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

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**ORGANIZATION OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT
IN SELECTED NORDIC COUNTRIES
AGAINST A BACKGROUND
OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN POLAND**

Introduction

Local government is an integral part of the political system of each country, therefore the scope of its activities and functions is usually standardized in legal acts representing the highest level of legal force, for example in the Constitution. In the literature, there are numerous examples of definitions of local government. Local authorities such as a mayor, a village-mayor, or a council are often referred to as self-government. Yet, the government upholds the law and the capacity of the local community. According to Jerzy Regulski “in order to make a self-government function, the community must have the ability, the capacity and the willingness to handle their own affairs. This means there must be a political system, that gives communities the appropriate capabilities, and promotes citizenship awareness necessary to make the right decisions”².

Due to the idiosyncratic nature of the organization of local governments and the implementation of tasks or funding model, for many years European countries had lacked uniform legal regulations that would clearly specify the position of local government in the state system. It was only at the initiative of the Council of Europe in 1985, that the European Charter of Local Self-Government was drawn up and signed. The reason for the adoption of the European Charter of Local Self-

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² J. Regulski, *Móc, umieć i chcieć. Kształtowanie samorządu terytorialnego w Polsce* [in:] *Dwudziestolecie funkcjonowania samorządu terytorialnego w Polsce*, eds. H. Kisilowska, E. Malak, Warszawa 2010, p. 15.

Government was to highlight the role of a local government in securing the rights and freedoms of individuals, which was one of the objectives, for which the Council of Europe was established in 1949. The document was ratified by Poland in 1993, and in 1994 the government issued a statement on the matter³.

An important role in shaping the views on the legal nature of local government was also served by the Worldwide Declaration of Local Self-Government adopted in September 1985, during the 27 World Congress in Rio de Janeiro. It states, that "local self-government denotes the right and the duty of local authorities to regulate and manage public affairs under their own responsibility and in the interests of the local population" (art. 2 paragraph. 1)⁴.

A common feature of international declarations quoted above is a recommendation to settle the issue of local government in the Constitution, supplemented by national legislation. Such legal regulation forms the foundation of constitutionally-legal institutions of the modern, democratic state⁵.

1. The legal basis, organization and functioning of local government in Poland

When analyzing the origins of Polish local government, one can come to the conclusion, that it refers to the traditions and achievements of local government in Europe. Due to the fact, that the only environment in which a government can exist is a democratic state, the development of the notion of self-government in recent Polish history had not been possible until after 1989. Building local government structures marked the beginnings of civic society. In the 1990s, a major reform of local government, started on 8 March 1990 with the adoption of the Local Government Act introducing self-government bodies at the municipal level, was introduced. The Act specifies, that „by virtue of the law the inhabitants of the municipality (gmina) form a self-governing community. [...] The municipality performs public tasks on its own behalf and under its own responsibility, has legal personality and its independence is subject to judicial protection”⁶.

The legal basis for the functioning of local government is stipulated in the Constitution of 1997 and the acts on the district government and local governments of 5 June 1998. Fundamental three-tier territorial division of the state was regulated by the law of 24 July 1998. Article 1 of the Act specifies the date of introduction of such a division on 1 January 1999⁷. As of January 1, 2014 there are 2479 municipalities (gminas), 314 counties and 16 regions in Poland⁸.

³ Statement of the Government dated 14 July 1994 concerning the ratification by the Republic of Poland European Charter of Local Self-Government, signed at Strasbourg on 15 October 1985, Journal of Laws of 1994 No. 124, item. 608.

⁴ Polish version of the World Declaration of Local Government was published in the liner notes to the biweekly *Gospodarka-Administracja Państwowa* of October 1988.

⁵ B. Dolnicki, *Ustawa o samorządzie gminnym. Komentarz*, Warszawa 2010, p. 15.

⁶ *The Local Government Act of March 8, 1990*, cont. „Journal of Laws” of 2013, item 594, 1318.

⁷ *The law on the introduction of the three-tier division of the country of 24 July 1998*, „Journal of Laws”, No. 96, item. 603.

⁸ http://www.stat.gov.pl/bip/36_PLK_HTML.htm, [12.03.2014].

Members of constitutive organs (the Municipal Council, County Council and Regional Parliaments – Sejmiks) are elected directly by residents, and since 2002 executive organs (President, Village Mayor, Mayor) have been elected in the same way. In the case of a municipality, executive power rests with monocratic authority, while in the case of a county (board of directors, headed by the governor) and regional (board of directors, headed by Marshal) it is collegial. The terms of office for all representatives last for four years⁹. However, the relatively low turnout (especially in comparison with the Nordic countries) in the local elections in the subsequent elections - 44.2% in 2002¹⁰, 45.99% in 2006¹¹ and 47.32% in 2010¹² must be noted.

