POLAND AS A GLOBAL DEVELOPMENT PARTNER

BUILDING LOCAL GOVERNMENT

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Lessons of experience from the Polish transition
Poland as a Global Development Partner

Polish Experiences in Building Local Government and Democracy: A Useful Tool for Others?

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This note has been commissioned by the World Bank under the project Poland as a Global Development Partner, led by Leszek Kąsek, Senior Economist in the World Bank Warsaw Office. The project was implemented between 2013 and 2014, and included the following activities: (i) supporting the establishment of an advisors’ roundtable to inform and fuel the Polish domestic debate on development issues; (ii) launching an experience-sharing process between Poland and Eastern Partnership countries; and (iii) recording some “lessons of experience” from the Polish transition, and disseminating them within the World Bank and externally.

This note was prepared under the third component of the engagement, and presents a personal perspective of the reform practitioners who have had intimate knowledge and were directly involved in Poland reforms during the past 25 years. This and other notes under the series are primarily addressed to policy makers in other countries in order to inspire them and provide knowledge of and an entry point to ask more questions on Poland’s experience, while designing reforms in their own countries. It is hoped that they will also stimulate a deeper reflection on past reforms in Poland and facilitate a national policy debate on future challenges. The notes are expected to facilitate a larger dialogue and serve as an example of Poland’s readiness for a stronger engagement on the global development agenda.

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Successful and profound reforms carried out in the 1990s in Poland decentralized the country, significantly empowered local communities and enabled the creation of an efficient and autonomous system of local self-government. The foundation for these changes was laid much earlier by independent specialists during the period of communist rule. This makes Poland unique in relation to other post-communist and post-authoritarian countries. In effect, Poland has exclusive knowledge and experience which may be of interest to countries undertaking similar reforms. However, this must not be understood as a coherent and universal "model" that may be taken as a one-size-fits-all solution for others to apply.

Reform in Poland was implemented in two stages, in 1990 and 1998. It affected all spheres of public life, and changed the administrative and political system of the state. This included achieving political, financial, property-related and administrative autonomy for local authorities (see Chapter 1). One of the crucial aspects of the reform are local government ownership rights, which leads to a change in society's view of public property. State property is often not respected – the public tends not to appreciate it as they lack a feeling of direct responsibility. Autonomy in this field is not common in other countries. In Hungary for example, ownership rights are strictly regulated by a separate law.

This and many other features of the Polish system of local governance make the Polish case a unique and potentially attractive source of inspiration for countries undergoing transition. The Polish experience shows that local self-governance plays a central role in increasing national wealth and living conditions. Without it, the public lack involvement in decision-making processes and have no influence on how issues directly relating to them are resolved. People remain passive without any interest in developing common wealth. It is impossible to have a democratic state without local self-governance.

Polish experiences may be grouped into four categories:
1. The model of governance, and the legal, administrative and financial position of local government authorities.
2. The way in which reform was organized and implemented, including the transfer of national property to local government.
3. Consolidation of the changes, and evolution of the administrative system during the two decades following the reform.

4. Social changes (development of NGOs, public participation, civic initiatives etc.) resulting from reforms to local government.

Poland should be interested in further dissemination of its own experiences. Democracy and local self-governance support political stability and make effective international cooperation possible. The Polish experience may be particularly useful in assisting evolutionary changes in decentralization, and the general public’s involvement in public affairs.

This may result in an increase of the quality of life, the cultural revival of communities, and in a higher level of general public satisfaction. Local governance does not function alone but interacts directly with the private sector, politics and central government. What Poland has to offer is a unique experience in building local democracy as a part of systemic change.

Cultural, economic and historical differences may constitute certain limitations to Polish assistance, but similarities in basic issues of transition from authoritarian rule to democracy make Poland a particularly valid source of experience and information. One of the crucial problems is a lack of understanding of basic notions of local democracy, such as lack of hierarchical dependencies, local responsibility for community affairs, local government property, etc. Poland has managed to overcome many difficulties in this field, and through effective cross-cultural communication its experiences in dealing with these challenges may be useful in countries with varied cultural backgrounds.

To make Polish assistance successful, several tasks should be undertaken, both in recipient countries and in Poland. In particular, the right institutional and financial structures have to be agreed on. A critical analysis of Polish experiences in implementing reform is needed to develop the content of assistance programs. A professional team of experts with in-depth knowledge of how Poland’s reforms were implemented is also one of the key factors.

The World Bank, as an influential institution with global reach and profound knowledge of economic and political conditions in countries potentially interested in developing decentralization, would be an ideal partner for many international and local initiatives aimed at supporting democratic transition. Well-organized self-governance enables better recognition of local needs and increases the potential for their fulfillment. It therefore contributes to social and economic development. For this reason, various actors representing civil society, international institutions and local communities should be involved in promoting self-governance as an effective means of achieving more sustainable democracy.

