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**TERRITORIAL COMMUNITIES DEVELOPMENT
IN COVID-19 TIMES:
POLISH-UKRAINIAN EXPERIENCE**

Introduction

The contemporary development of the world demonstrates new challenges and threats. And between them are previously marked, but unexpected for humanity, like pandemic of SARS-CoV-2 virus, which rapidly spread all over the world. So, from the beginning of 2020 until today, the world has been in a state of turbulent uncertainty: the emergence of the new SARS-CoV-2 virus became the starting point of changes the full depth and role of which humanity can only comprehend with the passage of time. In a short period of time, the transformations that began long before the Covid-19 pandemic have recovered momentum and accelerated the formation of a new picture of the world: a globalized and at the same time localized one. With common problems, challenges and threats, multiplied solutions to overcome / eliminate them and localize in identical terms. The latter requires a certain clarification: under quarantine restrictions, residents of communities, particularly in Ukraine, have lost the freedom of movement and travel (albeit for a short period). One of the consequences of this, in our opinion, is the strengthening of locality in the identity terms, which requires additional empirical and theoretical research, because this phenomenon is grad-

ually extrapolated into the sphere of national management with all the ensuing consequences both for the country and for the world system as a whole.

Ukraine and Poland are states with a common border, a common past and common geopolitical interests today. Since the first days of independence and today, Poland has been a promoter of Ukraine's interests on the European and world political arena. In the context of current events, this support is especially valuable in the common position on the Nord Stream-2 gas pipeline, support for reforms in Ukraine, in particular administrative. Moreover, Polish experience of reforms after the collapse of the socialist camp is actively used in Ukraine, which is much slower to depart from “Sovietism” in its state management. We should only mention that the Constitution of independent Ukraine was adopted in 1998, although independence itself was declared in 1991.

Ukraine facing the challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic

A particularly difficult decision for the Ukrainian government was the reform of local self-governance and the territorial organization of power. The concept of reform was approved immediately after the Revolution of Dignity in April 2014 by a decree of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine. It should be noted that the reform took place under difficult political conditions burdened with pandemic challenges. The first united territorial societies in Ukraine were created in 2015 under conditions of war on the eastern borders of Ukraine, the annexation of part of its territory, and a certain uncertainty of the areas of responsibility and authority of the newly formed communities. As of June 2020, 1,489 well-established territorial communities had been formed, including 31 in the non-controlled territories of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts¹. In fact, unified territorial communities have been established in every oblast of Ukraine during this time. Beginning in 2020, a new stage of reform has begun: the administrative-territorial structure of Ukraine is being improved within the framework of the current Constitution in the period 2020–2021. In particular, an administrative-territorial structure was approved, the basis of which are newly territorial communities and districts. Thus, for example, in the Chernivtsi region there are three districts instead of 11 – Chernivtsi, Dniester, and Vizhnitsk. Accordingly, there are changes in the organization of power at all levels: community - rayon - oblast. The powers of local self-governments, their sphere of responsibility, including financial, and sources of financing are changed.

¹ Чому в Україні створюють спроможні громади, URL: <https://decentralization.gov.ua/gromadas>

Under the conditions of latent war and violation of territorial integrity, Ukraine has taken active steps to reformat the system of state management, in which communities must play a key role in organizing life at the grassroots level. This process is far from straightforward: the question of the (financial, economic) solvency of communities or individual localities in particular communities is extremely acute. In fact, for the first time in a long time, Ukrainian society is forced to respond with action to the reforms introduced by Kiev: not just to “create” a community, but also to take responsibility for the organization of life in this community. Obviously, certain legal collisions that arise at the present stage need to be resolved. And this is especially perceptible in conditions of the Covid crisis, which has put all government and local self-government bodies in Ukraine in a difficult and uncertain situation, when proven algorithms of action do not work, and new ones have not yet been developed.