The scope of the tasks, that local self-governments have been entrusted with, is varied and depends on their level, that is whether it is a village, district or province level. Municipal self-government performs public tasks on its behalf and under its own responsibility, and these tasks are either of the municipality ownership or are assigned¹³. The former are performed by the municipalities themselves, and therefore without the interference of state authorities. In art. 163 of the Constitution local government has been predefined as the one, which performs public tasks not reserved by the Constitution or laws relating to the organs of other public authorities¹⁴. The main tasks of the municipality can include issues relating to environmental protection, municipal roads and streets, spatial management, water and sanitation management, health care, social services, local public transport, education, culture, cemeteries, public order, the maintenance of municipal utilities. Municipalities may also perform tasks commissioned on behalf of the government (under the Act or by agreement), which has a duty to ensure their funding. These tasks include, among others, conducting referenda, carrying out censuses.

The structure of expenditures of Polish municipalities (gminas) in 2012 showed, that the municipalities use their funds for the following purposes: education (37.1%), social care (16.2%), public administration (10.1%), public utilities and environmental protection (7.9%), transport and communication (7.4%). The sum of these expenses accounts for 78.7% of the total expenditure. The remaining amount of 32.6% was allocated to salaries.

Similarly to a municipality (gmina), a county is charged with two types of tasks- their own and those assigned to it. The basic responsibilities of a county include, among others, health care, social assistance, pro-familial policy, surveying, mapping, flood protection. In 2012, counties used most of their funding for: education and care (32.0%), social assistance (14.7%), transport and

⁹ W. Skrzydło, *Ustrój polityczny RP w świetle Konstytucji z 1997 r.*, Warszawa 2009, p. 192.

¹⁰ <http://wybory2002.pkw.gov.pl/grada/gw1/index.html>, [11.03.2014].

¹¹ <http://wybory2006.pkw.gov.pl/kbw/frekwencjae18f.html?fid=0>, [11.03.2014].

¹² <http://wybory2010.pkw.gov.pl/att/1/pl/146501.html#tabs-1>, [11.03.2014].

¹³ *Ibidem*, p. 190.

¹⁴ Art. 163 of the Constitution of 1997, „Journal of Laws” 1997, No. 78 item. 483.

communication (12.6%), public administration (11.1%), education (7.1%), social security and fire protection (5.3%), health (5.1%) as well as other tasks, including those related to social policy (4.7%).

Regional self-governments perform different tasks of regional scope in the areas of public education, including higher education, health promotion and protection, protection of cultural heritage, social welfare, combating unemployment. It is also responsible for the preparation and implementation of regional development strategies. In 2012, regional self-governments allocated their funds to the following purposes: the implementation of tasks in the field of transport and communications (37.9%), agriculture and hunting (10.2%), public administration (9.2%), culture and heritage protection (8.6 %), health (6.0%), education and upbringing (6.1%) and production and processing (4.1%) and physical education (1.7%)¹⁵.

2. The legal basis, organization and functioning of local government in the Nordic countries

Local government in the Nordic countries is one of the foundations of social order and the tool to implement the policy of a “welfare state”. In addition, a long tradition of using the mechanisms of democracy for electing democratic decision-making bodies at the level of local government must be pointed out. The first bills forming the base for the management system at the municipal level date back to the first half of the nineteenth century. During this period, the first regulations for municipalities appeared in Denmark in 1837, in Finland in 1865, in Norway in 1837 and Sweden in 1862. It should be also noted, that the local government in the Nordic countries have been undergoing significant transformations, however it is based on the model of a welfare state, which has been shaped in the course of time. The transformations have produced a number of results, among others, in the number of municipalities, their size and tasks¹⁶.

Historically, self governments in the Nordic countries in the 1960s and 1970s were entrusted with increasing number of tasks. As a result, the municipalities were provided with greater financial resources, and thus an increased control by the state. However, with the development of the concept of a welfare state, the 1990s marked a change in the approach of the central authorities to the activities of municipalities. This situation was related to the widespread access to public services, virtually regardless of place of residence. Providing people with basic public services allowed local governments in the Nordic countries to focus on the development of the local government, whose main task was to support the development of civil society¹⁷.