The World Bank has the potential to create an effective mechanism enabling contact and collaboration between countries under transition and those which already have useful experience in this field.
1. The success of the Polish case

Poland is the most decentralized country in Central and Eastern Europe, with powerful and autonomous local government. Decentralization led to the achievement of key positive effects in various areas of public life.

The main difference between Poland and other countries in the region is the specific way in which reform was implemented. Preparatory studies for potential reform in local governance began in 1980, and throughout the next decade were developed semi-legally under the communist regime. When the political change arrived, the new model of local government was ready and was implemented within the first few months of non-communist rule. The former system was totally abolished and all previous local administration – the main opposition to systemic changes – was removed.

The preparatory studies underpinning local self-government reform in Poland were able to break five of the fundamental monopolies of communist rule:

1) Political Monopoly. By all accounts, the local government elections of 1990 were free and fair, and gave all citizens and social groups equal rights.
2) Monopoly of State Power. Local authorities gained the right to fulfill public functions on their own behalf and under their own responsibility, but not in the name of the state. Central government can only control the adherence of local government decisions to the law. Local authorities received judicial care over their autonomy. An important field of public issues was removed from the control of central government.
3) Monopoly of State Property. Municipalities gained their status as legal entities and took possession of a significant amount of state property, which they were able to freely administer. This relates to buildings, land, infrastructure, and local enterprises.
4) Financial Monopoly. Municipal budgets were set apart from the state's budget, and local authorities now freely administer their own finances.
5) Monopoly of Administration. Self-governing municipalities gained their own administrative staff. A new group of civil servants emerged: local government employees.

In effect, these administrative reforms led to changes in several spheres. Two in particular should be stressed:

1) Increase in living conditions. Quality of life increased rapidly, particularly in rural areas and small towns. In comparison to state administration, local government has a better understanding of peoples' needs. Therefore, development programs are linked to actual requirements and expectations, and are implemented in a more effective way. The systemic changes gave local governments the necessary means to meet such needs. Of particular importance is access to bank loans, which were not accessible under the previous system.
2) Evolutionary change in public mentality. Many studies show that public confidence in local self-governmental administration is much higher than confidence in the state. Residents identify themselves with the local communities and municipalities where they live. This process has resulted in many secondary phenomena: involvement in public affairs has increased, and many NGOs have emerged.

Peoples' approach to public property has also changed. Under communism, people understood state property not as a common good, but as ownerless. A common expression was "don't worry about it, it's state property!"

Poland's advantage over other countries of the former Soviet bloc is down to several factors:

1) The revolutionary means of implementation. Due to the fact that no preparatory studies had been undertaken in other countries, new governments were unprepared for the implementation of profound reforms. They began to consider options only after political change had arrived. Therefore, any efforts aimed at revolutionary changes turned out to be mistimed. Reforms were carried out in a very limited way, in the form of amendments to the previous communist system as opposed to profound change. Due to the resistance from existing local administrations and other opponents of decentralization, it was only possible to introduce reform to a limited extent.

2) Municipalities (pol. gmina) and later districts (powiat) and regions (województwo), were granted legal status and unlimited rights to own and manage properties. An extensive program of communalization was launched in 1990, and as a result municipalities became the owners of a large part of state property in Poland. Their autonomous economic position was significantly strengthened. One of the important effects was access to bank loans, something which as unavailable under the former legal system. In other countries, local governments did not get these rights. Nowadays, Poland is the only country in the former Eastern bloc where local self-governments enjoy full communal ownership rights (regulated by the Polish Civil Code). In comparison, Hungary has a separate law which limits the scope of communal ownership.

3) The Polish system was based on a strict division of central and local government responsibilities. The state administration cannot intervene in local affairs which are under the control of local authorities. This principle opens for the door to local initiatives which are of great importance for economic growth and development. Central administration in other post-communist countries maintained the ability to intervene in local affairs, limiting the scope of self-governance.
2. The term “self-government”

The development of self-government is only possible through decentralization of state management, and decentralization is possible only through the development of self-governance. The two processes are inextricably linked, and full understanding of this interconnectivity is essential for implementing reform.

The European Charter of Local Self-Government, the international convention signed and ratified by all European countries (except Belarus) claims:

1) “Local self-government is one of the main foundations of any democratic regime.”
   It seems impossible to build real democracy without local self-governance. Without it, people are eliminated from any direct influence over local public affairs, which are managed by civil servants independent of local communities. Restricting citizens’ involvement to parliamentary elections will always result in a decline of democracy.

2) “Local self-government denotes the right and the ability of local authorities, within the limits of the law, to regulate and manage a substantial share of public affairs under their own responsibility and in the interests of the local population.”

3) “Powers given to local authorities shall normally be full and exclusive. They may not be undermined or limited by another, central or regional, authority except as provided for by the law.”

