

Multi-Level Governance: possibilities for implementation in Poland

Multi-Level Governance: możliwości wdrożenia w Polsce

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Streszczenie

Wzrost złożoności zarządzania rozwojem społeczno-ekonomicznym przez państwo wymaga dostosowań administracji. Przyjęły one formę poprawy jakości funkcjonowania dzięki nowym technologiom i lepszemu organizowaniu pracy, ale też uwzględnienie interesów i opinii innych interesariuszy, reprezentujących różne środowiska (New Public Management) i poziomy organizacji terytorialnej (MLG). W Polsce czynnikiem sprzyjającym upowszechnieniu elementów MLG jest decentralizacja państwa i udział w polityce spójności UE. Są też bariery: nadmierna autonomia jednostek terytorialnych, niska jakość hybrydowego systemu instytucjonalnego, słabość kapitału społecznego. W takich warunkach pełne wdrożenie MLG nie obejdzie się bez całościowej reformy instytucjonalnej.

Summary

Increasing complexity of socio-economic development requires adaptation on the administration side. It took a form of improvements in terms of performance quality thanks to new technologies and better organization, also through taking into account interests and opinions of other stakeholders, representing different environments (New Public Management) and other levels of territorial units (MLG). In Poland main factors facilitating introduction of MLG relate to decentralization and participation in European Cohesion policy. There are also barriers: excessive autonomy of territorial units, low quality of the hybrid institutional system, weakness of social capital. In such circumstances full implementation of MLG will not be possible without holistic institutional reform.

Słowa kluczowe: Polska, Multi-level Governance, New Public Management, ewolucja administracji, efekty

Keywords: Poland, Multi-level Governance, New Public Management, evolution of administration, effects

Introduction

The recent decades have witnessed a growing interest in how to improve the operation of the institutional system, notably that of the public administration since it is frequently perceived as the very heart of the system, which has a strong bearing on the shaping of its other elements, and thereby on the efficiency and effectiveness of the adopted development policies. Such an increasing interest can be explained by at least three interrelated reasons. The first is the progressing globalisation (and its opposite, regionalisation), both phenomena being accompanied by the growing competition. The second is associated with the easily observable change of the development paradigm (and its drivers), which is now taking place as the post-industrial economy and information society are getting established more and more firmly. The third reason is underpinned by the need to stimulate various “soft factors”, by way of a more robust cooperation between different players, networking, and a more efficient management of different kinds of flows. The latter aspect can be seen particularly distinctly in the establishment of supra-national territorial organisations (such as the European Union, NAFTA, ASEAN and others), which increasingly aim to maintain and strengthen their role globally. Similar phenomena can also be noticed at the local level: this is where there is both a growing need and an increasing pressure to form linkages, associations, networks which bring together the local communities for pursuing common objectives. Recently, such relationships of various types are more and more being established vertically, with a view to solving problems that call for unlocking the resources available to various players at various levels. Arguably, one general hypothesis may be formulated, that in the face of increasing competition, such integration processes make it possible to trigger mechanisms which help to more rationally use the resources at hand, and thereby to improve the competitive position vis-à-vis competitors. One important, though sometimes underutilised, tool in such rationalisation, relating to public administration and its activities, has been the use of evaluation as an inherent and integral component of management, and subordinating strategic decision-making processes to evidence-based procedure (that is looking at the results achieved so far). Evaluation as a tool represents a significant aspect of the public management debate (Ferlie 2011).

The paper looks at the possibilities (the facilitating and hindering factors) of a wider use in Poland of Multi-Level Governance, or MLG, one of the most advanced forms of public management, with a special emphasis on the regional level. Before embarking on any further analysis, it should be noted that Poland is a country where only 22 years have passed since the market reform and barely 14 years since the introduction of the country’s new territorial organisation. Interestingly, the reform largely bypassed a considerable part of the state administration, apparently in the belief that, when placed under democratic control, it

would adjust itself to the new situation. Thus, it was tacitly (and not quite rightly) assumed that the administration does not have any interests, including its own, other than serving the public at large. However, when we look more closely at how the administration system operates, we will see that it does support structures, mechanisms, policies either inherited from the traditions and administrative arrangements known before 1989 or those either generated or imported after this date (mainly under the influence of the EU alignment), which were occasionally inconsistent or confrontational in terms of their practical consequences. In general terms, it could be said that the philosophy that the Polish administration goes by is in its daily workings is embedded in the traditions of the old regime (the times of the People's Republic of Poland, or PRL), when the role of the administration was to serve the authorities and obey their decisions, instead of the public at large. Perhaps this was the crucial problem here: organisational structures are easy to change, unlike human habits and routines, or organisational cultures in particular. In such a situation, any attempt to introduce MLG is nothing but easy. An important reason for this is the fact that this concept was formed as a result of the evolution of the very notion of public administration, taking place globally for several decades now. For this reason, before we analyse the situation in Poland, we need to look at the changes which took place in the models of administration and which are increasingly oriented towards a broadly understood notion of New Public Management (NPM) or its variation, known as *good governance*¹.

