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THE CONDITIONS FOR GAINING SELF- GOVERNMENT BY LOCAL COMMUNITIES BASED ON THE EXAMPLE OF NEWLY EMERGED MUNICIPALITIES IN UPPER SILESIA (POLAND)

Abstract: The author uses the Upper Silesian region to study the emergence of new units of self-government as boroughs spin-off from town municipalities and clutches of villages split up from the larger rural districts. All of the boroughs seeking promotion to their own self-government feature a similar set of historical, social and economic features helping them to start on the path to self-government. A strong local leadership is the key success factor; only the boroughs that had groups of local leaders managed to gain administrative independence. Also, the successful boroughs followed similar steps along the way from the emergence of the idea of independence to securing the PM's signature on the project documents

Key words: gmina/commune/municipality, gaining self-government, Upper Silesia, local community, leader.

1. Introduction

During 1990s, thirteen new *gminas* (municipalities), including six urban and seven rural units, emerged around the peripheries of the Upper Silesian industrial region (Upper Silesia) (Tab. 1). Eleven of those were formerly boroughs of larger towns and two (Ornontowice and Krupski Młyn) split from rural *gminas* (Fig. 1). Common to all of those new municipalities is a long history as independent towns or villages, sometimes going back several hundred years until their incorporation in larger units during 1970s.

This study aims to identify causes for the emergence of the new *gminas* at the peripheries of the Upper Silesian region. The main questions are twofold: 1) Why these *gminas* gained their self-government and others did not? 2) What prerequisites had to be fulfilled for the process to start? Another interesting aspect is the very process leading to the administrative independence – who was involved and in what way, and what were the prerequisites for the process to begin and to succeed.

The research was based on interviews with “local leaders” and questionnaires for local citizens. Eight *gminas* (Bieruń, Bojszowy, Imielin, Wojkowice, Miasteczko Śląskie,



Fig. 1. The administrative division of Katowice voivodship in 31.12.1998

Ryc. 1. Podział administracyjny woj. katowickiego z dnia 31.12.1998 r.

Source: Author's research.

Tab. 1. Summary of the new gminas

Tab. 1. Lista nowych gmin

New gmina	Town (urban gmina) formerly containing the new gmina	Gmina status lost in	Gmina status recove red in
Bieruń	Tychy	1975	1991
Bojszowy	Tychy	1975	1991
Lędziny	Tychy	1975	1991
Wry	Tychy	1975	1991
Kobiór	Tychy	1975	1991
Imielin	Tychy 1975-1977 Mysłowice 1977-1995	1975	1995
Chełm Śląski	Tychy 1975 - 1977 Mysłowice 1977 - 1995	1975	1995
Miasteczko Śląskie	Tarnowskie Góry	1975	1995
Wojkowice	Będzin	1975	1992
Radzionków	Bytom	1975	1998
Ornontowice	Gierałtowice	1977	1991
Goczałkowice Zdrój	Pszczyna	1971	1992
Krupski Młyn	Tworóg	1975	1991

Source: Author's research.

Radzionków, Ornontowice oraz Goczałkowice Zdrój) were selected for the interviews, as representative for the whole group of 13. Additionally, citizen questionnaires were used for the gminas of Radzionków and Ornontowice.

2. Characteristics of the independent-minded boroughs

The maverick boroughs had a set of common characteristics. All of the new gminas displayed at least nine out of the set of ten identified characteristics, even if not always to the same degree (Tab. 2).

1. The demoting of the gmina status without local community's consent during 1970s.
None of the string of 1970s' incorporations was initiated by the local citizens. The decisions were typically taken at a higher level and aroused strong discontent in the local communities that were loosing their independence. There were, however, no protests at the time or the protests were weak. The reasons for this were twofold: Firstly, the general problems in staging a protest under a totalitarian regime. Secondly, many of the local citizens had hopes for a faster development, even if of unspecified nature.
2. A distinctive spatial-functional division of the unit.
All of the new gminas (established after 1990) are separated from its nearby large town by a few-kilometres wide belt of undeveloped land (i.e. woods, farmland, industrial grounds, brown fields, coal-mining subsidence-affected areas, spoil heaps