4) “Without prejudice to more general statutory provisions, local authorities shall be able to determine their own internal administrative structures in order to adapt them to local needs and ensure effective management.”

The above assertions contained in the European Charter clearly define the differences between local self-government on the one hand, and the local state administration which was present in authoritarian states. Local self-government is a system through which all residents of a given area form a community to manage their own affairs. Local authorities are the executive bodies of this community, and work for and on behalf of it under their own responsibility.

When we talk about self-government, we are talking about a local authority that:

1) Represents the interests of residents and holds a mandate stemming from its election by them;
2) Works within the law and is subjugated neither to central administration nor to higher branches of local government;
3) Is only subject to control by central administration in the legality of its activities; has assured judicial protection of its laws and independence;
4) Holds the status of a legal entity and has the liberty to manage its own property;
5) Manages its own revenues and has the right to manage finances, as well as subsidies from the central government budget; and
6) Has its own administrative personnel who are independent from the central administration.
Self-government units belong to two categories: local and regional. Local authorities (in Poland gmina and powiat) provide services for residents (delivering public services, establishing local regulations and undertaking initiatives to meet local needs). The needs of individual people have to be met by local authorities. The goal of regional governments (in Poland województwo) is to support general progress and development (regional transportation, environmental protection, water management, professional higher education, regional culture, management of EU funds, etc.).
3. Technical assistance and the nature of local government reforms

The goal of technical assistance is to help individual countries build new or amend existing systems. Each country has to make the desired changes independently, in line with local traditions, expectations and potential. Assisting countries should provide help for local efforts but cannot replace them. Any foreign experience must be adapted to local conditions and cannot be implemented automatically.

Technical assistance must be adapted to the nature of the supported change. Local government reforms have several specific features which must be taken into consideration:

1) The scope of reform. Decentralization reform means transferring responsibility for the delivery of public services from the state to local government. If a profound reform is planned, the scope of legal change is extensive and covers nearly all fields of public activities.

2) The reform is implemented at national level. Success depends on the skills and engagement of thousands of individuals, who must understand the idea and goals underlying the reform and be ready to follow its principles.

3) Establishment of self-governance is only possible through cooperation between society and the authorities. Such convergence is an absolute necessity: reform cannot be completed by one side alone. Local communities must be willing and able to take responsibility for their own local affairs.

As a result, four fundamental preconditions have to coexist simultaneously to make the reform successful:

1) Leaders’ political will to implement reforms, and a readiness to face all risks and overcome all obstacles.

2) The knowledge of experts, to define goals and to develop the right means to achieve them.

3) Citizen’s support. The public has to recognize the need for change and understand its meaning.

4) Human resources. A great number of well-qualified and motivated individuals are needed to implement and consolidate change at nationwide level.

An important goal of assistance is to help ensure improvement in fields that lag behind, hinder or even block possibilities for change. Analyzing the availability of the above resources should serve as a guideline for any assistance program.

Misunderstanding of the term “reform”. A bill being passed by parliament is often taken as implementation of a reform. This is not true. The real essence of reform is to transform institutions and to adapt procedures and individual behavior to the new regulations. Thus voting on bills is just the beginning of a complicated process which requires intense effort. The implementation of local self-government reform is a long-term process that also involves a deep change in mentalities.
Conflicts and resistance to change. Every profound reform modifies the division of power and the situation of many individuals. Some people and social groups become more influential – and often richer – while others lose their status. The first group is the most likely to support reforms, while the second will oppose them. The results of these shifts are myriad conflicts and the process of reform becomes a continuous power struggle. Successful reform depends upon the ability not only to predict such conflicts, but also to resolve them before they escalate. As per the Polish experience, three basic groups of conflicts may emerge from local self-government reform:

1) Conflicts over power and political influence,
2) Conflicts over control of public assets, particularly real estate,
3) Conflicts over access to public funds.

The most common adversaries of decentralization are:

1) The central bureaucracy, as decentralization limits its rights, power and privileges.
2) The fiscal administration, as decentralization means that central government loses control over a significant portion of public finances.
3) Politicians at central level, as they lose their influence over a huge part of administrative decisions.
4) Different interest groups linked to the economic sectors threatened by the strengthening of local governance, and thus opposed to the sectorial model of state management.
5) The leadership of enterprises and institutions which are taken over by local authorities, as they are anxious of losing their influence, independence and prestige.
6) Trade unions. Decentralization leads to the limitation of the central authority's power. Thus union leaders lose negotiation partners at central level as local authorities step in. This requires the decentralization of trade unions, which leads to a decline in their political power and especially diminishes the role of their national leaders.
4. How can Poland support other countries using its experience in building local democracy and government?