Let us start with some remarks concerning the key terms used in the analysis. As it happens, the majority of the relevant literature has been written by authors writing in English. It should be borne in mind that some of the popular and widely acknowledged terms are difficult to render in translation. One such example is the term *sustainable*, which has in many countries been associated with a balanced development understood in the way the Green parties do, reducing its meaning to the one associated with nature conservation². We encounter similar problems with the key notion of *governance* and how it differs from *government* (governing, that is the competency arising from the legislation in force and exercised by the specific state authorities to set goals, make decisions and enforce

¹ Such an approach is adopted in the UNESCAP (United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific) agenda, which has largely popularised this concept and which defines good governance as "the process of decision-making and the process by which decisions are implemented (or not implemented)" (<http://www.unescap.org/pdd/prs/ProjectActivities/Ongoing/gg/governance.asp>; [accessed 20.03.2012]).

² Rarely does it happen to render an English term succinctly and accurately as the French did with the word *durable* (sustainable, e.g. development).

decisions)³. On the other hand, *governance* (which initially was equalled with *government*) is a term more and more frequently related to the decision-making process and – in consequence – to the decision-enforcing process (UNESCAP): one which is affected by a greater number of non-governmental bodies. In such a system, setting goals is not limited to the competent state authorities, but allows for the participation of civil society in order to jointly reach crucial decisions regarding policy or specific investment decisions (such as those on nuclear power stations for example). Therefore, if we said earlier that globalisation forced some changes in the institutional system, it should be added that another, no less important factor, has been the emergence of civil society, which has more and more effective tools of influence at its disposal. At the same time, increasing the kinds and the number of players participating – in a variety of ways – in the decision-making process, influencing this process or bearing the consequences of the adoption and execution of such decisions, makes it more and more possible to speak of a circle of stakeholders, varying in time and space. This term encapsulates all the entities having an interest in a given matter.

Naturally, the process of transition from *government* (governing and managing basically discharged by the state structures) to *governance* (governing and managing comprising elements of varied participation, both formal and informal, at the individual stages of the process) is not “either or” system. Neither were there any systems of power in the past where the state would have the monopoly of power and not succumb to any influence whatsoever. By a similar token, today’s state structures been replaced by completely fluid coalitions of co-deciding stakeholders. In order to understand the contemporary phenomenon of governing (and management, understood as a process whereby decisions are put to life), our starting point should be an extensively elaborated theory of model administration, developed by the German scholar Max Weber. In turn, the criticism of this ideal type prompted an analysis of new models, constructed both as a result of the observations of spontaneous changes occurring in the decision-making processes and in theoretical concepts which set out to describe the necessary pre-conditions for optimising decisions taken in a changing, if not volatile, increasingly complex and globalising world (Mazur 2003; Geodecki et al. 2012). Let us begin with the Weberian model

³ Let us take this opportunity to clarify other terms which are widely used but not necessarily correctly understood. These include: management refers to activities which do not include setting (as they are determined by some other, competent entity) but include the right to adjust tools and shift resources to ensure best possible achievement of the goals. Implementation assumes that all the tasks will be carried out to the letter (without the right to set goals nor to independently make changes regarding tools or resources. Such hierarchic notions represent an example of the transposition of *acquis communautaire* in the field of Cohesion policy.

Frame of reference: the classical Weberian model

The functioning of the state and administration was studied by many eminent authors (ranging from Plato to Machiavelli, Tocqueville and our contemporaries), but a special place among them is due to Max Weber, strongly influenced in his work by Frederick Taylor, father of the scientific theory of management. Weber made a name for himself as the author of the only so far, complete ideal model of the administration (English edition 1947). This is mostly a normative model, partly informed by the realities of a given situation, but also one which highlighted attributes which were expected to free administration from the arbitrariness of officials in the decision-making process, and from external influences (be they political, social or merely nepotist) or, more broadly speaking, from voluntarism. In its structure, the Weberian model was based on predictability, objectivity, professionalism and rationality of decisions. There is quite a widespread opinion, however, that the contemporary administration has little in common with the classical Weberian theory of bureaucracy (administration). Any statement of its complete dissimilarity may only serve to underline the new characteristics and developments that can be observed in the administration. Nevertheless, the core features of this theory are permanent, as we will try to demonstrate below (cf. Sztompka 2002).

Weber distinguished six fundamental features (principles) defining the ideal model, with which the actual administrative structures should be aligned:

1. Hierarchical structure (principle of seniority);
2. Impersonal regulations form the basis of management (and enforcement of decisions);
3. Specialisation and division of labour;
4. Clearly articulated mission;
5. Depersonalisation;
6. Formal qualifications as the basis for employment and promotion (well-defined career paths).

It was expected that obeying these principles (which was interpreted in a variety of ways by successive researchers of Weber's output) would lead to the emergence of a group of professional clerks with top qualifications and ethical standards, who would use nothing but their best knowledge and objective criteria in the decision-making process. In comparison to the earlier systems of administration, where informal influences, no clear decision-making criteria, vague career paths, etc., were commonplace, the Weberian model, owing to its simplicity, seemed a promising way of promoting rational administration.

Just as any ideal model, it has met with criticism from the very beginning. A number of objections have been raised both regarding its conceptual aspects and following observations of social, economic and political processes and developments. There have been too many such objections to be mentioned here.