Tab. 2. Factors fuelling the separatist drive in boroughs

Tab. 2. Czynniki wpływające na wzrost nastrojów separatystycznych w dzielnicach

Factor \ New gmina	Wojkowice	Radzionków	Miasteczko Śl.	Imielin	Biereń	Bojszowy	Goczałkowice	Ornontowice
The demoting of the gmina status without local community's consent during 1970s.	++	+++	++	+	++	++	++	++
A distinctive spatial-functional division of the unit	+++	++	+++	++	+++	++	+++	++
The under-investment and underdevelopment of the infrastructure	++	++	+++	++	++	++	+	+
Non-existing infrastructural ties	++	+	+++	++	++	++	++	+
Economic status sufficient to maintain new gmina	++	++	+++	+	++	++	+++	+++
High level of economic development	++	++	+++	++	+++	+	++	+++
Lack of understanding for local community's organisations	+	+++	+	++	+++	+++	+	+
A high proportion of long-settled local population	0	+++	++	++	+++	+++	++	+++
No culture bonds with the large town	+	++	0	+	+++	+++	+	+
No identification of local communities with the large town	++	+++	+++	++	+++	+++	++	+
Political under-representation in the large town	++	+	+	++	++	+++	++	+
Overwhelming local support for the idea of self-government	+	+++	++	+	+++	++	0	+

0 - no influence or very weak influence

+

++ - high influence

+++ - very high influence

0 - brak wpływu, wpływ bardzo niewielki

+

++ - natężenie czynnika duże

+++ - natężenie czynnika szczególnie duże

Source: Author's research.

- and wasteland) and constitute discrete settlement units (Leszczyk 1994). All of them have an existing or emerging administrative, service and shopping centre.
3. The under-investment and underdevelopment of the infrastructure.
A degree of neglect of the municipal infrastructure is clearly seen in all of the new self-established boroughs. Their original administrators tended to favour infrastructural projects in newly constructed housing estates. As the peripheral neighbourhoods would have some facilities in place, albeit typically antiquated and inefficient, they would be pushed down the priorities' lists in the development plans. To the local communities, this seemed an unfair distribution of resources.
 4. Non-existing infrastructural connections.
Nearly two decades after their incorporation into the larger towns the infrastructural connections with the new centres have not been developed. Firstly, because of the overall slowness of infrastructural development in the incorporated entities. Secondly, because of the relatively long distance to the town centre; in some cases it made more sense to build a separate network. And finally, local industrial plants would often connect the nearby borough to their own plant transport networks.
 5. Relatively good economic status
Even as part of the larger towns, the maverick boroughs were anything but suburban "bedrooms"; they constituted fully functioning settlement units, typically with one or more thriving companies.
 6. A high proportion of long-settled local population.
Indigenous Silesians formed no less than one half, and in most cases more than 75% of the population in the new gminas (Wojkowice with ca. 50% of local population is a case of a "Zagłębie" locality, i.e. essentially similar to the "core" Silesian region, but with a distinctively different historical background). Any newcomers were typically assimilated in and dominated by the large homogenous communities rather than the other way around (Błaszczuk, Błasiak, Nawrocki, 1990). The percentage of the core population and the patterns of assimilation combined to develop strong internal bondage within the local community.
 7. No culture bonds with the large town
The proportion of the population with the Silesian descent in the larger towns is much smaller than in the new gminas. Also, the town governments would be dominated by immigrants from other Polish regions (Lis 1991). Consequently, the decision makers would have little understanding for the needs and expectations of the Silesian communities in the independent-minded boroughs.
 8. No identification of local communities with the large town
After losing their administrative independence during 1970s, the citizens of the new gminas had never developed any strong identification with the larger town. In their minds they were firstly citizens of their neighbourhood, their little homeland or *Heimat*, and only than, if at all, citizens of the large town (Śmiełowska 1989).
 9. Political under-representation in the large town
The boroughs typically represented only a fraction of the overall town population. As a result they only had a marginal representation on the town-level authorities and a minor influence on decision-making causing frustration and a sense of powerlessness.

10. Overwhelming local support for the idea of self-government

The idea of the self-government was backed, if not without certain anxiety, by 80-90% of the local population (Korzeniowska, 1996). This stands in contrast with the small size of the groups active in the independence drive that were never more than a few dozen people-strong and the popular support limited to signing the appropriate questionnaires.

3. Importance of local leaders

The study shows that the local leaders played a crucial role in the splitting up process. Indeed, there are many other boroughs of large Silesian towns that also feature several or most of the characteristics stated above, but have not seriously claimed their independence. Examples would include Szopienice, a borough of Katowice; Urbanowice, a borough of Tychy; and Kochłowice, a borough of Ruda Śląska. It was the local leaders, persons who were particularly active in the drive for their borough's self-government that seems to have been the decisive success factor. They supervised every step on the road to independence and the final success was crucially hinged on their number and commitment.