¹⁵ *Report on implementation of the state budget for the period from 1 January to 31 December 2012. Information on the budgets of local government units*, Warsaw 2013, pp.51, 85, 148

¹⁶ K. Stahlberg, *Samorząd terytorialny w Europie Północnej*, [in:] *Nordycki model demokracji i państwa dobrobytu*, eds. T. Steen Edvardsen, B. Hagtvet, Warszawa 1994 p. 55.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, pp. 56-57.

Local governments in the Nordic countries shape the political standards for legislative and executive levels of the central government. Active engagement in local government gives local politicians a thorough preparation to carry out their tasks related to local communities. Holding a position in the central and local government simultaneously is forbidden to ensure the independence and autonomy of local governments, councilors and mayors. Furthermore, the individual instances of self-government act in isolation from the hierarchical structure¹⁸.

In contrast to the three-tier territorial division in Poland, in the Nordic countries two-tier administrative system (regions and municipalities) prevails. Municipalities in the countries of Northern Europe tend to be larger in terms of area and population.

3.1. The legal basis for the functioning and organization of local government in Denmark

Local government in Denmark has a long tradition, and self-government of municipalities, which is expressed i.a. through their independence in financing their tasks is one of the foundations of the Danish self government. The shape of the contemporary local administration consisting of municipalities and regions was established after the adopting in 1953 the Constitution, in which Article 82 guarantees the right of local communities to manage their own affairs under the supervision of the state¹⁹.

The last reform of administration in Denmark was introduced on 1 January 2007. It was prepared by the government's commission, which earlier initiated a public debate related to the future reform. Referendums and wide consultation were carried out. It was concluded, that local administration in Denmark required modernization and decentralization. As a result, boroughs were to be consolidated, which was argued by an increasing demand of skilled staff, as the tasks assigned to local governments were more and more specialized. Consolidation of the tasks of one sector at a municipal level provides a much better coordination of activities²⁰.

Pursuant to the aforementioned administrative reform, the country was divided into municipalities inhabited by the population of at least 20 thousand people (30 thousand residents was the preferred population). Towns with lower than indicated population were given a status of a municipality only on condition, that they would cooperate with larger municipalities in their neighbourhood. In the mid 2004, the Danish government held consultations with boroughs in order to make them decide, which neighbouring borough they wanted to merger with. The boroughs were to make the decision by January 1, 2005. The process of

¹⁸ A.K. Piasecki, *Samorząd terytorialny...*, *op.cit.*, p. 45.

¹⁹ Art. 82 of the Constitution of the Kingdom of Denmark of 5 June 1953; <http://libr.sejm.gov.pl/tek01/txt/konst/dania-a1.html>, (11.03.2014)

²⁰ The final report of the Committee for Administrative Structure, as cited in M. Popławski, *Process of identifying the main objectives of the reform of local government in Denmark of January 1 2007*, [in:] *Samorząd terytorialny w Polsce i w Europie*, eds. J. Marszałek-Kawa, A. Lutrzykowski, Toruń 2008, p. 262.

decentralization and the creation of new municipalities ran smoothly and it did not create conflict situations when negotiating the terms of the merger between the individual boroughs, as it was expected by policy-makers. Only in two cases the creation of municipalities was the government's decision. In addition, many new municipalities were much larger than expected at the beginning.

The reform has resulted in establishing 98 municipalities and 5 regions. New administrative division of the country replaced the previously used for 36 years system of division into 273 boroughs and 14 regions. The boundaries of only 32 out of 273 boroughs have remained unchanged (they are inhabited by more than 20 000 people) – these municipalities are mostly located in the vicinity of Copenhagen. Only 7 out of 98 new municipalities, are inhabited by less than 20 000 thousand residents. They are mostly smaller islands, which have entered partnership agreements with neighbouring municipalities²¹. The average population of a municipality (kommune) is about 55 thousand people²².

Each of the 5 regions (amt) in Denmark has a self-government and government administration. Regional government is responsible for coordinating activities in the area of healthcare, education, public transport, social services, environmental protection, promotion of business. After the reform, the number of inhabitants of the regions ranges from 600,000 to 1.6 million. Regional governments are not allowed to levy taxes, and they are financed directly by a central government grant and small contribution paid directly by municipalities for special purposes. Every four years the residents of a region elect 41 regional councillors (the number of councillors is set out by law), and from 9 to a maximum of 25 municipal councillors (the number of mandates for a municipality is determined by the council of the previous term). In the four largest cities in Denmark, the number of councillors is slightly higher, for example in Copenhagen there are currently 55 councillors, and in Aalborg there are 31 council members.