In a nutshell, it could be said, though, that at the time this model was developed (early 20th century), there was still a widespread belief in the progress of science and knowledge and in the possibility of building an ideal world. This conviction, however, was undermined by the changes taking place in the society and by the two great wars. Observations made by scholars (e.g. from the school of human relations with its father, Elton Mayo) also demonstrated that the world of all organisations has a significant group and informal dimension, one that basically leaves little room to professionalism, objectivity, etc. Among the most eminent critics of Weber's theory there is certainly Michel Crozier (1967), who, in his elaborate study, investigated in detail the key problem of bureaucracy, that is the vicious circle of its inability to operate efficiently (or rationally, as Weber would have put it). According to this theory, the vicious circle stemmed from the impersonality of the regulations, excessive centralisation, isolation of individual organisational levels and the formation of relationships of power around spheres of uncertainty rather than the place in the hierarchy. Another scholar, Robert Merton, stressed in his critique of the model of bureaucracy, that the mechanistic patterns of behaviour imposed by an "ideal" bureaucracy make impossible all decision-making in situations out of the ordinary, which are not governed by the rules and go beyond the officials' competencies (1982). He dubbed this phenomenon 'trained incapacity', thereby accusing Weberian-type administration of being utterly unable to innovate (as we would contemporarily say), and this could indeed be regarded as a significantly pathological, if not undesirable, situation. Some critical opinions about the traditional administration being incompatible with the requirements of the present era were also expressed e.g. by Hughes (2003). The belief in the possibility of building an ideal administration was further undermined by the recent, numerous studies on the limited rationality of human behaviour, which as a result questioned the rationality of organisations (cf. Simon 1997).

There can be little doubt that the contemporary society is much more complicated, better educated and more difficult to govern than nearly a hundred years ago, when scientific management and belief in progress were in their prime. The administration of the day was not responsible for such a broad and varied spectrum of the spheres of social life as today (ranging from cleaning and communication to R&D policy). Moreover, never before has the administration been obliged to cooperate so closely with so many institutions both at home and abroad. The so-called institutional thickness (a term popularised by Amin and Thrift, 1994) has reached an astounding level and little suggests that its development is to change, especially because the civil society is characterised by an extremely robust dynamic and variability of objectives and forms of activity. As we could see on the occasion of building a massive coalition against the ACTA agreement, with the dissemination of ICT, the civil society has acquired a powerful tool of both mobilisation and influence.

As mentioned above, despite all the changes that took place in its environment and within the administration itself, the administration is strongly inclined to maintain many of the features of the traditional Weberian model (cf. du Gay 2005). This phenomenon can probably be explained by the complexity of the functions and tasks that the administration discharges, and the resultant expectations concerning its performance. On the one hand, it is expected that the administration will be fully predictable and will make rational decisions (e.g. health care), but on the other it should also be able to innovate and operate flexibly (R&D policy). Worse still, sometimes such expectations are harboured all at the same time (national defence). Some even tend to forget that the administration, due to its goals and position within the institutional structure, is divided into a whole gamut of functionally dissimilar types, and therefore aiming for “one model for all” would be an unrealistic approach. One thing is certain, though: professionalism, regulations based on reason, hierarchy, existence of the appeal procedures are also elements of the desirable core of every administrative organisation. Although the classical model still determines the operation of the administration, it is no longer perceived as an ideal or the only possible one. Some of its characteristics co-exist with “newer” features and elements of administration, intended to improve its performance in achieving its goals, adapt it to a complex environment and the multitude of stakeholders.

The evolution of the model of the administration is generally referred to as the transition from the mechanistic model (Weberian type) through stochastic to the network model (contemporary).

Table 1. Meaning of selected elements of large organisations at individual levels of organisational development

Stage/elements	Mechanistic	Stochastic	Network
Actors	Organisation as a coherent unit with clearly defined objectives	Organisation operating in open systems, made up of interconnected subsystems	Organisation as a component of an organisational network
Processes	Rational, with top-bottom structure	Strategic expectations of changes in the environment	Regulation of subsystems and their mutual linkages. Cooperation within organisation, whereby resources are exchanged
Decisions	Result of strategic decisions by central administration, focused on achieving the set goals	Result of interactions between subsystems, aimed to improve organisational structure and environment	Result of negotiations between organisations, focused on stabilising the flows of resources. Clearly directed linkages between organisations
Power/delegated authority	Clear, centralised power structures	Changeable power structure, dependent on specific subsystem architecture	Lack of central ruling structure. How strong the authorities are depends on the availability of resource
Information/values	Science as positivist key to collecting information. Clear objectives and values	Central task – collecting strategic information about environmental features of organisation. Values are ambiguous	Information – key resources are made available by various entities. Positive aspects of conflict

Source: Kickaert W. M., (1997), *Managing complex networks*, SAGE, p. 18, quoted after: Kojło S., Leszczyńska K., Lipski S., Wiszczun E., (2009), *Nowe koncepcje koordynacji w systemie Multilevel Governance polityki spójności*, p. 5

The characteristics shown in Table 1 exaggerates certain features (e.g. lack of a central power structure in the network model), but still outlines the general direction of organisational change (including administration), as organisations are operating in an increasingly complex environment. In the case of administration, a reservation should be made that also the central authorities function in an increasingly networked system, which however does not preclude a situation in which their actual role and influence are smaller than could be surmised from their competences alone. Sometimes the government can be weak.