4.1 Past Polish participation in assistance programs

After the collapse of communism there was a strong international demand for Polish experiences. Polish experts participated in many international programs and were invited to participate at several international events. However, these projects were financed mainly by the US, EU or other international organizations and were run by companies from Western countries. At that time, there was no Polish company or organization capable of competing with them, and only Polish individuals were invited to take part. In very rare cases, Polish institutions were hired as subcontractors responsible for particular parts of projects. In effect, Polish experts were unable to influence the content of the assistance, even though they were much better informed of real needs and had unique experience. In many cases, non-Polish experts proposed solutions which were purely theoretical and impracticable, despite the existence of tried and tested Polish solutions.

Various Polish governments have failed to ensure sufficient efforts to establish the country's own assistance programs. There was no understanding of the role and importance of local self-governance in Poland during the period of political transition, something which also extended to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Thus, at a time when Polish experience was needed by other countries, there was no effort to present Poland as a country of great success in building local democracy. The basic mistakes may be outlined as follows:

1) No policy articulated any attempt to transfer Polish experience. Decisions did not reflect long-term goals.
2) No financial systems were established to make long-term engagement possible.
3) No effort was made to analyze the experiences of implementing the reform. In effect, even today we lack any profound analyses of the reform.
4) No model of effective assistance was ever discussed. Nobody involved in Polish local government reforms was invited to present the country's experiences.

As a result, Poland lost the momentum to generate interest in its experiences during the late 1990s and the beginning of the 2000s.

4.2. Some generalities

From a strategic point of view, Poland should continue supporting transitions to democracy in other countries. Political entities complying with democratic principles are more stable and predictable, and international dialogue is easier when democratic conditions are assured at the most basic level – local governance.
The political and administrative system of each country is dependent on geographical, social, political, and economic factors. This means that each country must create its own individual system and other countries’ models should not be copied. The Polish experience should serve to raise awareness and show alternatives to existing systems, but not as a ‘ready-to-use’ model to be directly implemented. The way in which advice is presented has to be well accepted and avoid offending national pride and prestige.

Two main categories of assistance programs can be distinguished according to their goals:

1) Support in building a civil society capable of understanding and adopting democratic principles. This requires actions aimed at changing the mentality of activists and officials, but not at systemic reforms.
2) Support for systemic reform, which means reconstruction of the state with special regard to building local self-governance. In this case the scope of activities is much wider and includes actions dedicated to public institutions, legal procedures, etc.

Intermediate assistance goals are also possible, when the intention is to introduce only some amendments to an existing system.

Conclusions concerning the situations in individual countries within the region proves that no country has plans for any profound reforms to establish local governance parallel to the Polish experience. Therefore, the majority of assistance programs will belong to the first group, meaning that required programs will be oriented towards training and information for local activists.

4.3. Support in building a civil society

Aside from a lack of social support and a lack of trust in the potential success of reforms, one of the fundamental obstacles to profound political change is a lack of public understanding of reforms. This results from the absence of experience with such models due to the restrictions imposed by authoritarian regimes. As we stressed earlier, the political system has to be directly linked to local culture, hence a change of system needs a change in the behavioral patterns of the population. Such a fundamental shift can be achieved through a long-term process including reform of the educational system. Still, the results may come after several decades or would even need a generation to pass.

In the short-term, the following actions may be undertaken to assist with peoples' engagement in public affairs:

1) creating the legal basis for establishing NGOs (in particular the “watchdog” model) and financing their activities.
2) opening means to engage in public affairs (for example a system of public enquires, control over local finances, transparent decision-making, etc.).
3) training of local activists in different kinds of public initiatives.
4) organizing local events to integrate local communities.
To encourage public support for the decentralization and development of democratic local government, any attempt at implementing change must be published and people must be persuaded that the democratic system is much more efficient than the existing one. This effort has to be focused on subjects which are particularly difficult to understand for people educated under authoritarian regimes.

Our experience shows that the following subjects have to be presented and discussed:

1) The meaning of self-governance: independent functioning of local authorities within the legal framework but rejecting the administrative hierarchy. Alongside the responsibility of local governments for the results of their own decisions, a lack of hierarchical dependence is particularly difficult to understand.

2) Rejection of a hierarchy of interests. Under the Soviet system an artificial "social interest", which covered the interest of the state and communist party, was privileged in comparison to the interests of individuals or municipalities. For many people it is difficult to understand that the main goal in democracy is to satisfy the interests of individual people.

3) Recognition of municipal property as a form of public ownership. State property is perceived as the only legitimate form of ownership in many post-Soviet countries. Although post-transition, private property has become widely recognized, it is sometimes hard to understand that public bodies may manage their own property outside of state control.

4) Independent local finance. Under authoritarian regimes the state budget was the only source of financing local activities. Financial decentralization means that local governments manage their own finances and are charged with full responsibility for their use. This new scope of economic responsibility requires adequate training and a change of mentality.

5) Relations with citizens. A democratic system means that local authorities are elected to represent the community's interests, not appointed to control people as was the case in the past. This change demands a complete reversal of relations: people are not 'humble supplicants' who may be badly treated or ignored, rather they are the electorate who decide on the future of the local administration. This change is not easy to understand.