In the region, public authority is exercised by the Regional Council (amtsråd), the board and the governor, who is selected by the councillors. Local elections in Denmark are held every four years, at a high, about 70 percent turnout. Residents elect councillors, who then by vote select a mayor (borgmester) from among its members for a four-year term. It is quite frequent, that mayors remain in the office for another term. About 40% of the mayors have remained in the office for over 25 years. The mayor is the chairman of the council, the head of the administration, who supervises the work of the Chief Executive. They are the chairman of the board of the financial committee and that why play a decisive role in the preparation of the budget.

The municipalities are entrusted with the following competencies: social services (medical care, nursing care), primary education, libraries, spatial

²¹ <http://www.kl.dk/English/Local-Government-Reform/>, [15.03.2014].

²² www.kl.dk/ImageVaultFiles/id_64104/cf_202/The_Local_Government_Reform_in_Brief.PDF, [15.03.2014].

planning, maintenance of local roads, ensuring the supply of gas, electricity, water, heating for residents. In addition, municipalities support culture and sport. Municipalities may quite easily expand their powers, and if the implementation of the task exceeds the capacity of one municipality it can create a partnership with other municipalities²³.

3.2. The legal basis for the functioning and organization of local government in Finland

The traditions of the Finnish local government date back to the twelfth century, a period when the country came under the Swedish domination. Self-government in Finland is concentrated on the level of municipality (kunta) level, and this administration system was formed in the interwar period.

In recent years, a thorough administrative reform has been carried out in Finland, which has resulted in reducing the number of municipalities. The process began in 2005 and during the first seven years after the introduction of the reform, the number of municipalities has decreased by one-fourth²⁴. Currently, administrative and functional structure of Finland comprises 320 municipalities²⁵, of which 304 are in the mainland and the remaining 16 are located on the Åland Islands, which operate through different principles. The largest group of municipalities are those with the population from 2 to 5 thousand people (95 municipalities), whereas there are only a few with a population of over 100 thousand residents (9 municipalities). Finland is divided into 18 regions excluding the Åland Islands.

State subsidies account for 18% of the revenues of municipalities, fees and charges for services account for 26% of the revenues, 44% come from taxes, 8% from loans. As it can be seen, the main source of the revenues of municipalities is income tax. Each local authority decides independently on its income tax rate. Local authorities are entitled to levy property taxes and business activity taxes (in the case of the latter 20% is collected by a municipality and 80% is collected by the state). The amount of the state grant depends on the population of the municipality, its expenditure on education as well as social and health care.

Local authorities are responsible for performing the social welfare, and that is why a significant part of the budget of the municipalities of Finland, estimated in 2013 at 45.3 billion euro, is channelled into providing the services, including social services and health care (50% of the budget, the sum of 22.8 billion euro), education and culture (21% of the budget, the sum of 9.7 billion)²⁶.

²³ A. K. Piasecki, *Samorząd terytorialny...*, op.cit, p. 80.

²⁴ T. Pettersen, *New Year Sees End of 16 Finnish Municipalities*, <http://barentsobserver.com/en/society/2013/01/new-year-sees-end-16-finnish-municipalities-03-01>, [12.03.2014].

²⁵ As for 31.12.2007 there were 415 municipalities in Finland.

²⁶ <http://sfmr.no/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/Heikki-Telakivi.-Local-government-system-in-Finland.27.9.2013.pdf>, [12.03.2014].

Pursuant to the Local Government Act (paragraph 2) local authorities shall fulfil the functions, which result from their autonomy and those, which are imposed by law. Due to the fact that Finland does not have a strong self-government at the regional level, often municipalities work together entering into agreements under which, for example, several municipalities finance one hospital and several educational institutions²⁷.

Depending on the area of activities, joint municipality or regional committees are set up, and in the case of regional cooperation they are mandatory. As far as the cooperation at the regional level is concerned, municipalities participate in regional councils, regional hospital services, regional services for the disabled. Representatives of municipalities constitute decision-making bodies in the joint committees. Joint municipal committees are engaged in providing secondary education services, employment and primary health care²⁸. State supervision of local government is general and is limited to ensuring the legal basis for its activities.

