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**The Arctic and Nordic
Countries in the World of Economy and Politics**

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**CHANGES IN THE ORGANIZATION
OF LOCAL GOVERNMENTS
IN THE NORDIC COUNTRIES**

Introduction

Local government in the Nordic countries is perceived as representing a single model and quite often considered a positive pattern. Lawrence E. Rose and Krister Ståhlberg point to four key reasons for this: 1) these countries have similar historical and cultural heritage; 2) local governments are given general power of competence; 3) local governments have the financial resources necessary to fulfill the tasks assigned to them; 4) local authorities in these countries have a significant share of public expenditure and are the largest employer, thus Nordic local governments can be referred to as local *welfare state*. During the process of development of the Nordic welfare state model, local self-government occupied a crucial role in its implementation². Apart from the Nordic countries, there are few states in the world, where local authorities would be given so much confidence in the scope of power and responsibilities³.

As far as the Nordic model of a self-government is concerned, there are both similarities and differences. The similarities concern the formal institution of a local government. As for the differences, for example, Finland has no regional authorities comparable to elective county authorities, which exist in Norway and Sweden. In Finland, however, there is a system of inter municipal cooperation, which in many ways serves as the regional government. Municipalities in Finland and Norway are significantly smaller in terms of population than their counterparts

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² L.E. Rose and K. Ståhlberg, *The Nordic Countries: Still the „Promised Land”?* [in:] *Comparing Local Governance. Trends and Developments*, eds. B. Denters and L.E. Rose, Palgrave Macmillan 2005, pp. 83-84.

³ S. Montin, *Moderna kommuner*, Malmö 2004.

in Denmark and Sweden⁴. Danish mayor, who is selected from the councilors, is superior to the position of chief executive officer and has a much stronger administrative role than their counterparts in other countries. In Finland and Norway, political and administrative power is clearly separated. In Sweden, however, some councilors are employed full-time as heads of municipal committees or boards⁵.

Experiments of Scandinavian “free commune” from the 1980s have reduced central government control over local governments and overdeveloped systems of central regulations and orders. These experiments can be seen as part of the neo-liberal reforms and a herald of several changes introduced in local governments in all four countries in the 1990s and the beginning of the new millennium.

Changes in the organization of local government

In the 1990s, a common feature of the new legislation on self-government in Finland, Norway and Sweden was granting these governments with greater freedom in determining their own organizational structure. In Norway, the new Local Government Act of 1992 enabled the functioning of local government in the form of parliamentary democracy as an alternative to the traditional type of aldermanic government. Alderman type of government does not provide for the division between the ruling majority and the opposition, as the executive power is represented by the local council members allowing all parties to influence decisions. In this model, the emphasis is put on consensus and distribution of power and responsibility. On the other hand, parliamentary model highlights the differences between parties and favours concentration of power and responsibilities. Traditional model of consensus decision-making has been replaced by simple majority system, which is used by Norwegian local government. Majority model has been developed in response to the growing need for political leadership and accountability at the local level as well as the changes referred to as a transition from local government to local governance⁶. In 1986, in Oslo Ministerial decision-making model was introduced to provide clearer division of responsibilities. The model adopted in Oslo has not been widespread. It has been implemented only in Nordland (since 1999) and Bergen (since 2000)⁷. In 1999, Norway was the first Nordic country to introduce the directly-elected mayors, but did not introduce any changes related to the position of mayor⁸.

⁴ Over 50% of these municipalities have less than 5,000 inhabitants.

⁵ L.E. Rose and K. Ståhlberg, *The Nordic Countries: Still the „Promised Land”?*, *op.cit.*, pp. 84-86.

⁶ P.E. Martinussen, *Majority Rule in Consensual Democracies: Explaining Political Influence in Norwegian Local Councils*, „Local Government Studies”, 2004, vol. 30(3), pp. 304-308; L. Rajca, *Zmiana sposobu rozwiązywania konfliktów politycznych w norweskim samorządzie lokalnym* [in:] *My i oni. Rola, miejsce i znaczenie konfliktów w polityce*, eds. A. Kasińska-Metryka, R. Miernik, Kielce 2012, pp. 143-154.