6) The role and character of local elected officers is quite new and different. They have to serve as negotiators, free of any corruption and thinking about the interests of the population.

The above list is evidently incomplete, but it does present real issues noted during implementation of the Polish reforms.

For the most part, training and information activities have to be run by non-governmental organizations. The involvement of private companies is possible but the core of the task is the elaboration of training programs with respect to local circumstances and long-term objectives in building a stable democracy. These functions cannot be fulfilled by commercial entities as they have their own particular interests or operate only within certain agreements. In other words, they do what they are paid for and act to increase their influence on the authorities. The state administration is generally wary of change and is interested in limiting it. The admini-
istration is usually incapable of teaching new issues. Therefore in Poland, the Foundation in Support of Local Democracy (Fundacja Rozwoju Demokracji Lokalnej) was established as the main non-governmental organization promoting training programs. During the initial years of the Polish reforms, its activities were concentrated on the following issues:

1) Training local political and administrative leaders about:
   - the role and nature of local self-governance,
   - the organization of local administration,
   - local finance,
   - the economic activities of local government,
   - land use planning,
   - environmental protection,
   - cooperation between the local administration and local communities,
   - social communication.

   These topics were something absolutely new for Polish administrators. Negotiation techniques and compromise attainment were an issue of a particular interest. Even for new mayors, it was difficult to understand that their role was to discuss and negotiate a compromise, not to fight with everybody.

2) Organization of professional advisory units supporting local authorities in decision-making processes. Lacking experience, newly appointed officials had great difficulties in facing up to the new challenges.

3) Building a system of information exchange between the local bodies, public administration and NGOs, including the professional press.

4) Demonstrating the possible types of citizens’ initiatives and how to organize them.

5) Helping to establish international cooperation between Polish municipalities, well-experienced municipalities abroad and international organizations. The new authorities needed constant and amicable assistance.

4.4. Support for administrative reforms

The conditions for deep reforms similar to the Polish model are absent in today's world – there is simply a lack of political will to implement such revolutionary reform. It seems more likely that decentralization will be achieved through evolutionary modifications to existing systems. This means that the process will be long and will depend on changes in the mentality of politicians and the public. It is therefore important to create a mechanism supporting them.

The best way is to show the positive effects of even partial change. Both the public and politicians have to see that decentralization does not constitute a threat to the state but instead offers positive results. It is thus necessary to define the fields where decentralization is easy and where its effects are be visible in a relatively short period of time. Their definition and positive evaluation will make the next steps much easier to implement.
In Poland, the reestablishment of local and regional governments was achieved in two stages. The first gave the birth to municipal self-governance, and the second to powiats (equivalent to counties, the second tier of local government) and voivodships (regional authorities). This bottom-up sequence resulted from the fact that it was impossible to divide the tasks and responsibilities of the central and local administration in one move, as both were performed by the same authority. However, different strategies may be followed in other countries, as the following examples show:

1) Start from regional level. This is the Tunisian case, where the establishment of regional self-governance is planned as the first step. In parallel, a strong movement to develop NGOs can be observed. A positive outcome may be the development of civil society and creation of many active NGOs with a great number of people understanding self-governance. The danger is that the decentralization will never arrive at local level due to the resistance of many opponents.

2) Another sequence may be based on an evolutionary increase in the tasks and responsibilities transferred to local authorities, where regional authorities remain part of the central state administration with significant power to control the decisions of local bodies. This was the method discussed in some post-Soviet states like Ukraine or Georgia.

The leaders of these countries wanted to maintain control over local affairs through regional state administration, through financial control, administrative approval of local decisions or establishing the public's right to appeal to the state administration against local self-governmental decisions. This method is a long-term means to achieving real decentralization, however it seems to be the only effective option under certain circumstances.