Council (Kunnanhallitus) is the constitutional body of a municipality. Council elections are held every four years and its members are elected directly. The number of council members varies from 13 to 85, depending on the size of the municipality. Proportional representation electoral system is used and voter turnout is very high and reaches 80%. The executive body of the municipality is the board (Kunnanhallitus), which consists of at least seven members elected for two-year term. Although informally, proportional representation of political parties in the composition of the council is required, whereas a minimum of 40% quota for women is a binding obligation²⁹. The board is rarely headed by the chairman, as a managing director is usually appointed and the position of a mayor does not exist. The managing director is a civil servant, who is elected for an indefinite period of time, by the councillors using absolute majority voting. The managing director can be dismissed by a two-third majority vote.

3.3. The legal basis for the functioning and organization of local government in Sweden

Economic boom in the past century created the need to reconsider the fragmented Swedish administrative structure. Small municipalities had limited financial resources for funding increasing tasks. Therefore, it was necessary to merger municipalities in order to strengthen their organizational capacity, which in turn resulted in a significant reduction in their numbers. Under the reform of 1952 the number of municipalities was reduced to 1037. Between 1962 and 1974 further reduction took place and as a result Sweden was divided into 278 municipalities³⁰.

²⁷ A. Rynänen, *Samorząd w Finlandii a Europejska Karta Samorządu Lokalnego*, [in:] *Statuty samorządu terytorialnego. Regulacje europejskie i amerykańskie*, ed. W. Kisiel, Kraków 2005, p. 194.

²⁸ A. K. Piasecki, *Samorząd terytorialny...*, *op.cit.*, p. 82.

²⁹ <http://sfmr.no/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/Heikki-Telakivi.-Local-government-system-inFinland.27.9.2013.pdf>, [12.03.2014].

³⁰ M. Popławski, *Samorząd Terytorialny w Królestwie Szwecji*, Toruń 2007, pp. 34-35.

As for 2014 administrative division of Sweden comprises 290 municipalities, 20 provinces and Gotland.

The main document regulating the scope of the local government in Sweden is the Local Government Act adopted in 1992, which in 10 chapters specifies, among others, the competences and the organizational structure of municipalities³¹.

The main constitutional body in all municipalities and regions is the council (kommunfullmaktige), whose members and deputies are elected directly on the day of parliamentary election.

Traditionally, voting takes place on the third Sunday of September in the year of the election. Typically of the Nordic countries, the turnout at the elections usually is very high, up to 80 percent. Councillors select a chairman from among its members. The term of office of local government lasts for four years and starts on November 1. Councillors and their deputies are elected by proportional representation voting system. There is a 5 percent threshold for the elections. The number of mandates ranges from 31 to 61 in a municipality and from 31 to 101 in the region. 42 percent of the members of the municipal councils are women³², the total number of councillors elected in Sweden is estimated at 44 thousand.

Administration, municipality asset management and other responsibilities are in the scope of committees appointed by the council. The committees usually consist of 9 to 14 members, who supervise a group of officials and the commissioner appointed for a term (in larger municipalities there are several commissioners). The main task of the committee is to facilitate the preparation of projects aiming at finding unique solutions, and that is why their characteristic feature is the diversity and far-reaching specialization. Committees are also responsible for implementing the decisions of the council. The executive body of the municipality is the main committee (kommunstyrelse). Its job is to coordinate the work of the committees, represent municipalities, preparing their budget. The main committee also has full responsibility for the finance of municipalities. It consists of 11 to 17 members, its chairman is an important person in the public life of the municipality, most often employed full-time by the office³³.

Municipalities are responsible for matters of direct concern to its residents, and for matters of a general nature relating to the planning, maintenance and environmental protection, emergency services, civil defence and communications, water supply, sewerage and energy, as well as recreational and cultural activities. In implementing the model of "welfare state" extensive social care provided by the municipality focuses primarily on children, older people and the disabled as well as families³⁴.

³¹ Local Government Act, <http://www.government.se/content/1/c6/02/95/35/ca584fee.pdf>, [12.03.2014].

³² http://english.skl.se/municipalities_county_councils_and_regions, [12.03.2014].

³³ Comp. A. K. Piasecki, *Samorząd terytorialny...*, op.cit, p. 98 and M. Popławski, *Samorząd Terytorialny w Królestwie Szwecji*, op.cit. pp. 39-41.

³⁴ Comp. W. Nowiak, *Nordycki model „welfarestate” w realiach XXI wieku. Dylematy wyboru i ewolucja systemu w społeczeństwach dobrobytu – wnioski praktyczne*, Poznań 2011, pp. 121-129.