⁷ H. Baldersheim, *From Alderman to Ministers: The Oslo Model Revisited* [in:] *Transforming Local Political Leadership*, eds. R. Berg and N. Rao, Palgrave Macmillan 2005, pp. 59-72.

⁸ H.O. Larsen, *Transforming Political Leadership: Models, Trends and Reforms* [in:] *Transforming Local Political Leadership*, eds. R. Berg and N. Rao, Palgrave Macmillan 2005, pp. 195-211;

In Finland and Sweden special emphasis has been placed on allowing municipalities to select appropriate forms of inter municipal cooperation. Also experiments in various forms of decentralization, especially in the largest municipalities have been conducted. This was seen as a better way to meet the needs of local people and make them involve in a decision-making process. This has also contributed to a clearer division between politics and administration. Politicians should focus on strategic management (“steering and not rowing”), while the current activities and the implementation of the objectives should be handled by administrative bodies. In order to carry out their tasks, municipalities have been increasingly working in cooperation with actors from the private sector and non-governmental organizations⁹.

In Finland considerable freedom in appointing authorities and organizing activities of the municipality was granted by the Law of 1995 on local government. The executive power and the ongoing management of the affairs of the commune rests with the executive officer (manager), who is appointed by the council and considered the most important official. Although this position is considered non-political, it is usually held by a person associated with a political party having a majority in the council. The current model of municipalities, characterized by a predominance of the administration over the politics, the lack of a clear division between functions, as well as a wide range of competences conferred on the officer, who is not selected through general election – gives rise to discontent of these citizens, who are not strongly involved in the affairs of municipalities. Establishing the position of a mayor was seen a chance to make citizens more involved in local issues¹⁰. The Act on Local Government, amended in 2006, provided a solution, thanks to which municipal councilors could select a mayor. The solution, however has not been widely accepted, as it has been applied only in two Finnish municipalities (Tampere and Pirkkala)¹¹.

Sweden belongs to the countries with the strongest political and practical forms of local government, which is the most financially independent. In the wake of “experiments of the free commune” in the 1990s the country was still undergoing decentralization, being the result of devolving further powers from the state level to the municipalities, especially in the field of social services and education¹². Local Government Act of 1991 significantly empowered municipal councils by

L. Rajca, *Przywództwo polityczne w zachodnioeuropejskim samorządzie lokalnym*, „Studia Regionalne i Lokalne”, 2008, No. 4, pp. 87-88.

⁹ L.E. Rose and K. Ståhlberg, *The Nordic Countries: still the “promised land”?* *op.cit.*, p. 94.

¹⁰ A. Pawłowska, *Prawno-instytucjonalny wymiar przywództwa lokalnego (na przykładzie wybranych państw)*, [in:] *Model przywództwa. Wymiar lokalny, krajowy, międzynarodowy*, ed. A.K. Piasecki, Kraków 2006, p. 451; M. Grzybowski, G. Kuca, *Finlandia* [in:] *Samorząd terytorialny w wybranych państwach europejskich*, ed. A.K. Piasecki, Kraków 2010, p. 84.

¹¹ K. Radzik-Maruszak, *Transformacja roli organów przedstawicielskich w procesie lokalnego współrzędzenia. Doświadczenia wybranych państw Europy Zachodniej* [in:] *Europejskie modele samorządu terytorialnego. Stan obecny i perspektywy*, ed. J. Wojnicki, Warszawa 2014, p. 119.