The first case of COVID-19 was detected in Chernivtsi in March 2020². Since then, the number of reported cases has increased. Obviously, the situation has changed several times over the two years, but not once has there been zero (0) cases per day. Chernivtsi regional authorities responded rather quickly to the emergence of a new virus in the region. Quarantine restrictions were introduced for schoolchildren and applicants for professional and higher education (all educational institutions were closed for three weeks), mass events, concerts and sports competitions were banned. However, this did not stop the virus from spreading. Therefore, already at the beginning of April new, tougher restrictions were introduced for all inhabitants of the region. Since April, 1, on demand of the state commission on technogeneous and ecological safety and emergency situations a special regime of entrance and exit through the coronavirus was introduced in Chernovtsy region: passenger traffic was completely banned³. In addition, additional quarantine restrictions were imposed for the weekend, which caused a mixed reaction in society: the population was advised to buy food and stay at home⁴. And the main problem of that first quarantine was unpreparedness of society to such situation and incompetence of local authorities to explain the roots and possible consequences of it because of lack of information concerning coronavirus.

Further development of the situation both in Chernivtsi region and in Ukraine as a whole shows the importance of learning the experience of European Union countries in combating the pandemic, as the vast majority of measures were, in

² В Україні – перший випадок коронавірусу, URL: <https://www.pravda.com.ua/news/2020/03/3/7242332/>

³ У Чернівецькій області запровадили особливий режим в'їзду та виїзду, URL: <https://www.rbc.ua/ukr/news/chernovitskoj-oblasti-vveli-osobyj-rezhim-1585735748.html>

⁴ У Чернівецькій області запровадили нові обмеження, URL: <https://www.pravda.com.ua/news/2020/04/4/7246462/>

our opinion, borrowed from European / world practice and were generally in line with WHO recommendations. We can now state that the pandemic has entailed the beginning of profound transformational changes in all spheres of life of the world community, which is especially important in view of the political upheavals of the beginning of the III millennium.

Protective measures introduced in Poland and other European Union countries

In the conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic, as the experience of Poland and other EU member states shows, local governments faced enormous organizational and financial difficulties. Almost for the first time in history, the spread and threat of new mutations of the virus had such a significant impact both on society and the economy, as well as on public administration at all levels. In this context, the difference between authoritarian, democratic and transitional societies was significant, each reacting differently to the emergence and spread of the new virus, suggesting appropriate ways to counter or ignore its presence. We believe that Western democracies, especially those in the European Union, have generally taken a systematic approach to organizing crisis response measures under conditions of global uncertainty, taking into account regional and local features in each case. In most European countries a number of measures proposed by WHO have been implemented. However, the introduced quarantine restrictions differed significantly in individual countries. It was primarily due to the decisions of local governments, which de facto and de jure represent the interests of communities.

Speaking of Polish society, we can speak of the generally traumatic impact of the COVID crisis on it⁵. The coronavirus pandemic has become the quintessential risk society: no one was and still is confident about their health, preservation of their jobs or social position. In the situation of the COVID crisis, the wide range of responsibilities, new tasks and legislative changes that have been applied to local governments have certainly made them work more actively.

In both Ukraine and Poland, there is a three-stage system of territorial division: community – district – region / gmina – county – voivodeship. In Poland, the local administration operates at the level of the gminas and counties, while the local and government administration operates at the level of the voivodeship. Gminas, counties and the self-governing voivodeships have different tasks and act independently of each other. Each local government unit has an elected deci-

⁵ P. Długosz, *Trauma pandemii COVID-19 w polskim społeczeństwie*, CeDeWu Sp. z o.o. Publishing House, Warszawa 2021, p. 198.

sion-making body and individual or collegial executive bodies. According to Article 164 of the Constitution of the Republic of Poland of April 02, 1997, *gmina*⁶ is the basic institution of territorial self-government. In addition, the lowest level of local government in big cities of Poland is a precinct. Each precinct has a council and a burgomaster, who is elected among the deputies of the precinct council. The burgomaster does not have any governing powers; his role is only to perform certain administrative functions. Precincts in Poland do not have broad powers: they mainly perform informational, advisory, and administrative functions, and precinct councils have a great influence on the budgetary policy of the respective city. In general, the cooperation of local governments is necessary to pursue a policy of rational development and better meet the residents' needs.