Recent years have seen a rising popularity of public intervention via tapping new development concepts, introduction of new rules such as e.g. sustainable development, evidence-based policy (that is, pursuing policies informed by research) or smart development. Such changes, occurring at the level reaching beyond the state's system of organisation (administration), are undoubtedly associated with the transition from the phase commonly known as the era of industrial economy and modern society to the post-industrial economy (knowledge-based)

and post-modern society or, more and more frequently, information society. These changes were accompanied by a shift in the drivers of development. Whilst it was industry which determined growth in the time of the rapid industrial development, and the availability of raw materials and energy, together with the technical infrastructure, determined the development opportunities, today we are more and more aware that, in the contemporary era, the bulk of income is generated in the service sector, and therefore the ability to manage information frequently decides about success or failure. Having strategic infrastructure is important, but the infrastructure alone will not suffice to initiate development processes. It is good to bear in mind that a mere hundred years ago access to a railway line was a matter of life and death for many towns and regions⁴. We should therefore look at the new factors defining the post-industrial era, hailed by Toffler (1980) as the “third wave” in the history of humanity.

Contemporary development drivers

In the recent decades, one of the crucial development factors has been the development of information and communication technologies (ICT), which have dramatically accelerated the process of accumulating and utilising knowledge to enhance competitiveness. The so-called soft development factors have considerably gained in importance. These include: the theory of the significance of culture⁵ (Harrison, Huntington 2003); human capital and various forms of social capital (e.g. Coleman 1988; Putnam 1995); the role of innovation and an innovation-friendly environment (Camagni 1991; Cooke 2002); networks of cooperation and spaces of flows (Porter 2004; Castells 2008); creative class; co-existence of talent, tolerance and technology (Florida 2002); the role of the institutional system (Keating et al. 2003), or, in the Polish context, the triad of innovation, globalisation and competition (Gorzela 2007). What these theories and approaches popular in the recent years have in common is the belief that the principal development factors include the capacity to accumulate, process and utilise information in order to maximise the use of the available resources. Other forms of capital (financial, material, technological) are not so prominently in the fore because their efficient use is increasingly dependent on people, their ability to cooperate, level of innovativeness, and on the effectiveness of communication systems. The most modern

⁴ To give an example: the railway line bypassed Drohiczyn, the historic capital of the Podlasie region, and ran through Białystok, elevating this then minor city to the status of the regional capital, which it temporarily enjoys. On the other hand, over two billion euros pumped mainly into the technical infrastructure of the former GDR did not prevent millions of Germans, most of them young, from migrating to Western Germany or from the depopulation of large parts of East Germany. In the past, a similar scheme aimed to halt the demise of the Appalachian region (USA) did not produce the expected results despite spending billions of dollars.

⁵ Understood far more broadly than just culture institutions and activities.

economies of the recent years are those which were the first to make the transition towards a knowledge-based economy and information society and were the most consistent in their endeavours. Some attempts to stimulate development have also been made, though with meagre results, by the European Union (*The Lisbon Strategy*, Europe 2020)⁶, while in Poland more and more analyses point to the danger of a stagnating development if new development drivers are not tapped very soon (Boni 2010; Boni 2012; Geodecki et al. 2012; Kozak 2012). The implementation of the Cohesion policy has for many years provided a powerful stimulus to seek new, more efficient administrative arrangements in order to make better decisions in the field of development programmes. Very quickly, it became clear that the implementation system built mostly on the administrative structures is characterised by the same weaknesses as are generally known to beset the Polish administration: red tape, inconsistent arrangements, avoiding personal responsibility, formalism, more pressure put on the regulations than achieving the goals set. However, the administration should not be blamed for all these faults since, generally speaking, the Polish institutional system is inefficient and over-regulated, whilst the Polish society is distinguished by a low level of social capital (i.e. propensity to cooperation and trust). There can be little wonder, therefore, that officials operating in such an environment tend to manifest distrust (protecting themselves against the real or imagined being 'led astray' by the client) and centralisation. It is also more and more frequently emphasised that quality leadership, that is the ability to mobilise the elites and the society at large around the set goals, is crucial for development.

Speaking about contemporary development factors, we cannot ignore territorialisation, a factor increasingly gaining in importance (Barca 2009) and understood as a *sui generis* defence against the consequences of the progressing globalisation. One result of globalisation is that a lasting competitive advantage can only be achieved through innovation. Comparative advantage, gained owing to low production costs, is short-lived because globalisation, through deconcentration and offshoring, expands the group of those who compete with prices by new, underdeveloped countries (areas). Similarly, no significant long-term advantages can be obtained if the economy is based on the export of raw materials. Moreover, technological progress, abundance of capital and the increasing globalisation considerably facilitate freedom of location, and this means being unconstrained by the so-called hard factors (costs, availability of raw materials, etc.) (Gorzelać, Kozak 2012). Not as much specialisation as economic diversity

⁶ The debate on the scientific underpinnings of the EU Cohesion policy is based on many studies written at the request of the European Commission, particularly the report by F. Barca, *An Agenda for a Reformed Cohesion Policy. A place based approach to meeting European Union challenges and expectations*, http://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2009_2014/documents/regi/dv/barca_report_/barca_report_en.pdf, [accessed: 20.11.2011].

promotes growth thanks to reducing transaction costs as a result of concentration (which, in its extreme manifestation, assumes the form of the metropolisation of development) (World Bank 2008; Smętkowski 2012). On the other hand, global corporations play quite a considerable part in the processes of development translocation, as they are highly mobile and actively seek out new markets and, depending on the sector, try to secure either comparative or competitive advantages. Managing development with such complex, intangible factors, places bigger and bigger burdens on the administration (authorities) or rather, more broadly, on the societies themselves.