¹² R. Premfors, 1998, *Reshaping the Democratic State: Swedish Experiences in a Comparative Perspective*, „Public Administration”, 1998, vol. 76/1, pp. 141-59.

giving them right to decide on the organization of local authorities¹³. Municipalities wanted to be more professional in their activities and at the same time were interested in associating local political leaders with a political party within the traditional leader committee system. Measures to strengthen political leadership have been undertaken in many municipalities. The executive power, however, still rests with many people, which weakens political accountability and transparency. An idea of political control exercised by many unpaid representatives, having close relation to the citizens has been prevailing. However, the concept of local policy, as the activity of the laymen, has faced a serious challenge of increased professional approach to politicians and chief executives¹⁴.

Traditionally, in Denmark amateur politicians have been actively involved in policy making, which is referred to as “the layman rule”¹⁵. Danish municipalities have still maintained committee leader systems. Reluctance to strong executive power as well as intense activity of amateur politicians had resulted in 1998 in restoring more collective forms of decision-making characteristic of committee leader systems in three largest cities (Copenhagen, Aalborg and Odense)¹⁶. As a result, formal position and influence of political leaders have been weakened, and formal and real power of councilors (*backbenchers*) has increased. Consequently, the decision-making system has become more dispersed, which undoubtedly contributes to “blurring” responsibility of elected representatives¹⁷.

In the face of financial crisis and simultaneous pressure on the efficiency of a local government, as well as the growing number of public tasks, Nordic countries have been introducing reforms of territorial consolidation¹⁸. In Finland, Denmark and Sweden, the total number of municipalities has been reduced through mergers of municipalities. For example, in Finland, between 1965 to 2014, the number of municipalities decreased by 226. Currently, there are 320 of them¹⁹. In Denmark, as a result of the reform of 1970 the number of municipalities was reduced by five times: from 1388 to 272. The reform of 2007 resulted in the transition of 16 counties into five regions, and further reduction in the number of Danish municipalities to 98²⁰. As a result, the average number of a community inhabitants increased significantly. In 2008 in Denmark the average number was

¹³ H. Wollmann, *Local Government Reforms in Great Britain, Sweden, Germany and France: Between Multi-Function and Single-Purpose Organisations*, „Local Government Studies”, 2004, vol. 30(4), pp. 647-648.

¹⁴ S. Montin, *The Swedish Model: Many Actors and Few Strong Leaders*, [in:] *Transforming Local Political Leadership*, eds. R. Berg and N. Rao, Palgrave Macmillan 2005, pp.116-130.

¹⁵ P. E. Mouritzen and J. H. Svava, *Leadership at the Apex: Politicians and Administrators in Western Local Governments*, Pittsburgh 2002, p. 51

¹⁶ Before 1998 only these three cities had cabinet executive structures.

¹⁷ R. Berg, *From Cabinets to Committees: The Danish Experience*, [in:] *Transforming Local Political Leadership*, eds. R. Berg and N. Rao, Palgrave Macmillan, 2005, pp. 85-100; L. Rajca, *Przywództwo polityczne w zachodnioeuropejskim samorządzie lokalnym*, *op.cit.*, p. 90.

¹⁸ Similar reforms were introduced by other west European countries.

¹⁹ *Finnish Local Government*, <http://www.localfinland.fi/en/Pages/default.aspx>, [5.05.2014].

²⁰ I. Rycerska, *Reforma samorządu terytorialnego w Danii* [in:] *Samorząd terytorialny w Europie Zachodniej*, ed. L. Rajca, Warszawa 2010, pp. 238-266.

56 000 people, in Sweden 31 800, and in Finland 15 300²¹. Also the number of inhabitants per one councilor increased, which resulted in weakening the relations between the representatives of their constituents. The reform has led to increasing responsibilities of territorial self-government units, especially in the field of social and health care.