In the face of the COVID-19 pandemic, local governments in Poland have taken measures, focusing in particular on ensuring the right to life and safety of citizens:

- Restrictions on work in offices, subordinate departments and commercial enterprises (possibility for employees to work outside the usual place in the form of remote work);
- Restriction of access to offices for residents (resolving matters online, by e-mail, traditional correspondence, via telephone; possibility work with applicants in the administration's premises);
- Cancellation and non-organization of mass events and additional cultural, sports and other activities;
- Closure of nurseries, kindergartens and schools;
- Imposing obligations on health care institutions for carrying out specific tasks (mainly changes in the organizational structure of the health care institution or transfer of meds, medical products, food, as well as medical apparatus and equipment in order to ensure the continuation of medical services in another health care institution);
- Problems with convening and deliberations of decision-making bodies – *gminas*, towns, county and voivodship councils (holding meetings by means of electronic communication)
- Ensuring the protection of the local community (crisis management).

All of these activities carried out by local governments were accompanied, on the one hand, by the legislator's strengthening of the authority of local governments to supervise the activities of local governments, and on the other hand,

⁶ Konstytucja Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej z dnia 2 kwietnia 1997 r. uchwalona przez Zgromadzenie Narodowe w dniu 2 kwietnia 1997 r., przyjęta przez Naród w referendum konstytucyjnym w dniu 25 maja 1997 r., podpisana przez Prezydenta Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej w dniu 16 lipca 1997 r., Dziennik Ustaw 1997, nr 78, poz. 483.

by the uncertainty of their financial condition. The expected economic consequences of the pandemic include a decrease in revenues from the income tax (from individuals and legal entities). According to the estimates of the Association of Polish Cities, property tax will decrease by 40% (possibility of tax exemption or deferred payment for entrepreneurs), as well as other taxes (vehicle tax, civil transaction tax), local fees, and other revenues. In this context, the government's financial assistance to local authorities, which was included in the Anti-Crisis Shield 4.0, was expected, such as⁷:

- ✓ Spending the funds from the so-called Cork (Cap) Fund in 2020. Money from this fund comes from payments of businesses for alcohol licenses. The money is used to counteract and prevent alcohol addiction and counteract drug addiction. They can now be used to counteract and mitigate the effects of COVID-19.
- ✓ Increasing the percentage, from 25% to 50%, of the State Treasurer's property management (real estate) revenues for cities with county rights from June through December 2020.
- ✓ Liberalization of fiscal rules, which means:
 - a) the possibility of not maintaining the balance of the current part of the budget of the local government in 2020 (the so-called golden rule of finance) according to the value of the actual tax revenues loss (from personal and legal entities' income tax,); income tax, local taxes: real estate, agricultural, forestry, vehicles, civil transactions tax, local fees: stamp duty, resort and local fee), resulting from the introduction of the COVID-19 countermeasure plan.
 - b) the possibility of increasing the debt by excluding from the repayment of liabilities incurred in 2020 and related to making up the local government tax revenue deficit resulting from the COVID-19 epidemic. At the same time, a provision was introduced for enhancing the financial security of local government units in the form of a one-year debt limit in effect in 2020 of 80 percent of the unit's revenue.
- ✓ Opportunities to transfer to the state budget payments made by local government units whose tax revenues exceeded the statutory limit for the second half of 2020 (August through December).
- ✓ Previously established by law terms of recalculation of total payments of subsidies in 2020.

The actions of the authorities ("shields"), on the one hand, indicate the seriousness of the problem and the desire to minimize the negative consequences of the pandemic, but, on the other hand, do not protect local governments and their

⁷ K. Owsiak, K. Peter-Bombik, *Samorząd terytorialny w dobie epidemii*, URL: <https://www.forum-ekonomiczne.pl/samorzad-terytorialny-w-dobie-epidemii/>

budget economy enough. The greatest long-term threat of the pandemic has been the loss of their own revenue, especially taxes. This is mainly due to the method of calculating the amounts for individual units. Mostly, these are revenues from the share of personal income tax in municipalities. In real practice, this can mean the need to finance their tasks at the expense of debt obligations, which for some entities can significantly limit the ability to act. Here an important component of supporting the positive dynamics of the gminas' development, for example, remains investment. And local governments do not want, for example, to give up investments, which are an important determinant of local development, as they meet the needs of the local community and allow to reduce the gap in their development.

