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Empirical Investigation of the Structure and Functions of the Commune *

Badania nad strukturą i funkcjami gminy

Исследование структуры и функций гмины

Our aim is to present in a very condensed manner the empirical investigation which was conducted by our Institute in two communes in eastern Poland in the years 1976—1978.

Before specifying the objective, the methods and the results of the investigation we would like to outline the situation in Poland, which should throw some light on the nature of our undertaking.

Poland covers the area of 312,683 sq. kilometres. The number of its inhabitants exceeded 35 million in 1978. The present territorial division as well as the system of local administration and state administration were developed as a result of reforms carried out in the years 1972—1975. The former three-level territorial division was then replaced by a two-level one, which comprises basic administrative units and 49 districts (voivodships). The basic administrative units are now rural communes, towns or large city sections. The reform, as the law which introduced it worded it, had as its aim "the adjusting of the administrative division to the needs of an accelerated socio-economic development of the country, the creation of proper conditions for a more efficient management of the national economy, for an improved functioning of the organs of power

* The paper was presented at 5th World Congress for Rural Sociology, August 7—12, 1980, Mexico City.

and of state administration, finally — it also aimed at satisfying better the growing social needs [...]”.¹

The first stage of the reform consisted in a change of the administrative division in rural areas where small units were replaced by larger ones — the communes. The word "commune" (gmina) denotes here a piece of territory usually comprising about twenty villages and hamlets. The law says: "Communes, as basic units of the administrative and economic division in rural areas, are formed in order to create by their size an economic potential and conditions helping to direct properly the economic and socio-cultural development as well as to satisfy the needs of the inhabitants".²

In our investigations we focused our attention on the new rural commune. Its boundaries were altered, as was also its structure.³ At its head there is the National Council of the Commune which represents state authority and is at the same time an organ of local government. Beside the Council there is the chief of the commune, who is also an organ of administration. On the one side he is subordinated to the administrative authority of the upper level, by which he is nominated. On the other — he is subordinated to the National Council of the Commune, whose executive organ he is. The chief, who holds the key position in the commune, discharges his duties with the help of the commune office which comprises the commune office proper, the commune agricultural service and the registry.

The commune comprises villages, each headed by a *soltys* who is elected at a gathering of village inhabitants. Such a gathering is the organ of local authority in the village. A village gathering is open to all the village residents with active voting rights. A *soltys* — the village head — is first of all a representative of the self-government of the village but he is at the same time an extension of the "arm" of the chief of the commune. It should be stressed that, according to the intention of the legislator, it is the commune that is the basic administrative, economic and social unit.

The commune is the place of activity of a number of institutions

¹ Preamble to the law of May 28 1975 concerning a two-level administrative division of the country and a change of the law about national councils, *Dziennik Ustaw* [Record of Laws], No. 16, item 91.

² Article 1, item 1 of the law of November 29 1972 about the formation of communes and a change of the law about national councils, *Dziennik Ustaw* [Record of Laws], No. 49, item 312.

³ The current structure of local authority is regulated by the law of January 25 1958 about national councils. Uniform text after modifications: *Dziennik Ustaw* [Record of Laws] of July 25 1975, No. 26, item 139.

established to provide the means and services necessary for agricultural production and for consumption. These institutions provide fertilizers, agricultural tools and machinery, fuel and building materials. They also buy agricultural produce, employ mechanics responsible for maintenance and repairs of agricultural machinery, provide means of transportation, rent heavy machinery for field work, handle finances. Every commune has its own grade school, offering an eight-year course of education and supervising the work of smaller local schools in hamlets. There are also: a medical centre and a centre of cultural activities in every commune.

Some of the institutions in the rural commune are controlled wholly by the local authority, whereas others are subordinated to superior authorities (those in the district town or in the capital). The regional activity of the latter institutions is coordinated by the authorities of the rural commune.

The local authority, together with the organizations and institutions referred to above, usually have their offices in a large village situated centrally.

As has been mentioned above, the newly formed rural communes are not merely units of administration but are also economic and social micro-regions. They were formed in order to satisfy in the best possible manner the needs of the local population.

In 1978 there were 14.9 million people living in all the administrative rural units. This constituted 42.6 per cent of all the population in Poland.

In 1978 the mean figures for one rural commune were as follows⁴:

area covered — 14 thousand hectares;

number of inhabitants — 8.7 thousand;

number of villages — 18;

arable lands — 9.1 thousand hectares;

number of private farms — 1,507;

number of cooperative institutions — 3 (these institutions offer agricultural services, sell fertilizers and fuel as well as buy agricultural products from the farmers);

number of state agencies buying agricultural produce — 40;

number of shops — 30.

The total area of the rural commune, the number of its inhabitants, the number of institutions serving both the material and the spiritual needs of its inhabitants, as well as the range of power of the local author-

⁴ „Rada Narodowa — Gospodarka — Administracja” [“National Council — Economy — Administration”] 1978, No. 9, p. I.

ities were designed so as to assure the fullest and most harmonious development to every community.