Changes inspired by the new public management

Under the influence of neo-liberalism of the 1990s, reforms inspired by the New Public Management (NPM) were introduced in local governments of the Nordic countries. In the areas, where previously local government was the only service provider, other agents providing services appeared and citizens were given the possibility to choose a provider using some criteria, usually associated with typical factors of competitiveness. Such phenomena as: outsourcing; division of roles of a buyer and a service provider; result-oriented and customer-oriented business activities; separating public policy from operational management; introduction of measurable service standards; consumer satisfaction surveys, became widespread. The policy of NPM was being implemented in the Nordic countries at the uneven pace. Finland and Sweden were leaders in this respect, while Denmark and particularly Norway were a bit slower in its adoption²². The idea of NPM resulted in perceiving a citizen as a consumer and this phenomenon received due recognition both in the Nordic countries, as in most of the countries of Western Europe. The idea of citizenship remained in the background. The focus shifted towards efficiency, whereas political functions of municipalities and their relations with citizens remained rather neglected.

In Sweden, the introduction of reforms stemming from the concept of New Public Management was due to several factors²³. Firstly, the so called “quasi monopoly” of the Swedish municipal sector to deliver social services was widely criticized. Secondly, in 1991 the newly elected Conservative government proclaimed the rejection of “social democratic welfare state”. Thirdly, the Local Government Act of 1991 empowered municipal councils by granting them right to decide on institutional structure and organization of social services delivery. Finally, the financial crisis, which created the need to increase savings and efficiency was another contributory factor. Since the 1990s, some municipalities have been using outsourcing²⁴. Some municipalities have been allowing residents to select service providers and funded “vouchers” as a form of refund of their spending. Swedish municipalities have also begun to privatize utilities and

²¹ CEMR (Council of European Municipalities and Regions) and Dexia, *EU Sub-national Governments: 2008 Key Figures*, 2009, s. 4 [online], http://www.ccre.org/docs/nuancier_2009_en.pdf, [20.02.2011].

²² M. Øgård, *Forvaltningsinnovasjon i de nordiske regionene/kommunene: I felles takt mot new public management?*, [doctoral dissertation], Oslo 2002, as cited in: L.E. Rose and K. Ståhlberg, *The Nordic Countries: Still the „Promised Land“?*, *op.cit.*, p. 95.

²³ H. Wollmann, *op.cit.*, pp. 639-665.

²⁴ However, later outsourcing has been reduced.

withdraw from the provision of many public services. Performance management has become a generally accepted practice. The concept of “separating the roles of service provider and service user” has been particularly widespread in public healthcare services²⁵.

In Sweden, and to a greater extent in Denmark consumer approach to a citizen has been evident in such actions as introducing boards made up of service users in relation to certain activities of local government. For example, in schools such boards were made up of parents, who were granted special powers. The purpose of the creation of such boards was to allow users to have a greater influence on decisions about services and to get citizens more involved. However, research shows different, not necessarily positive results of the activities of such boards, especially with regard to citizen engagement. These practices have not been widely used in other Nordic countries²⁶.

In Finland, the implementation of NPM paradigm consisted on the one hand of decentralization, deregulation, outsourcing, separating the roles of service user and service provider, performance oriented activities, and on the other on unwavering commitment to professional organization of municipal administration, and thus further excluding representatives selected through elections from the decision making process²⁷.

Changes inspired by the concept of co-governing

Since the mid 1990s in Western Europe a new paradigm in the management of local government referred to as local governance i.e. moving away from hierarchical management structures to network structures has been gaining increasing popularity. In contrast to the new public management, governance approach, in addition to efficiency, focuses also on the quality of democracy. Governance attaches great importance to the issue of democratic network decision-making results. The policy of democratic renewal has in recent years gained importance in many countries, including Scandinavian states. It is worth noting, that it has been inspired from the supranational level. Nordic Council of Ministers recommended in 2004, that all the Nordic countries have their own strategies to develop democracy. Proposed activities relate primarily to the level of local government²⁸.

In Sweden, the beginning of the 21st century marks the numerous attempts to coordinate activities in the various sectors of municipalities, including the coordination of public and private agents. Also the importance of making citizens engaged in various decision-making processes within representative, direct,

²⁵ H. Wollmann, *op.cit.*, pp. 647-650

²⁶ L. E. Rose and K. Ståhlberg, *The Nordic Countries: Still the „promised land”?*, *op.cit.*, p. 96.