Of course, the period of the COVID-19 pandemic is a difficult time for local governments. This is due to both the number of legislative changes and expected financial challenges, which are already leading to lower revenues and further possible increases in debt. However, increased debt should not be a „cure” for local government financial problems⁸. Professor A. Raszkowski of the Wrocław University of Economics emphasizes in this context: „The deterioration of the financial condition of local governments is a logical consequence of the economic crisis caused by the pandemic, so one should not be surprised here. One should have been prepared for this from the beginning. If this increase in debt is part of a broader, thoughtful exit strategy, it's an acceptable way to get through the difficulties. I am not opposed to loans, which in the long run can stimulate social and economic development, taking into account the legal norms concerning local self-government bodies⁹”.

It shall be stated that the pandemic has also been a difficult test for Polish local and territorial communities, towns and cities. According to the report of the Polish Economic Institute „Polish Cities During the Pandemic”, 79% (522) of the cities surveyed for the aforementioned report had their financial situation worsened due to the pandemic. At the same time, 47% of them noticed a worsening of conditions for doing business in the city¹⁰. Unfortunately, the threat of increasing existing disparities between rural and urban territorial communities, small towns and large urban centers, caused by the pandemic, is real, and a push shall be made to minimize this phenomenon. When one considers the fact that even before the pandemic, the disparity has grown, the problem becomes even more complex. In this context, it should be noted that the matter of sustainability at this stage is even more com-

⁸ M. Augustyniak, *Samorząd terytorialny w świetle wybranych regulacji ustawy Covid-19 i jej zmian: Poradnik*, Walters Kluwer Polska Publishing House, Warszawa 2020, p. 100.

⁹ *Wyzwania dla samorządu terytorialnego w czasach po pandemii*, URL: <https://przetargowa.pl/wyzwania-dla-samorzadu-po-pandemii/>

¹⁰ *Ibidem*.

plex: the distribution of European funds in the new financial perspective 2021–2027 will be key here – how much of these funds will actually go to the smaller urban centers of local communities. At the same time, it is important to understand, as the research of Polish sociologist P. Długosz confirms, that in Polish society there are great obstacles to social mobility; in fact, it is a closed society¹¹.

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on local and regional governments: governance, finance and recovery plans: research data

The global COVID-19 pandemic and the socio-economic crisis it entails have a territorial dimension and a profound impact on sub-national authorities not only in Poland, but also in other EU states. To understand and assess this better, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and the European Committee of the Regions (CoR) jointly conducted an online survey in June-July 2020 on “The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on local and regional authorities: governance, finance and recovery plans”. The questionnaire was translated into all official EU languages. 300 responses from regional, intermediate and municipal authorities of 24 EU member states were received¹².

The most important results of the survey are as follows:

- A majority of respondents (63%) expect the COVID-19 crisis to have a significant negative impact on local governments.
- According to respondents, lack of technical resources and equipment (“very difficult” for 46% of respondents), subnational funding (39%), and coordination with other levels of government (27%) are the biggest challenges they face in managing the health care crisis.
- Only about half of respondents felt that coordination within subnational governments or with national governments was effective.
- In the short to medium term, most subnational governments expect the COVID-19 pandemic socioeconomic crisis to have a negative impact on their finances, with a dangerous “scissor effect” on rising costs and declines in revenues.
- About 86% of regions and cities expect a negative impact on their expenses, especially in terms of a significant increase in social services (64%), social

¹¹ P. Długosz, *Trauma pandemii COVID-19 w polskim społeczeństwie*, CeDeWu Sp. z o.o. Publishing House, Warszawa 2021, p. 181.

¹² *Wpływ pandemii COVID-19 na samorządy lokalne i regionalne w UE: główne wnioski ze wspólnego badania KR–OECD*, URL: <https://webapi2016.cor.europa.eu/v1/documents/cor-2020-04845-00-01-tcd-tra-pl.docx/content>

payments (59%), support for SMEs and the self-employed and healthcare. At the same time, 90% of respondents forecast a decrease in revenues, in particular tax revenues, as well as fees and the financial burden on users.