The local leaders are understood here as persons particularly active in pursuing objectives important for their communities, and enjoying a certain authority and respect. Local leaders are not paid for what they do; they voluntarily devote their time and energy for the common good. The voluntary commitment does not, however, preclude certain rewards typically taking the form of being elected to the local councils and sitting on the councils' executive bodies. A local leader would normally be a priest, a teacher or a local artist; he would be a very active person committed to the issues of the local community. A leader is not appointed or nominated, but evolves during years of consistent work for the common good. The study shows that only those boroughs achieved self-government that had adequate local leaders.

In each of the studied cases, there would be one, sometimes two or three persons with leadership skills. They would take on them the task of coordinating the activities and with time would be accepted as informal champions of the local popular movements for self-government. It would not be just a person who coordinated the efforts during the final steps leading to the splitting up from a larger entity, but it had to be someone most active and devoting most of the time to the cause right from the start. In building their status they also used their personal connections and professional status, features of much importance for the broadening of the lobbying efforts. The development of a local leader could then be summed up as leading from being a promoter of the idea, to the most active practical implementer and finally to a coordinator during the consultation and legal documentation phase. Such activists turned into coordinators – i.e. *de facto* leaders – only when the number of tasks and people involved in them rose.

4. Steps to self-government

The path to self-government could be broken down into five steps, always following the same order, but differing in their duration in each case.

1. A small local group comes up with self-governance as a realistic prospect.

2. The group convinces perhaps a dozen of people (or several dozens at most), known for their active roles in the community. Moods and preferences of the local community are probed. Initial social and economic impact simulations of the splitting-up are made. Model-cases and contacts are sought in other new gminas.
3. Groups of active campaigners are formalised. The idea is strongly promoted and support of the whole community sought.
4. Necessary documentation is completed and local consultation/referendum carried out. Pressure is exerted on and backing organised within the town government, regional authorities and with the central government. Eventually, a complete formal proposal for the establishment of a separate gmina is presented to the regional governor.
5. Having approved the proposal the governor sends it to the Prime Minister who makes the final decision to establish the new gmina.

5. Conclusion

The emergence of the new gminas at the peripheries of Upper Silesia is an essentially a bottom-up process initiated and carried out by strong, but relatively small local communities. They are strong with their social ties that have survived the decades of administrative dependence (Turowski 1993). A precondition for the empowerment process is a set of historic, social and economic characteristics similar for all of the maverick boroughs. These characteristics were almost identical in all of the studied gminas, although their intensity differed.

The decisive factor for attaining self-government by all of the new gminas was the emergence of one or more local leaders capable of taking the responsibility of guiding the entire process. The study also identified a number of steps on the road to self-government, from the first idea of independence to securing the PM's signature of the formal proposal.

In summary, the process of attaining self-government by a town borough is not an easy one; it takes several years and requires persistence and determination on the part of the local community and especially of its leaders. Indeed, both within and around the Upper Silesian peripheries there are numerous boroughs sporting the characteristics identified as preconditions for the commencement of the process leading to self-government. It seems, however, that the lack of adequate leadership hampering the process is compounded by the time elapsing since the loss of separate administrative presence no less than 28 years ago (the last gminas were incorporated in 1975). Additional factors are provided by the continued deterioration of the region's already poor industrial status and the growing unemployment. It also seems that the financial condition of the local government is worse than during the early 1990s.

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Warunki usamodzielniania się społeczności lokalnych – powstawanie nowych gmin w GOP

Streszczenie

Od 1991 roku w GOP powstają nowe gminy w wyniku odrywania się dzielnic od dużych miast lub sołectw od dużych gmin wiejskich. Wszystkie usamodzielniające się dzielnice charakteryzują się podobnym zespołem cech historycznych, społecznych i gospodarczych, które umożliwiły rozpoczęcie starań o oderwanie się. Powstawanie nowych gmin to zupełnie oddolny proces zainicjowany i przeprowadzony przez silnie, choć stosunkowo niewielkie społeczności lokalne. Ich siłą są więzy społeczne, które nie zostały zniszczone po utracie samodzielności. We wszystkich nowych gminach co najmniej 50%, a zazwyczaj od 70 do 80% mieszkańców stanowi ludność zasiedziała – Ślązacy, a w Wojkowicach Zagłębiacy.

Czynnikiem decydującym o powodzeniu przedsięwzięcia była postawa lokalnych liderów. Tyko te dzielnice, w których uaktywniła się grupa aktywnych i odpowiedzialnych działaczy, zdołały doprowadzić do uniezależnienia. Sam proces - od pojawienia się idei samodzielności do uzyskania pod projektem podpisu premiera – za każdym razem przebiegał według podobnego schematu, a każdy kolejny etap był nadzorowany przez lokalnych liderów.

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