New Public Management

Essentially, the concept of New Public Management (NPM) has been, and still is, a conglomerate of various attempts to adjust the administration to changes taking place in its environment. This term was coined to integrate different approaches, such as post-bureaucratic government; market-based public administration; post-bureaucratic paradigm; entrepreneurial government; post-modernism; post-modern government; post-industrial government; managerialism, etc. (Hood 1994, quoted after Supernat 2004). What they all had in common was the intention to involve other entities (rules, criteria) from outside of the government sector into the policy formulation and decision-making processes. OECD studies (2000) emphasised that the reform came as a consequence of the simple need on the part of the authorities (administration) to keep up with the changes taking place in the society. It could be said that, in the wake of the reforms, there was a constant shifting of the boundaries of the administration, which until then was thought to be alienated from its surroundings, and now was making a determined attempt at a positive integration with its environment, or at least cooperation in various areas where external opinions are appreciated. On the one hand, in the mid-20th century the state remarkably expanded the scope of its activity and, in line with its new, wider competencies, assumed control over approximately a half of the generated income. On the other hand, however, as a result of the continuing processes of democratisation, globalisation, internationalisation, emergence of supra-national organisations and forms of cooperation, it gradually lost its earlier freedom of decision-making and had to agree more and more of its plans and decisions with other entities, including private and non-governmental ones.

The concept of NPM was first put to life in the 1980s in the United Kingdom and New Zealand, and in the 1990s in the USA, in response to the challenges facing public administration in the era of reforms accompanying the transition to the post-industrial era (OECD 2000; OECD 2005; Supernat 2004; Krynicka 2006). NPM borrows, and adapts to its needs, various arrangements typical of the market economy and the private sector, notably the managerialist approach; being

oriented to results; decentralisation; privatisation and outsourcing, as well as improving prudent financial management, efficiency and effectiveness (cf. Zalewski 2005; Blakely & Bradshaw 2002; Supernat 2004; Osborne & Gaebler 1994). The experiences gained so far from the operation of NPM are neither unequivocal nor conclusive. In addition to improving the administration's performance, as promised (although it is not quite clear whether and, if so, to what extent, this depends on NPM, and not on technological progress, e.g. use of ICT), some weaknesses were also observed. One such weakness was the strength of NPM, which essentially strived to subordinate the operations of the administration to the needs of the consumers of its services. Such an approach weakens its accountability before the citizens and, in view of the limited funding, poses a threat that its functions will be limited only to those which are most frequently discharged. What is more, the idea of maximised utilisation of market mechanisms may lead to a clash with other social values that do not succumb so easily to valuation by the market (Supernat 2003). Therefore, if we look at the actual NPM models, we have to conclude that these represent a number of slightly dissimilar attempts at improving the public sector, which frequently take place in a different institutional environment and mechanisms of the society's operation. This may be the reason underpinning attempts at changes, known by the term of good governance.

Good Governance

The distinguishing mark of good governance is that it does not aim to create new structures but seeks to optimise the performance of existing organisations in specific economic, social and institutional conditions. The focus therefore falls on the functions and capacity to provide public service in the best possible way rather than on building ideal structures; more on physiology than on morphology. In a sense, this approach is based on the assumption that the quality of how the administration operates does not necessarily depend on any specific type of structure. In other words, organisational forms can vary from country to country, but this does not define their (in)capacity for good governance.

What does good governance mean, then? What requirements should it fulfil? What attributes should it have?

Within the meaning proposed by UNESCAP, the administration, in order to qualify under the brand of *good governance*, should demonstrate the following characteristics:

- Participation
- Rule of law
- Transparency
- Responsiveness
- Consensus-oriented

- Equity and inclusiveness
- Effectiveness and efficiency
- Accountability

Each of these attributes requires radical, functional rather than structural, adjustments: ensuring effective channels of communication with the environment, giving more attention to equality, gender or social inclusion issues, or being more responsive to needs (Czaputowicz 2005). Will that be sufficient to respond to the challenges associated with development? Can GG offer an alternative to the managerialised NPM, focusing on results rather than processes?