²⁷ K. Radzik-Maruszak, *Transformacja roli organów przedstawicielskich w procesie lokalnego współrzędzenia. Doświadczenia wybranych państw Europy Zachodniej*, *op.cit.*, p. 118.

²⁸ A. Kubka, *Poszukiwania nowych form demokracji bezpośredniej w krajach skandynawskich*, [in:] *Stan i perspektywy demokracji bezpośredniej we współczesnym świecie*, ed. M. Marczewskiej-Rytko, Lublin 2011, p. 492.

participatory or deliberative democracy²⁹ is strongly emphasized. In order to promote democratic activities, Swedish municipalities hold consultations with local communities, form “councils” for some groups of residents, take measures to facilitate citizens’ access to the work of the municipal council, allow the submission of the so-called “Citizen applications”. Citizens’ panels, a new form of cooperation, has received little response from the citizens. The possibility of appointing local committees in municipalities has also failed to produce significant results in the development of democracy.

The institution of local (regional) referendum introduced in 1994 in response to people’s³⁰ initiative had negative results in practice, as in most cases the representative body rejected proposals to hold a referendum³¹. Andrzej Kubka emphasizes, that these different forms of engaging local communities have not been widely used, and their “structure leads in each case to subjecting (if not subordinating) civic initiatives to mechanisms of representative democracy system at a local level”³². Any forms of active citizenship initiatives are controlled and monitored by local politicians, who look after their own interests, for example recruiting people to a political party. The results of research conducted in Sweden have not confirmed the hypothesis, that the actions of municipalities to revitalize democracy actually lead to the citizens’ involvement. On the contrary, the level of democratic involvement has weakened. Comparing various case studies of Swedish local governments Andrzej Kubka claims, that there are limited opportunities to manage the development of democracy and that “the Swedish municipalities have failed to introduce better working democratic mechanisms into administration. What is more, one can easily justify the claim, as M. Gilg and O. Jodan do, that the results of studies weaken the theory of participatory democracy”³³. Evaluation studies of “the policy of democracy implementation” indicate its weaknesses and low efficiency³⁴.

Initiatives towards democracy revival have been taken in Norway at the government level, as well as through a national organization of Norwegian municipalities. In Norway, engaging communities in local democracy is mainly about more direct participation of citizens in matters of the municipality and include such forms as meetings, consulting, decentralized decision-making bodies,

²⁹ A. Kubka, „*Polityka rozwijania demokracji*” w szwedzkim samorządzie terytorialnym, [w:] *Demokracja bezpośrednia w samorządzie terytorialnym*, eds. M. Marczevska-Rytke i S. Michałowski, Lublin 2012, s. 141-158.

³⁰ In 2011, the laws involving the strengthening of institutions people’s initiatives at the local level were adopted.

³¹ A. Kubka, *Demokracja bezpośrednia w Szwecji i Norwegii*, [in:] *Stan i perspektywy demokracji bezpośredniej w Polsce*, ed. M. Marczevska-Rytke, Lublin 2010, p. 309.

³² A. Kubka, „*Polityka rozwijania demokracji*” w szwedzkim samorządzie terytorialnym, *op.cit.*, p. 150.

³³ *Ibidem*, s. 154.

³⁴ Actions for democratic renewal in the English local government also did not produce the expected results. L. Rajca, *Reformy samorządu terytorialnego w Anglii w latach 1997-2010*, Toruń, Europejskie Centrum Edukacyjne 2012, pp. 191-203.

forming boards made up of the residents, making decisions on selecting services, surveys and filing complaints. These more resemble initiatives associated with New Public Management, but also with governance to some extent. The scope of initiatives towards reviving democracy have been much more limited in Denmark, where non-institutional local activity is always associated with the high level of political commitment at the national level³⁵. It should be noted, however, that the number of candidates in local elections for the Danish councilor has been decreasing steadily for four decades, which raises concerns about the conditions of local democracy³⁶.