- At the time of the survey, about 24% of subnational governments planned to ask for new loans to overcome the crisis. 13% of respondents had already applied for additional EU funding, and 49% were considering applying.
- At the time of the survey, most subnational governments were still facing a public health emergency, and some were beginning to take remedial measures, such as encouraging public investment and direct support for the economy.
- The COVID-19 crisis allows policymakers to transform regional development policies. The three main priorities are providing accessible and quality basic services, including healthcare in all spheres (76%), increasing regional sustainability (69%), and reducing the digital divide between regions (68%).

The mentioned proportions and trends of the negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic are also confirmed by the annual EU regional and local Barometer studies. Since the pandemic is a dynamic factor of social reality, dynamic research is necessary to understand pandemic societies. It is impossible to form an accurate portrait of a society from one-time measurements. The famous Polish sociologist Sztompka pointed to this fact and emphasized that “society cannot be perceived as a stationary state, but as a process; not as a rigid quasi-object, but as a continuous endless stream of events”¹³. In September 2020, a new opinion poll was conducted: the number of respondents was more than 26,300 from all EU countries. The materials of the report on the results of this survey, as well as other similar studies, were published in a separate edition and in the EU Barometer of October 12, 2020¹⁴. The report draws attention to a number of problems caused by the pandemic and needing special attention from both local governments, public authorities and society in general, in particular:

- Declining revenues and rising costs, the so-called scissor effect, threaten the public finances of municipalities, cities and EU regions. For example, in 2020, the decline in subnational government revenues in France, Germany and Italy alone is estimated at around 30 billion euros for the three countries, accounting for up to 10% of the respective totals. More than 90% of EU regions and municipalities expect a sharp drop in revenues. The economic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic are serious throughout the EU. The report shows that some areas are particularly vulnerable to negative effects, like the Ile de

¹³ P. Sztompka, *Socjologia zmian społecznych*, Znak, Kraków 2005, p. 24.

¹⁴ European Committee of the Regions, *2020 Barometer of Regions and Cities*, 02 October 2020, Brussels 2020, 142 p.; *Doroczny barometr regionalny i lokalny UE, KR, 2020 r.*, URL: <https://cor.europa.eu/pl/our-work/Pages/EURegionalBarometer-2020.aspx>

France regions, the Spanish regions of Andalusia, Castile and Leon, Madrid and Valencia, and most Italian regions, as well as the coastal regions of Croatia; eastern Bulgaria and Greece were particularly affected.

- COVID-19's lost generation, the youth, is the most vulnerable group as Europe's digital divide widens. Research and evidence on the impact of the pandemic on young people is crucial to ensure that this group does not become the lost generation of the EU. Sound policies at all levels support the integration of young people into a modern education system and labor markets based on a green, sustainable and digital transition.

The report also shows that the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic may be particularly significant for women, who make up almost 80% of healthcare workers in the EU and occupy a similar proportion in various sales positions involving direct contact with customers. There is growing evidence that violence against women and girls has increased during the period of isolation.

The pandemic could widen the gap between rural and urban areas and exacerbate the gap between education systems. Only six member states provide a high level of digital schooling to at least 80% of students.

Particular attention was paid to the impact of the crisis on small and medium businesses. The report refers to the tourism industry, which is particularly important in the peripheral and coastal regions of the EU, where it is often the only main source of economic activity and employment.

The pandemic has had a very different impact on different regions and local governments in the EU. This leads to a new COVID-19 geography, highlighting significant differences between regions, both in terms of their responsibility for healthcare and their ability to provide different kinds of services. For example, the availability of intensive care units and hospital staff varies across the EU, with a direct impact on the regions' ability to cope with the emergency. The asymmetric impact of the COVID-19 crisis on regional health systems demonstrates the need for a rapid site-specific response. Most Europeans consider health to be a top priority. Therefore, local and regional authorities must have more say over decisions made at EU level (67% of Europeans believe that local and regional authorities do not have enough influence over decisions made at EU level) in the face of the crisis and then in other areas of local policy.