Multi-Level Governance

The fundamental practical testing ground for the MLG approach is the European Union and its willingness to construct a system of government (and management) reflecting the entire complexity, the multi-level nature of its organisation, where the typology of administrative territorial units alone (NUTS) comprises five levels, ranging from municipality to Member State (which, with the Union, makes up six levels altogether). The process of the European Union's creation increased the interest in the relationships between individual Member States and community institutions (Bevir 2007), whilst the launch of mass-scale intervention in form of Cohesion policy, with its numerous objectives and a complex set of attendant instruments (mostly connected with the preparations to the introduction of the Economic and Monetary Union of the EU), led to the testing not only of decentralisation or partner arrangements but also those which would create a mechanism for promoting the participation of many territorial levels (Kozak 2009). Also some US research showed that there was an on-going process of "networking", and expanding the cooperation of administrative units also vertically (Rhodes 1997).

In the EU approach, however, there is a visible pressure on developing the relationships between the EU and other institutions, which renders this approach somewhat instrumental. For instance, the Committee of the Regions (2009) defined MLG as follows:

- coordinated action by the European Union, Member States, regional and local authorities, based on partnership and oriented towards the formulation and implementation of European policies;
- a dynamic process, having a horizontal and a vertical dimension, which however does not compromise political accountability;
- a process which is subordinated to five principles underpinning all good management: openness, participation, accountability, effectiveness and consistency. MLG guarantees that these principles are implemented, upheld and reinforced;

- a phenomenon which depends on whether the principle of subsidiarity is observed;
- the key principles which inspire and guide Community actions include: subsidiarity, proportionality, proximity, partnership, participation, solidarity and mutual loyalty;
- must be understood not only as the question of transposing European or national goals into regional and local activities, but also as a process of integrating the goals adopted by local and regional activities with EU strategies;
- the conditions for a good implementation of MLG in fact rest with the Member States themselves (EU 2009).

Table 2. Features of a traditional model of bureaucracy and MLG public governance model – a comparison

Features	Traditional model	MLG model of public governance
Leadership style	Bureaucratic – administering	Managerial – managing
Organisational structures	Hierarchical, rigid	Diversified, flexible, flat
Direction of activities	Inwards, on procedures	Outwards, on needs
Control	Internal	External
Time horizon for activities	Short-term	Long-term
Purpose of activities	Preserving order	Inducing order
Type of rule	Imperative	Interactive
Cooperation with organisations from other sectors, interdependence	Separation	Partnership
State organisation	Dominance of monocentric systems	Domination of self-governing and autonomous systems
Interactions between partners	Regulated by rules	Based on trust
Level of independence from the state	Low	Moderate
Relationships between administration levels	Based on strengthening independence	Based on shared interests and tasks
Attitude of administration to citizens	Lack of trust	Based on trust
Development paradigm	Traditional	Modern

Source: Kozak 2009, p. 91

It should be underlined that MLG is not a uniform concept. The relevant literature suggests some variations of this term, such as for example: multi-tiered governance; polycentric governance; multi-perspectival governance and some other (Hooghe, Marks 2001). The approach known as MLG turned out to be the most

popular. According to some researchers, we can speak of two forms of MLG. The first covers the decentralisation of power to many independent territories, which – as a matter of course – care above all for their own interests and needs. Such a form would be permanent in character, whereas the distinctly separate territories subject to their own jurisdiction would be MLG actors. The other formula involves the overlapping of jurisdictions, multiplicity and variability of jurisdictions and their flexibility (Hooghe, Marks 2001). It is not clear, though, to what extent these models, based on dissimilar logic, occur in reality and to what extent they are merely ideal models, whose individual elements may indeed be identified in reality, but this alone does not make a model.

It is usually acknowledged that MLG has a considerable impact on the democratisation of the European Union. This is confirmed among other things by such issues as e.g. granting peripheral areas the right to take part in decisions relating to their future; exercising this right in a way which prevents obstruction in the form of the right of veto, and last but not least, promoting the establishment of “organic” linkages between communities and the regional and local authorities, as a result of which their actions are more responsive locally and at the same time help create broad coalitions, which also leads to increased responsiveness (Piattoni 2009: 33). While the overall tenor of this approach is acceptable, it is difficult to overlook the fact that the EU is still suffering from significant deficiencies of democracy⁷, a phenomenon that MLG can hardly compensate for in full. It is also occasionally pointed out that MLG in the EU practice restricts its activities to the relatively simplest areas of operation (Jordan 2001).

Factors facilitating and hindering the implementation of MLG in Poland

The main factors which facilitate the introduction of MLG include those which are associated with development and the growing requirements concerning the pursuit of public policies in the conditions of internationalisation and globalisation. On the other hand, the requirements vis-à-vis the administration are increasingly stricter, and on the other there is an observable diffusion of patterns adopted from other countries and the development of both public functions and societal expectations, expressed by more and more diverse communities. This leads to an increasing pressure on the public administration despite the fact that both its substance and reception can be quite varied. Depending on their competences and affluence of the local, regional and national areas, their specific character can differ.

European integration and the need to adapt at least some of the administrative structures to the requirements of the European MLG in the sphere of Commu-

⁷ Starting from the still very limited role of the European Parliament.

nity policies are significant factors which play an important inspirational role. The expectations increase as the time passes, and this is best proved by draft EU regulations for the new programming period 2014-2020, which place great emphasis on participatory planning (also vertically), coordination of actions and other elements which are typical, to varying degrees, of NPM or MLG. One observable weakness is that this impact of the changes in the Community system does not affect the whole of the public sector in Poland but, so far at least, is limited to those of its parts which are directly involved in the planning, managing and implementing of EU policies (MUS 2012).