This option may be implemented in practice through transfers with a gradually increasing scope of tasks and responsibilities in particular fields. Examples of this policy are presented in following table.
Table 1
Possible courses of action to decentralize tasks and responsibilities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Problem area</th>
<th>First step</th>
<th>Second step</th>
<th>Third step</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Finance</td>
<td>Limited autonomy in use of state budget resources</td>
<td>Increased autonomy in use of state budget resources. Restricted rights to establish local taxes</td>
<td>Full power in managing own budget and establishing local taxes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Land management</td>
<td>Administration of state-owned land according to central directives</td>
<td>Running own policy managing state-owned land within general state regulations</td>
<td>Own responsibility for managing municipal land within a local development policy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public housing</td>
<td>Inspection of the management and development of state-owned housing</td>
<td>Full control over state-owned housing pursuant to centrally established rules</td>
<td>Own housing policy. Management of own housing estates.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Land development</td>
<td>Managing small local projects financed by the state budget</td>
<td>Managing infrastructural projects within an accepted development policy financed by the state budget</td>
<td>Running own development policy, financed from the own resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrative decisions</td>
<td>Restricted scope of administrative decisions undertaken on behalf of the state under the strict control of upper tiers</td>
<td>Broader scope of administrative decisions undertaken on behalf of the state as delegated from central administration. Individuals have the right to appeal to the state administration against local decisions</td>
<td>Own responsibility for administrative decision undertaken within constitutional limits. No appeal to the state administration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delivery of public services (water, sewage, transportation etc.)</td>
<td>Partial inspection of state-owned enterprises delivering public services</td>
<td>Full control over service delivery by state owned units</td>
<td>Full responsibility for public service delivery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social care</td>
<td>Organization of care financed by the state budget according to state regulations</td>
<td>Autonomy in managing social care within budgetary limits</td>
<td>Full responsibility for social care financed from the local budget</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary Education</td>
<td>Managing land and buildings. Serving as an instrument in financing education from the state budget.</td>
<td>Managing schools and daycare centers with limited access to recruitment of teaching staff.</td>
<td>Managing schools and other institutions as part of local policy within general national rules</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGOs</td>
<td>Control over civic initiatives</td>
<td>Support local NGOs from the state budget resources and exercise control according to state policy.</td>
<td>Full power to support civic initiatives from the local budget</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The assistance program supporting administrative change should be directly linked to the scope of the reform and should be based on analysis of actual barriers and potential resources. The four preconditions needed for success of the reform were mentioned earlier. Assistance programs have to be based on an analysis of their condition and present ways to overcome identified shortages. The following table shows possible ways of achieving this effect.

Table 2
Possible ways of achieving this effect

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Shortage</th>
<th>Recipient of Help</th>
<th>Form of Help</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Political Will</td>
<td>Political leaders, parliamentarians, members of government</td>
<td>Seminars, conferences, analysis, memoranda, short educational visits abroad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge and Experience</td>
<td>Research institutes, experts, professional organizations, local organizations</td>
<td>Providing equipment for research institutes, lengthy internships abroad, professional workshops, delegating foreign experts to collaborate on-site</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Support</td>
<td>NGOs</td>
<td>Help in organizing public campaigns, organizing systems of social communication, aiding NGOs, training local leaders, short trips abroad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human Resources</td>
<td>Local authorities and professional organizations</td>
<td>Organizing large-scale training courses, capacity building for professional organizations, advising administrative schools, organizing trips abroad of moderate duration</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A lack of political will to decentralize can be seen in the majority of potential recipients which could benefit from Polish experiences. Opponents argue that decentralization leads to a weakening of the state. This opinion makes political leaders resistant to change. One crucial task is to persuade them that this is the wrong approach, and that decentralization makes a country more stabilized and stronger. People support the state when they are able to participate in the resolution of public concerns and can influence the direction of the state's policies – and a state supported by citizens is stronger. In a decentralized state, central government can be more effective as the scope of its responsibilities is more restricted, and thus being freed of involvement in small and local problems it can concentrate its attention on crucial issues. The stability of a particular country increases as a result of decentralization, and the situation for the central authorities becomes stronger. However, the means of governing the state has to be changed, and new routines and mechanisms have to be developed. One of the roles of foreign assistance is to provide demonstration and assistance in implementing this.

Each assistance program has to be tailored to individual needs. It would be worthless to present general principles. However, our experience of Western countries assisting Poland demonstrates some key issues.
Administrative reforms always require a longer period of time, and programs must be adapted to the phase of the reform’s progress. Tasks differ in consecutive stages, and the form of assistance should differ too. This is especially crucial in relation to local authorities which are learning a new model and consecutively increasing their skills. At the beginning, local officials need to be convinced of the need for reform and must receive some basic information. However, in later phases they will need more and more specialized assistance to solve specific problems. It is therefore important to maintain continuous evolution in the form, scope, and content of assistance as per changing needs. Support offered at the wrong moment is useless.

The elasticity of the assistance program is an extremely important issue. Assistance has to be programmed over multiple years. This is the only way to ensure that programs are properly organized and prepared. However, unexpected problems will always arise, and these may change the original priorities and current needs. In these situations, the assisting organization should allow for quick changes in the program in order to meet the real needs of the recipient country.

Implementation of a program supporting administrative reform requires the establishment of a permanent office in the supported country. It is impossible to enter into real cooperation with local bodies during short visits. The task of such an office would as follows:

1) To continuously cooperate with partner institutions in the supported country,
2) To assess changing needs,
3) To organize current support from Polish experiences in the form of studies, experts, training sessions or other ways in which Polish experiences may be explained.

International assistance is temporary and will come to an end at a certain moment. For this reason, one of the primary tasks of international assistance should be to develop local institutions which will be able to support the local self-government unit over a longer period of time. Therefore, assistance programs should support not only local governments but also auxiliary institutions and organizations assisting local administration (e.g. training organizations, consulting bodies, local government associations, citizens’ organizations, etc.).