The concept of governance has also influenced the Finnish local government. In order to ensure the implementation of the common good, local authorities have to take care of balancing the interests of all parties involved in the co-governing³⁷. Such a role is more difficult and different from the one, which local representatives are more used to. Research carried out in three Finnish municipalities indicate the difficulties in both effective and democratic network governance. As Inga Nyholm and Arto Haveri claim, although municipalities “have developed some good practices to maintain coordination and democratic legitimacy, the best practice is demanding and time-consuming, and not necessarily well suited to the current institutionalized role of local councillors”³⁸. The concept of governance poses challenges to local representatives.

Since the 1990s the priorities of policies in local governments of the Nordic countries have shifted from the mere provision of services towards greater focus on local economic development. This is partly due to the cooperation between local governments at the international level, for example in the form of sister city (municipality) programmes. Greater importance, however, is placed on new forms of cooperation at the municipal, inter-communal or regional level. One of them are public-private partnerships established in order to carry out many public tasks. Another example is the cooperation agreements between local governments to foster development.

According to L.E. Rose and K. Ståhlberg, the evidence for the emergence of local governance in the Nordic countries is ambiguous. The increase in popularity of local partnerships and projects involving agents from different sectors is in fact also associated with more traditional service delivery. The key features and structure of local government remain essentially intact. At the inter-communal and regional level the characteristics of governance are more visible, especially in the

³⁵ A. Kubka, „*Polityka rozwijania demokracji*” w szwedzkim samorządzie terytorialnym, *op.cit.*, p. 141. In efforts to improve communication with local communities local authorities have been supported by National Association of Danish Municipalities. I. Rycerska, *Reformy samorządu terytorialnego w Danii*, *op.cit.*, p. 256.

³⁶ U. Kjaer, *The Decreasing Number of Candidates at Danish Local Elections: Local Democracy in Crisis*, „*Local Government Studies*”, 2007, vol. 33(2), pp. 195-213.

³⁷ I. Nyholm, A. Haveri, *Between Government and Governance – Local Solutions for Reconciling Representative Government and Network Governance*, „*Local Government Studies*”, 2009, vol. 35(1), p. 114.

³⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 109.

growth of the number of partnerships and joint ventures in activities related to the development, as well as in strengthening cooperation between public authorities at all levels and wielding influence in European institutions. LE Rose and K. Ståhlberg emphasize, that the Nordic tendencies are the sign of gradual change, rather than revolution. The foundations of the Nordic model are resistant to serious challenges and experiences. Nordic governments, like other European governments face today serious challenges such as demographic change, stronger competition, market pressures and the erosion of the notion of traditional social solidarity. In order to meet these challenges, it is likely that gradual shift towards local governance will continue. However, it is difficult to predict what results it will produce³⁹.

In the context of this forecast, a marked change in civic attitudes, now strongly influenced by individualistic approach⁴⁰, has been observed in the Nordic countries. According to a Norwegian researcher, Kristin Strømsnes, current civic attitudes are "more individualistic, more contextual and they feature more direct engagement"⁴¹, which contrasts with the forms of collective activity, which is stable and long-term. Individuals are more and more isolated from the formal structures of political activity. What is more, the role of a citizen as a consumer still seems to be more important than their role in common decision making⁴². This presents challenges for the implementation of the concept of governance.

Conclusion

In many countries, the traditional approach to leadership in local government has been subject to transformation. Establishing a more focused and more responsible local leadership has come to increased attention. In Norway, the majority system is gradually replacing the traditional model of consensus. Attempts to strengthen the political leadership in the municipalities have been made in Sweden and Finland, but they have not yielded significant results. In Denmark, the trend has been shifting in the opposite direction. The cabinet system, which had been established in three largest cities was abolished and more collective forms of decision-making returned. The reforms inspired by the idea of strong local leadership force representative bodies to redefine their functions and roles, which is often met with the reluctance and opposition of councilors. In technocratic self-oriented public service in the Nordic countries⁴³, tendency

³⁹ L.E. Rose and K. Ståhlberg, *The Nordic Countries: Still the „Promised Land”?*, *op.cit.*, pp. 98-99.

