

CHALLENGES OF THE LOCAL SELF-GOVERNMENT IN THE CONTEXT OF PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY: SOME REMARKS CONCERNING THE POLISH EXAMPLE

On a large scale the crisis of contemporary democracy is present in the academic discourse since the 70s of the 20th century. The reflection of political science of the last decades of the 20th century focused on the research concerning the 'internal' and 'external' problems of representative democracy, often contrasted with the direct democracy [1, pp. 1-212; 2, pp. 1-229]. A number of charges against representative democracy includes: a decrease in political activities and voter turnout; an increase of alienation and cynicism of citizens; the lack of enthusiasm and confidence in political institution; a disproportion in participations as the effect of excluding people living on the margins of society; disappearance of some social bonds; the lack of legitimization of political systems due to the fact that political decisions taken at multi-level stages made the identification of the responsibility of the decision makers almost impossible [4, p. 109].

It is significant that there were more unfavorable conditions which also influenced the quality of contemporary democratic systems, e.g., the destructive influence of globalization on the local markets and traditional social bonds, economic changes leading to the treatment of social relations as the economic phenomena; demographical trends connected with the ageing of societies; the individualization of life resulting in degeneration of social bonds; decrease in the role of the states authorities, their responsibilities as a result of globalization and mass migration; a sense of thread with work market transformation and fluctuation; or some changes in social structures resulting from the dynamic evolution [4, p. 111].

Participatory democracy reaches presently new fields of varied empirical insights and theoretical debates, however, some flaws of deliberation and participation are also noticed [5, pp. 77-84]. In the matter of fact, the diversity of forms of participation gives a real opportunity to shape the policies of a state, region or local government. Citizens themselves implement solutions in the area of administration, social affairs and economy through their participation in contemporary social dialogue.

Social consultations are part of social dialogue. The motivation to implement social consultations into Polish ground results from the internal and external pressure. The external pressure arises from the EU requirements and standards. Social consultations at the level of gmina administrative district are of obligatory or facultative character [6]. Obligatory character of consultations results from the legal acts devoted to the local administrative units. Facultative consultations may be decided in the important, from the local perspective, matters. They may also depend on the object of consultations and relate to some part of society. The Polish legislator entitled local administrative units (gmina) to determine the forms, procedure, and rules of consultations.

Polish local self-governmental bodies develop some new forms and tools of communication [7, p. 172]. Common forms of consultations at the local level are meetings of inhabitants, survey forms, meetings of the local authorities and local representatives with the inhabitants of local administrative districts, research on public opinion using some electronic questionnaires, consultation cards, receiving opinions and proposals, making documents referring to subject of consultations available to the public [3, pp. 23-25]. Information and communication technologies (ICT) mould public opinion, and shape the subjectivity of citizens. They give the opportunity to faster exchange of information and answers to the local problems. At the local level, they are advantageous to broadly understood dialogue between local self-government and local society, engaging local inhabitants, NGO's, and entrepreneurs.

Despite the fact that social consultations are prone to some flaws, the dissemination of forms of social participation in Poland is desirable because of the improvement of the quality of representative democracy and making weaken the particular interests of political parties. In many administrative units it might be observed that the bonds between local societies and local authorities have been strengthened during last years. Public support for the realization of fundamental tasks of local administrative bodies is required in order to make the decisions legitimate and understandable.

Literature

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