The crisis has led to unprecedented violations in the free movement of people, goods and services through the unified market. This occurs partly uncoordinated, and sometimes with disastrous consequences for businesses and individuals, particularly workers in cross-border regions or students. In addition, the flexibility afforded by state aid rules is likely to distort competition and could lead to increased territorial disparities.

Accordingly, measures must be taken to ensure the smooth functioning of the unified market in the face of future crises, since it is a key vector of European unity and sustainability. In this respect, particular attention should be paid to cross-border regions. In addition, the Committee should assess the extent to which different levels of state intervention have exacerbated national and regional imbalances and disrupted the unified market. In its overall review of the state aid system, the Committee should consider the provision of compensatory measures. The Committee should examine the possibility of creating a pan-European program for critical sectors. All companies that have suffered losses as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic crisis should receive compensation and benefits, regardless of where they are located.

Overall, an opinion poll conducted by the European Regions Committee shows that 52% of respondents generally trust local and regional governments. They remain the reliable level of general government, in fact the only level of trust among Europeans. A joint study by the RC and the OECD, as well as other similar studies (e.g. the Regions Committee's survey of 27,000 citizens on "The Coronavirus crisis and the role of regions and cities in the EU", October 2020) show that a new model of coordination between the different levels of government is needed, in particular to ensure a coherent and effective response to future crises. Cities and regions must also be closely involved in the preparation of national plans, and ensure that they supplement the necessary regional and local recovery strategies. More and more people are realizing that Europe's future must be built with regions, cities and villages, not only with the member states and Brussels. Accordingly, these difficult times could be turned into an opportunity to strengthen local democracy, the level of government that citizens most trust. The pandemic also reminds us of Europe's interdependence with the rest of the world. The EU must continue to support democracy, the rule of law and human rights in its partner countries and ensure that its post COVID policies and instruments contribute to their strengthening and development.

Conclusions

Summing up the above, we consider it appropriate to emphasize that the COVID-19 pandemic has led to a paradigm shift in the socio-political and socio-economic life in different countries, which was particularly clearly showed in the EU member states. It was here that systematic approaches to the organization of the fight against the pandemic were proposed, from the local to the European level. Ukraine, as the EU neighboring country, actively uses the European experience of anti-pandemic management. But it is necessary to point out that among

the first communities that began to actively implement it were the communities of the European border regions, in particular, Chernivtsi oblast, a pilot both in terms of the appearance of the first recorded case of infection, and the introduction of special quarantine restrictions. Here the first restrictions were introduced and new European experience in different spheres of health security was adopted.

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TERRITORIAL COMMUNITIES DEVELOPMENT IN COVID-19 TIMES: POLISH-UKRAINIAN EXPERIENCE

Abstract

This article is devoted to the peculiarities of the organization of anti-crisis measures by local governments in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic on the example of Ukraine and Poland. The authors draw attention to the preventive measures introduced by local governments of both

states, emphasizing the importance of the systemic approach in combating the spread of COVID-19, which was suggested by EU member states. In addition, the main consequences of the pandemic's impact on the social and socio-economic life of communities and the challenges that require an urgent response from both local and national authorities have been identified.

Keywords: COVID-19 pandemic, anti-crisis measures, local governments, quarantine restrictions, "lost" generation.

ROZWÓJ WSPÓLNOT TERYTORIALNYCH W CZASACH COVID-19: DOŚWIADCZENIA POLSKO-UKRAIŃSKIE

Streszczenie

Artykuł poświęcony jest osobliwościom organizacji działań antykryzysowych przez samorządy lokalne w kontekście pandemii covid-19 na przykładzie Ukrainy i Polski. Autorzy zwracają uwagę na działania prewencyjne wprowadzone przez samorządy obu państw, podkreślając znaczenie systemowego podejścia w walce z rozprzestrzenianiem się covid-19, które zostało zaszeregowane przez państwa członkowskie UE. Ponadto wskazano główne konsekwencje wpływu pandemii na życie społeczne i społeczno-gospodarcze oraz wyzwania, które wymagają pilnej reakcji zarówno ze strony władz lokalnych, jak i krajowych.

Słowa kluczowe: pandemia covid-19, działania antykryzysowe, samorządy lokalne, restrykcje kwarantannowe, „stracone” pokolenie.