The majority of funds of Swedish municipalities is allocated to education (41% of total expenses), care for the elderly (19% of expenditure), the disabled (11% of expenditure). In recent years, municipalities in Sweden have been heavily indebted. One of the reasons for the financial difficulties facing local governments in this country is making a lot of investments, which results from the necessity to renovate the infrastructure, which was built in the sixties and seventies. In addition, growing aging population in Sweden contributes to increasing the spending of local governments for the nursing homes for the elderly³⁵.

Self-government at the regional level has overall responsibility for healthcare, dealing with the services of primary and hospital treatment. Regional authorities also provide support to cultural initiatives including music events and theatres. Another sphere of activity is the participation of the regional government in the projecting of regional development³⁶.

4. Conclusions

When analyzing the origins of the local government in selected Nordic countries, the rich tradition and long-standing practice of municipalities in solving the problems faced by community residents should be noted. The development of local self-government has contributed to growing of the awareness of the community subjectivity in the municipality-state relations. This, in turn has greatly fuelled the development of civil society, without which the realization of the concept of “welfare state” would be impossible to achieve.

One of the key areas of the local governments in the Nordic countries is providing social support for residents, which consumes significant amounts of municipal budgets. This situation, of course, creates the risk of certain protectiveness of the state understood as supporting groups, that by virtually unlimited access to such an extensive system of social assistance lose motivation to change their life.

In recent years, each of the analyzed Nordic countries, has been undergoing the process of consolidation of municipalities, leading to a reduction in their number. The aim of the reform was to achieve more efficient structure composed of larger administrative units, which would be able to cope with the performance of more complex tasks. Merger of municipalities was also aimed at optimizing human and organizational resources. Also the way of implementation of the administrative reforms in these countries is noteworthy. In each country, the decision to carry out the reforms was preceded by the process of extensive public consultation, in accordance with the Scandinavian management style based on

³⁵ „An Association and its members” draft by SALAR (Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions) http://english.skl.se/BinaryLoader.axd?OwnerID=0d4cb14d-48e5-4ec5-b349-c84bc89bed33&OwnerType=0&PropertyName=EmbeddedImg_f04c0493-486b-46db-a2ce-c9e34774f4d5&FileName=An_association_and_its_members.pdf&Attachment=False, p.8. [12.03.2014].

³⁶ S. Häggroth, K. Kronvall, C. Riberdahl, K. Rudebeck, *Samorząd terytorialny w Szwecji...*, op.cit. pp. 24-28.

consensus. Looking at the results of the merger, it can be noted, that the Nordic countries have been successful in reducing the number of municipalities and in improving the organization and the implementation of the tasks they perform.

The organization of local government in the Nordic countries is different from that in Poland. In the Nordic countries two-tier administrative system (regions and municipalities) prevails, while in Poland there is a three-tier territorial division into municipalities, counties and regions. Lack of intermediate (county) level of self-government does not impede municipalities in the Nordic countries to carry out the tasks, that go beyond their scope. In such a situation, the most common solution is establishing joint committees, which are, depending on the country, either voluntary or mandatory. It can be assumed, that the administrative costs of operating joint activities of municipalities within the committees are lower compared to the cost of maintaining the entire administration of the county.

In the analyzed Nordic countries, in most cases, the executive power in municipalities rests with the councils, whose heads are selected by councillors. A similar, indirect system of electing authorities in municipalities was used in Poland from 1990 until 2002, when a bill on direct election of the village mayor, the mayor and the president of the city was passed. The organization of the work of executive bodies varies across the Nordic countries. For example in Finland the position of a mayor does not exist and executive functions are performed by a civil servant employed as a managing director. Also the high level of social trust towards the local government in the Nordic countries cannot pass unnoticed. This is confirmed by the data on turnout in local elections in the analyzed countries, presented in this paper. In each of these countries about 80% of the population eligible to vote take part in the elections. These are much higher rates than in Poland, where the turnout in the elections to local government usually does not exceed 50%.

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Abstract

The aim of this article is to compare the organization of local government in selected Nordic countries – Finland, Sweden and Denmark with the organization of local government in Poland. The paper highlights the main differences in the organization of local government, electoral procedures and the tasks assigned to municipalities.

Funkcjonowanie samorządu terytorialnego w wybranych krajach nordyckich na tle samorządu terytorialnego w Polsce

Celem opracowania jest przedstawienie funkcjonowania samorządu terytorialnego w wybranych państwach nordyckich – Finlandii, Szwecji, oraz Danii na tle samorządu terytorialnego w Polsce. Artykuł wskazuje różnice w organizacji samorządu terytorialnego, procedurach wyborczych czy wykonywanych zadaniach.

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