⁴⁰ A. Kubka, *Poszukiwania nowych form demokracji bezpośredniej w krajach skandynawskich*, *op.cit.*, pp. 485-486.

⁴¹ K. Strømsnes, *Folkets makt. Medborgerskap, demokrati, deltakelse*, Oslo 2003, p. 117, as cited in: A. Kubka, *Poszukiwania nowych form demokracji bezpośredniej w krajach skandynawskich*, *op.cit.*, p. 485.

⁴² A. Kubka, *Poszukiwania nowych form demokracji bezpośredniej w krajach skandynawskich*, *op.cit.*, pp. 486-488.

⁴³ A. Pawłowska, K. Radzik, *Modele instytucjonalne lokalnego przywództwa a zarządzanie wielopodmiotowe. Analiza porównawcza*, „Studia Polityczne”, 2008, No. 22, pp. 36-38.

towards professional approach to local government management, which can lead to reducing the role of representative bodies, is still very clear. In decision making, parties seek consensus – today different tendency can be observed only in Norway.

Reforms of territorial consolidation have resulted in increasing the number of inhabitants per one councilor, which clearly weakens the relations between the local representatives and communities. This phenomenon does not support local democracy. Moreover, pursuant to the reforms, local government have been charged with more tasks and at the same time granted with more freedom so as to their accomplishment.

Innovative concepts in the management of local government have shaped the modern local democracy, also in the Nordic countries. In the 1990s, local governments in the Nordic countries adopted the reforms inspired by the new public management. Since it was expected, that local governments would be more efficient, they have been gradually withdrawing from service provision and have been seeking cooperation with many other agencies. A citizen was treated as a consumer, who should be provided with good quality service. At the beginning of the new millennium, local governments faced another challenge i.e the concept of governance. Great importance was placed on the revival of local democracy. Central governments and local governments of the Scandinavian countries began to pursue a policy of renewal of local democracy through wider use of traditional forms of active citizenship and the application of innovative methods, mainly based on the assumptions of deliberative democracy. However, it is essential to strengthen democratic values of the political system by improving the strong form of representative democracy⁴⁴, and this trend is likely to shape democracy in the Nordic countries. It seems reasonable, taking into account failures and low effectiveness of the policy of “developing democracy” as well as the changes in the attitudes of citizens towards the prevailing individualistic approach in the Nordic countries.

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⁴⁴ A. Kubka, *Demokracja bezpośrednia w Szwecji i Norwegii*, *op.cit.*, p. 312.

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Abstract

Since the 1980s local government in the Nordic countries have been subject to many changes. Experiments of “free commune”, the concept of new public management and co-governing have been successively introduced. In addition, new legislation has granted local authorities with considerably greater discretion to determine their internal organization and to establish more focused local leadership. Despite these changes, the essential characteristics and structure of local government remain largely intact.

Zmiany w funkcjonowaniu nordyckich samorządów lokalnych

Od lat 80. XX wieku samorząd terytorialny w państwach nordyckich podlegał wielu zmianom. Kolejno wprowadzono „eksperymenty wolnych gmin”, koncepcję nowego zarządzania publicznego i współrządzenia. Ponadto, wprowadzane były zmiany instytucjonalno-prawne polegające na przekazaniu gminom więcej swobody w ich organizacji wewnętrznej i ustanowieniu bardziej skoncentrowanego przywództwa lokalnego. Pomimo tych zmian, najważniejsze cechy i struktury samorządu terytorialnego pozostają zasadniczo nie naruszone.

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