

Editorial

The present publication is the result of the conference 'New Challenges of Local Governance in Times of Uncertainty and Complexity', held at the Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, on June 23–24, 2021, organized by the International Geographical Union Commission on Geography of Governance and the Faculty of Human Geography and Planning of the Adam Mickiewicz University. It was the 2022 Annual Conference of the Commission and was organized online due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The aim of the Conference, organized into 5 tracks, was to explore the nature and transformations of territorial governance in current times of uncertainty and complexity. As Zygmunt Bauman (born in Poznań, Polish sociologist and philosopher, one of the founders of the concept of postmodernism) wrote, we live in a time of 'liquid modernity'. It is manifested by rapidly changing development paradigms and the personal sense of uncertainty in the face of complexity, fragmentation and episodic nature of everyday experience. Local government and governance, urban policies and patterns of spatial change are of prime significance for the quality of human life. Public management at local, metropolitan and regional levels is close to the people and their needs, and at the same time is strongly dependent on national policies and, in the case of Europe, also on the policy of the European Union. Various concepts and visions of the state clash in the world today, based either on neo-liberalism or on neo-populism or even post-democracy. They result from economic crises, political and ideological transformations, climate change, technological progress and recently also from pandemic threats. These concepts also affect the organization and functioning of local government, centralization and decentralization tendencies, and new forms of civic involvement and participation.

Established in 1984, the International Geographical Union Commission on Geography of Governance aims to advance knowledge of the geography of territorial governance at local, metropolitan and regional levels, namely the conditions, scale and characteristics of new modes of territorial governance and its social, cultural, political, economic and environmental consequences. Its objective is also to identify new perspectives and to explore new research methodologies and different geographical approaches in the field of local, metropolitan and regional governance.

The authors of the articles in this volume comment on various aspects of local government reforms and governance changes as well as their spatial, social, economic and environmental effects, with particular emphasis on new trends and challenges of the 21st century. The scope of the volume is international and the articles range from review papers to comparative research to case studies.

The issue opens with an article by Axel Priebes. The author notes that the importance of small towns for the stabilization and support of rural development

is gradually noticed in spatial research and planning. His article discusses the status of small towns in local administrative reform processes. It is based on the example of reform processes that were carried out in the German state of Schleswig-Holstein. At the end of this process, the small towns found themselves in very different political and administrative constellations with respect to neighbouring districts. As a final result, the concerns of the small towns were not taken into account sufficiently in the reform processes in question.

The second article, by Pascal Rey and Margot Petitpierre, focuses on urban development in Conakry, the capital of the Republic of Guinea. The authors reflect on the progress and innovation represented by the increasingly widespread application of the World Bank's international environmental and social standards with respect to the consideration of local stakeholders in governance processes. They also examine the paradoxical fact that, within the same territory, the variable application of those standards can create strong inequalities, particularly in the treatment of people involuntarily displaced by projects of public interest. This article underlines that the funding source of a project often determines whether international standards are adhered to. These differences in the consideration of people affected by projects may thus depend on criteria that are difficult for them to understand and are largely beyond their control.

In the next article Verna Nel and Stephanus Minnie present the situation in South Africa, where local government has been plagued with severe problems such as a lack of capacity and resources, poor governance and limited intergovernmental and intra-municipal coordination. Their paper describes the challenges facing local government and outlines the District Development Model (coordinate and support government interventions – DDM) concept. The authors consider the potential of this model to improve the performance of local government, improve spatial governance and promote social and economic development. They conclude that the DDM may not succeed as it does not address the core problems. A candid review of the current concept of local government, its powers, responsibilities, capacities and relationships is required.

Guidelines and indicators for a smart and sustainable urban project definition at local level in developing countries is a topic presented by three authors: Stella Schroeder, Trinidad Fernandez and Sonja Stöffler. Their research is based on the work of MGI Morgenstadt Global Smart Cities Initiative in Piura, Peru, a project funded by the International Climate Initiative (IKI) of the German Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety (BMU), with the primary objective to mitigate the consequences of climate change in the pilot cities, increase their resilience to climate risks, and preserve their natural resources. As part of this broader project, this article seeks to define valuable contribution to sustainable principles oriented to the definition of urban development projects within the framework of the elaboration of the Metropolitan Development Plan Piura – Catacaos – Castilla – Veintiséis of October 2020 – 2040. The authors explore the potential of science-based frameworks that consider sustainable aspects in the description of the project idea and strategies at the local level and provide relevant sustainability indicators for the measurement

of the project scope regarding its outcomes and impacts. This methodology contributes to generating projects to transform Piura into a model city of ecological, economic and social sustainability, with accessible public spaces, adequate urban infrastructure designed for its inhabitants.

The next author, May East from the University of Dundee, explores the issue of gender inequality in urban planning. In her opinion, while some research has focused on how urban planning fails to respond to women's needs and perspectives, the concept of an 'urban planning gender gap' remains undertheorized and underrepresented in the realm of practical applications. While adopting a critical analysis perspective of the system, the article aims to investigate to what extent the UN Sustainable Development Goals support or hinder the capabilities of women to participate equally and meaningfully in urban planning. It concludes by highlighting that not only are urban spaces gendered, but so are urban policies and international accords as well. Based on these findings, the author proposes new narratives highlighting the interdependencies between women and cities, which if adopted, could bridge the historic urban planning gender gap.

The issue of local COVID-19 management in Lesotho is a topic of the article by Lucia Leboto-Khetsi, Jennilee Kohima, Fefisa Rwanqa-Mokete and Verna Nel. The authors attempt to answer how Lesotho responded to the COVID-19 pandemic, which factors hindered the local-level implementation of COVID-19 response and mitigation, and how the kingdom's local government disaster preparedness can be improved. A desktop study supported by virtual consultations with relevant players was conducted to gain insight for this study. Content and thematic analysis showed a lack of administrative and financial decentralization in Lesotho, which had detrimental implications for COVID-19 response and mitigation.

The last article is concerned with the measurement of the impact of international tools in local governance. Tamara Espiñeira-Guirao explores the world of new urban diplomacy, asking questions about the added-value and legitimacy of the international action of cities. In her analysis she proposes to invert the famous slogan and get local authorities to think local and act global. The analysis examines three categories of instruments: programming, communication and representation. Three main approaches to the international role of cities are applied: economic, political and spatial along with three main indicators (capacity, intensity and coordination) and three possible scenarios (the bywatcher, the silent silo and the strategist).

We would like to thank all the authors of the articles included in this issue of the journal *Rozwój Regionalny i Polityka Regionalna* (Regional Development and Regional Policy). Thank you for the effort and time devoted to the preparation of the articles. We want to assure you that we appreciate your commitment and believe that the articles will contribute to raising the level of knowledge about local governance and its conditions. Special thanks go to the secretary of the editorial office of the *Rozwój Regionalny i Polityka Regionalna* Journal, Mr. Rafał Lemański, for the effort put in preparing the publication for the edition.

We hope, Dear Reader, that you will find interesting research results among the texts presented here, regardless of the issues related to different latitudes.

Editors

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