The conditions which facilitate, or even encourage the implementation of MLG also include the new territorial organisation of Poland introduced in 1999, which established local government units at the regional level (including the districts [*powiaty*] and traditional municipalities [*gminy*]). Discharging more and more numerous and complex functions helps improve communication with as complex environment, both vertically and horizontally. It is pointed out, however, that the strengthening regions are raising some concerns about the dominance of the strongest of them (Kojło et al. 2009).

There are also weaknesses, that is factors which slow down the implementation of MLG. Above all, they include the low quality of the institutional system, which is irrational and rife with arrangements which are commonly regarded as requiring change. For example, widely criticised issues include the functioning of the health service, regulations governing business activity and the operation of many institutions which are important for the state and the life of the society (cf. Jarosz 2012). Despite some genuine attempts at creating a uniform and rational system of development planning, work is far from over. Over-regulation is regarded as one of the most serious institutional problems.

The original sin of the present system of local government units, which makes them completely autonomous and independent of one another, can be considered as one of the most serious obstacles to this process.⁸ The decisions which are made at the higher level are not binding for the lower level, which makes the entire planning process (e.g. territorial planning) dependent on effective negotiations. This is one of the reasons why no decision has not been taken as yet on the location of the nuclear power plant, although the need for its construction seems to be a priority for the government in power. Even though the lack of the planning hierarchy is a genuine global-scale oddity, any attempt at restraining this autonomy is treated as an attack on democracy and the Constitution. The arrangements

⁸ While building the foundations of the new system in (an effort which was completed in 1999), it seemed absolutely rational to furnish municipalities (and later the remaining levels of territorial self-government) with far-reaching autonomy as a safeguard against the return of the non-democratic system of power which was in force before 1990. Nevertheless, the decisions that were (in my opinion) rational at the time, today produce effects as unpredictable as they are undesired.

currently in force cripple the effectiveness of the state as such and greatly complicate the process of agreeing and coordinating actions. This, however, does not alter the fact that, according to some experts, the absence of sufficiently strong regions poses a barrier to a real partnership in the European Union (Wojtaszczyk et al. 2009: 11).

Finally, among the factors which considerably hinder the development of the MLG system is the dramatically low level of social capital (*Diagnoza Społeczna* 2011). The Polish society is characterised by distrust towards others, the institutions of the state in particular. But it is a minimum level of trust that is the essential prerequisite of MLG. Given such a situation, can the condition for the introduction of MLG, as identified in one study (prematurely perhaps), be the "(...) constant and significant increase of societal activity, but on a really large scale"? (Kojło et al. 2009: 66).

Future outlook

MLG is one stage in the evolution of the public administration system. For this reason, it seems justified to ask the question on how and where this system will go, and what factors will define the direction of these changes. Let us start with its weaknesses. Neither NPM nor MLG have any strong democratic underpinnings; in their wish to introduce managerialist principles, accountability for expenses, outsourcing and privatisation of some of their functions (and in effect transferring some of their assets to foreign and international corporations), they tend to reduce their accountability for discharging some fundamental tasks to their own societies. This also gives rise to the political issue of salaries: Should specialists employed in the public sector receive as generous pay packages as employees of huge private companies? The recent attempts at introducing changes into the Polish health care system, made in order to enhance the rational use of the available financial resources, demonstrated the strength with which the individual stakeholders can manifest their interests and views⁹. The movement of the Outraged, commenced in 2011, and other developments (ACTA) show, on the one hand, problems associated with working out adequate tools for the communication between the authorities and the society at large in democratic countries, and, on the other hand, the huge power of ICT, which make it possible to mobilise large portions of the civil society around matters widely considered as significant. This new vehicle of communication, as vehement as it is effective, seems to corroborate the thesis that political and electoral systems no longer can guarantee the elec-

⁹ It should also be borne in mind that this rationalisation of the system (mostly cost of medicines and medical treatment) was made in an utterly hybrid organisational system where, in addition to state and quasi-private hospitals (state ones, those owned by local governments and those which have been commercialised) there operate private health establishments.

tion of the ruling elites that would be adequate to the needs and commensurate with the expectations (for the Polish context, see: Kęska, Kinowska 2012). What can be expected in response?

Definitely, attempts at deregulation (a phenomenon now visible in Poland) to tap the reserves hidden in the society and in the economy, and, wherever possible, introduction of the rules of managerialism. Also, implementation of legal and financial instruments supporting the process of cooperation and partnership in the discharge of public functions locally, regionally, nationally and supra-nationally (which directly means creating the conditions for, and improving the quality of MLG).

Changes in the structure of the redistributive function, which will mostly likely come as a consequence of two phenomena. Firstly, reducing the area for which the state bears responsibility, and delegating this responsibility, in part or in full, to the citizens. Secondly, increasing the role of intervention in areas associated with improving competitiveness, particularly R&D, innovation, education and training, health. Thirdly, adding flexibility to the budget, currently heavily dominated by “fixed” spending.