National organizations should take full part in the implementation of programs and should be utilized as subcontractors. Local partners require support and financial resources to build capacity.

4.5. Study visits

Study visits are one of the most popular forms of support and transfer of experience. It is therefore necessary to provide more detailed elaboration of these. Visits abroad can have enormous significance in training and education. However, trips must be well prepared in order to achieve this goal. There are three general types of visits:
1) Short visits for the purpose of general information on local self-governance,
2) Professional visits to learn specific issues,
3) Specialized internships for research and academic development.

**Short Visits:** (7-10 days). The purpose is to ensure a general understanding of self-governance. International assistance cannot be treated merely as a technical challenge to learn skills – a psychological component is also needed. People have to see that proposed systems exist in reality, that they offer new opportunities and that it would be possible to implement them in their own country. This is particularly important for those who have never had the chance to see other countries and different administrative systems. It is the best way to fight a lack of belief that reforms can be successful.

The purpose of short training visits abroad is not to acquire concrete knowledge but to show participants alternative management methods, and to persuade them that these methods can be applied without excess difficulty.

Study visits cannot replace professional training, but they can be an important supplementary practical experience. People must trust the fact that new systems can be introduced and that they are capable of doing so. This cannot be achieved only lectures alone. People are usually hesitant to attend lectures by foreign experts. They do not always believe, or understand, everything that is said. A visit may serve as confirmation of the content of training. Even the best lectures cannot substitute the practical knowledge that is attained by seeing the reality.

As a result of each visit, participants should keep in mind conclusions which may be applicable in their future activities. Observing the programs of foreign study visits to Poland, we can stress the following errors which make them less effective:

1) Programs are not concentrated on selected issues but cover too many individual topics. For instance, one day participants visit parliament, the second a ministry, the third a local administration and the last day an NGO. The final effect is that they accept Poland as a pleasant country, but are unable to draw any valuable conclusion.

2) Speakers from Poland are usually politicians or practitioners without any understanding of their visitors' needs or real problems. The content of lectures is usually beyond the understanding and expectations of the audience.

3) Visitors can see Poland as it is today, more than twenty years after the reforms. This image is far from their own problems. They would like to know not only about the current Polish model, but first of all how the reform was implemented and what the crucial difficulties were. Participants want to know what kind of errors were made in Poland and how these can be avoided. However, this knowledge is no longer available for the majority of Polish experts.
The organization of short visits has to be based on following principles:

1) Each visit should have a well-defined goal and set of conclusions to be internalized by participants. The length of the stay and program of the visit has to reflect these demands,

2) Participants have to be grouped according to their specific interests,

3) Materials with basic information on Poland and a visit program have to be distributed in advance to economize time,

4) Lecturers have to be professionally prepared to present Poland's experiences in an understandable way and in line with the needs of participants,

5) Written materials describing Polish experiences in a given field have to supplement lectures and discussions.

Professional stays: (1-2 months). The goal here is to familiarize professionals with particular problems linked to their professional responsibilities. Administrative reform requires specific changes in a variety of fields. Foreign stays may make implementation easier.

To learn new skills, a longer stay should be planned, and the program should be carefully guided and prepared. The topic of these visits should be tailored to participants' professional duties. The subject needs to relate to issues of the reform that need to be solved through practical work. Mentors have to be informed about the needs and expectations of participants and about the conditions in which the experiences offered will be used in the future.

Research Internships: (39 months). The goal of research internships is to develop the qualifications of independent experts. Research internships are not directly related to implementation of a concrete change, but their role has great significance for the development of highly-qualified specialists who will be valuable for national-level transformation and the organization of public administration schools.
5. Conclusions and recommendations

Poland has been successful in introducing profound reforms rebuilding local self-governance. Polish experiences in this field are unique and may be useful to all countries in transition. However, there is no climate in these countries for deeper reform of administrative systems. Thus the transfer of Polish experiences has to be oriented towards supporting the development of civil societies capable of understanding the concept of self-governance, which are ready to implement even some elements of it. However, selection should be based on the local criteria and political conditions. The main tools should be information on Poland's experiences, training and study visits to Poland.

Effective export of the Polish experience requires several preparatory initiatives, both in Poland and in assisted countries.

5.1 What should be done in Poland?

Our experience shows that the following issues should be addressed in Poland:

1) To establish an adequate organizational and financial basis,
2) To work out the specifics of Polish assistance policy, based on monitoring of other countries' needs,
3) To develop the professional content of the assistance,
4) To appoint Polish experts prepared to assist other countries in building local government structures,
5) To efficiently promote Poland as a country with considerable success in building local democracy.

Organizational and financial basis. To run an effective technical assistance program and transfer Polish experiences, a specific organization has to be established. This organization must have adequate power to establish and direct Polish policy in the field and must have long-term financing. The lack of such an organization is one of most important mistakes made in the past. The reestablishment of Solidarity Fund PL is an optimistic sign.

Only a long-term policy based on stable goals and priorities can be effective. However, to export Polish experiences it is necessary to observe the changes, needs and expectations in potential recipient countries. To be able to deliver adequate help and assistance, Polish programs have to be based on these observations. A permanent monitoring system and selection of the right partners in interested countries are needed to gather this information.

To offer Polish experience, it is necessary to ensure professional explanation of the programs and to prepare them in a manner that would enable comprehensible presentation suited to the needs of recipients. There is an absence of sufficient analysis and description of the Polish experience in building local government. The content transferred abroad presents the current opinions of individual lecturers and only refers
to the real experience of the past in a limited scope. It is necessary to prepare deep analysis of the process of Polish reforms, something which must be done in cooperation with competent participants in these reforms. This study should form the basis for transfer of Poland’s experience and assistance to other countries. The study has to present the means of implementing reform, detailing not only the current system but also how it was achieved, how the reforms were organized, the crucial difficulties encountered, mistakes made, etc.

A description and critical analysis of Polish experiences may be centered on three main issues:

a) Organizational background for implementation of the reform. A description and evaluation of this is of crucial importance for assisted countries interested in following our experience. The Polish model was based on certain principles:
   - Establishment of a special ministerial position subordinated directly to the prime minister with the power to intervene in the responsibilities of all ministers linked to decentralization of the state.
   - Agreement and division of tasks between parliament and government
   - Creation of a nationwide network of officers responsible for implementing reform
   - Cooperation with social partners in building social support for the reform and professional training

The models used in 1990 and 1998 differ only in some details.

b) Critical analysis of the implemented model of local self-governance. This analysis should identify our main mistakes and the evolution of the changes initiated. The planned model has to be compared to the currently existing model and all amendments to the law, introduced after the reform was completed, have to be shown and commented.

c) Critical assessment of the social effects of the reform. One of the main goals of the reform was to increase peoples’ participation in public life. It is important to evaluate the successes and identify failures.

The experts and teaching staff have to be well prepared for their task. It would be a mistake to invite current practitioners without the necessary knowledge of the entire reform processes and the difficulties which emerged. Lecturers also have to have the right knowledge about the needs and problems of participants and the conditions in which Polish experiences will be used. A good set of experts is a prerequisite for our success in assisting others.

To develop a market abroad for Polish experiences, it is necessary to develop and implement an effective program to promote Poland’s success. Countries of potential interest have to be informed about the kind of experience Poland offers and how it may be received and used. Without such promotion, demand will shrink and disappear.
5.2 What should be done in assisted countries?

- Select local institutions as partners and establish clear rules for common work. Local partners have to be prepared to work independently when foreign assistance comes to an end.
- Organize a permanent representative office for the Polish assisting organization in the supported country. This could be an information center managed in cooperation with the local partner.
- Prepare information for Polish experts and trainers on the basic issues prevalent in the supported country, enabling them to tailor their lectures and make their recommendations directly applicable.
- Observe the evolution of needs and adapt training content as applicable.

In 1990 when municipal self-government was established in Poland, nearly 100 pieces of legislation were amended by parliament. In the second stage, in 1998, the establishment of districts and regional self-government demanded the amendment of nearly 150 acts and influenced the organization of more than 10,000 institutions.

At that time it was disappointing to see the promotion of Poland as a lyrical landscape full of dancers from Krakow, sausage and vodka.

An example is the ministerial action in 2000 to support reforms in Albania. In two years, nearly 300 local activists visited Poland and learned about Poland’s experiences. However, the next year priorities had changed and the ministry refused to finance even short visits for Polish experts to Albania to maintain contact with potential partners. In effect, the whole political effect of several hundred people visiting Poland was lost.

For many years Prof. Regulski has been making numerous efforts to gain (even small) resources for such analysis. This effort was unfortunately not successful.

This is a very important element. Several American publications offered to Poland in the period of transition ignored our own ability, creating a negative reaction to the proposals.

Such actions were not undertaken in Poland, and the development of civil society has lagging behind political, legal and economic changes.

The phenomenon was also observed in Poland. The first stage in 1990 was introduced in a revolutionary, top-down manner from central government. However, it was necessary to wait eight years for the second stage until local governments became politically stronger and the public saw the positive results of decentralization. For the full acknowledgment and appreciation of the reforms on the other hand, it was necessary to wait about fifteen years.

The impact of a lack of such elasticity in Poland have been negative. In the late 1990s a long-term program of assistance to Poland was established with representatives of the EU. However, a change of government arrived and the new administration decided to implement the second stage of reforms, creating district and regional governments. A new and enormous field of training needs emerged. However, the EU was unwilling to change earlier agreements. As a result, assistance program did not meet real needs, and funds were spent on issues which had become marginal due to political change.