Digitisation of the administration, facilitating contacts between citizens and businesses and the administration, and a more active role played by officials in their relationships with their environment. It should be hoped that the information gathered in databases via ICT will not be collected “just in case”, but will be used in making decisions, whether strategic or operational. One example which shows how real the danger of waste can be are the evaluation studies of European programmes: commissioned, financed and accepted by the programme managers, such assessments rarely offer any criticism, and in effect their usefulness in decision-making is rather questionable, an opinion which is also admitted by experts responsible for them (Bienias et al. 2009).

All these changes will be heavily influenced by globalisation and increasing competition, but will be made in a specific society with a unique culture, which will ultimately determine the goals, forms and functions of the public sector. That is why one thing seems to be crystal clear: dissimilarities in the adopted models of administration between nations will not disappear[†]

Lessons for Poland

[†]It seems that the independence of local and regional governments and the scale of Cohesion policy interventions provide conducive conditions for MLG. Indeed, some manifestations of this can be found in the field of Cohesion policy. Other than those, there are few proofs of MLG to be found in Poland. Truth be told, joint projects are few and far between even in the field of Cohesion policy itself. Metropolitan areas, where MLG is widely regarded a necessity, still wait to be regulated

by the legislation. Public-private partnership is more dead than alive, whilst business clusters as a rule exist as long as they receive funding.

The first and foremost reason for this is the weak institutional system (Boni 2009 and 2011; Jarosz 2012; Geodecki 2012). There is no doubt that this is a hybrid system which contains structures, rules and policies of varied provenance. Let us recall here that the central level of the administration has not undergone any coherent and consistent reform: post 1989, it was believed that it would suffice to impose democratic political control over the administration to adapt it to the new requirements. Nothing could be more wrong. The institutional system has so frequently been subject to subsequent partial quasi-reforms that it is now utterly incoherent and can neither serve development objectives nor satisfy citizens' needs. As a result of the 1990 administrative reform, municipalities were re-established and furnished with considerable competencies and given substantial funding, in the unjustified belief that local government is by definition a creation with ideal features. The 1998 reform (establishment of counties [*powiaty*] and regions [*województwa*], the latter having their boundaries re-defined) imposed considerable duties on these two levels of self-government, but provided them with insufficient funds, as these were not easy to obtain from the state budget coffers, and quite impossible to raise locally, at the municipal level. This is how local and regional government organisations, poor in comparison to their tasks, came into being. What was even more peculiar (in Europe if not globally) was granting full autonomy to the individual levels of the territorial organisation and liquidation of all hierarchy. This still produces disastrous results, e.g. in the form of local, regional or national plans not being regulated by any hierarchy. Any attempt at imposing a decision, let alone subordinating local interests to national ones, will instantly be questioned as breaching the constitutional rights of the municipalities. As a result, the whole country can be held hostage by municipalities, and the competent authorities are not able to make final and binding location decisions.

We can speak of internal hybridity also in the case of the administration, since two completely different structures can be found within it: those departments or agencies which are involved in the implementation of European policies¹⁰ (where new knowledge and operating policies are being absorbed) and those which do not have any significant tasks to fulfil in the European system and live by the old rules. Quite interestingly, even organisational units in individual offices are divided into those discharging tasks associated with European policies and all others. Since there is no transfer of knowledge from the "European" units to the remaining ones, contrary to expectations there is little or no modernisation of the administration in practice (MUS 2012).

The Polish institutional system, which is very poorly rated in international rankings (Kozak 2012: 179), has clearly reached the limit of adaptability. The pre-

¹⁰ With some limitations, as far as agricultural policy is concerned.

sent condition of Polish institutions is probably best portrayed in the recent publication by Maria Jarosz (2012), who strives to identify and explain the institutional dysfunctions. Quite interestingly, not only independent experts have reached similar conclusions (see also Geodecki 2012), but also panels of experts working within the government structures (Boni 2010, 2012). Nevertheless, all these efforts are not transposed into all-encompassing reforms. And we are all well aware of the consequences half-baked reforms can have for various spheres of life.

One important feature which undoubtedly affects the operation of administrative institutions is the scant social capital, mentioned above and manifested in limited confidence in others, and in consequence – in low propensity for cooperation (*Diagnoza społeczna* 2011). The reasons for this situation should probably be sought in the features of the Polish national culture, which for centuries developed in the conditions of weak statehood and growing anarchy, a political and social system that for all intents and purposes treated peasants as serfs, and finally in the Partitions, which, despite the modernisation of the Polish regions ordained by the invaders, also brought a great deal of injustice and strengthened the deformed approach to the state structures (on account of their being oppressive and foreign), particularly in the Russian Partition. The two World Wars and the period of the People's Republic of Poland (or PRL) increased the gap between Poland and other European countries and preserved the state of a prevalent lack of trust in the society and the ever-recurring division into “us” and “them”.¹¹ Thus, we became a society with strong national bonds but weak social ties. One can hardly imagine more difficult conditions for modernisation efforts and implementing a more flexible and efficient system of governance and management. Therefore we should accept the idea that MLG cannot be implemented or popularised without a root-and-branch institutional and cultural change. Institutions will always imitate the prevalent culture. Unfortunately, the opposite situation can be as true.

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¹¹ Admittedly, this is not only a Polish problem (cf. Bingen et al. 2012).

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