Realizing that all analogies are incomplete, we yet consciously offer one in order to emphasize more strongly the significance of our latest reform. Examining the structure of a Polish rural commune, which is to facilitate a full participation of all the citizens in decision-taking and at the same time is to help satisfy their needs — we are reminded of the system of city-state in ancient Greece — the polis, where the number of free citizens could never — according to Plato — exceed 5,400 people. and — according to Aristotle — the area covered by such a city-state should all be seen by a man standing in its middle. In the ancient doctrine the "polis" constituted an organic unity of its free citizens who voluntarily subordinated their individual interests to the interests of the community. These small states, comprising urban and rural areas, were self-supporting in principle and owing to their small size they made possible the maintaining of close ties between their citizens.⁵

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We conducted our investigation in two selected communes — Puchaczów and Ludwin — situated in the newly formed Lublin coal mining district. This is an area which is in the process of rapid industrialization and urbanization. Both communes are within the voivodship of Lublin. Over 80 per cent of all the inhabitants of these two communes are farmers. It is also significant that there are no collective farms here. All farms are private ⁶ (Table 1).

Table 1. General characteristics of communes under investigation

Commune	Number of inhabitants	Area in hectares	Arable lands % of total area	Private farms		Number of villages
				number	mean size in hectares	
Puchaczów	5209	9,160	81.2	1490	4.99	15
Ludwin	5960	12,390	70.8	1401	6.26	21

⁵ Cf. G. L. Seidler: *Przedmarksowska myśl polityczna* [Political Thought up to Marx], Kraków 1975, p. 83.

⁶ In spite of the existence of private ownership of land private farms are a part of socialist economy because: a) the state determines amounts of different crops to be produced; b) the state purchases agricultural produce from farmers; c) the state supplies them with fertilizers and machinery.

These two communes have a number of characteristics in common but they also differ from each other, hence comparison can be made between them. In Ludwin there are more institutions important for the economy, that is state agencies purchasing agricultural products, warehouses, workshops, shops, reading-rooms and lecture halls etc. The commune of Puchaczów has no chemist's, no central shop, and no cooperative bank but only branch offices of all these institutions. The institutions themselves have their offices proper in Łęczna, which is a nearby town.

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Our investigations dealt with three social groups living in the two communes:

- 1) farmers living in villages and hamlets;
- 2) persons employed in state institutions or cooperatives;
- 3) social and political activists.

The investigation aimed at finding how each of these groups of inhabitants evaluated the following factors:

- a) changes in the administrative division in their region;
- b) new administrative machine and the functioning of local authority;
- c) structure and functioning of the institutions operating in the commune.

More generally, we wanted to find out which factors were regarded as improvements and which were regarded as obstacles in an effective functioning of the institutions operating in the two communes.

The investigators made use of various methods and techniques: different kinds of interviews, observation and an analysis of documents kept in the commune.

The first stage of field work consisted in making lists of institutions operating in the two communes. This listing led to a fairly precise description of commune institutions, their organization, functioning and the rank of each in the commune.

Next we made use of standard interview. There were three different questionnaires that were used:

- 1) for farmers;
- 2) for employees of commune institutions;
- 3) for social and political activists living in the communes.

The longest and most detailed questionnaire was that for the farmers living in villages. It contained 118 questions. Each questionnaire contained questions concerning those problems which were strictly connected with

the present boundaries and topography of the commune, attitudes to commune institutions, postulates and detailed requests concerning their ways of operating. These questionnaires had earlier been tested in pilot investigations.⁷

Interviews with farmers were conducted in four villages, two in each commune. These villages were selected according to the following criteria: one central village (i.e. the seat of commune authorities) and one situated at the farthest end of the commune.

The total number of interviews was 600. Out of this number 389 interviews were with farmers and their families. The list of persons interviewed was made up in such a way as to include one representative from every private farm in the villages. The mean length of the interview was two hours.

The investigation began in 1976 and lasted two years. Its character was legal and sociological. It was conducted under the supervision of Professor Grzegorz Leopold Seidler from Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin. The instruments used in the investigations were prepared in collaboration with the team of researchers headed by Professor Jan Turowski of the Catholic University of Lublin. Funds for the investigation were provided by the Polish Academy of Science and administrative authorities.

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The data collected in the course of the investigation were processed by the Department of Computer Operations. In all we obtained over 2,000 tables concerning the arrangements of replies and their mutual correlation.

In our present report we will present only a few of the total number of data obtained, namely those that will indicate in a general manner the results of our investigation.

THE NEW ADMINISTRATIVE DIVISION

The employees of the commune and the social activists (over 90 per cent) know the boundaries of the commune and can name all its villages and hamlets. In this group of respondents only commuters living outside

⁷ After checking the efficiency of instruments of investigation some questions were re-formulated and those which provided no useful material were eliminated.

the commune and travelling to and from work gave more ambiguous answers.

The orientation of the commune inhabitants in matters concerning the boundaries of their commune is presented in Table 2. Nearly 20 per cent of village inhabitants name as belonging to their commune places which are really in adjacent communes. As for the choice of the main village in the commune the majority of inhabitants thought it was right (Tables 3 and 4).

Table 2. Ability to name villages and hamlets belonging to commune (in %)

Number of villages	Village inhabitants interviewed		
	commune of Puchaczów N=217	commune of Ludwin N=172	total N=389
All	2.8	1.7	2.3
More than a half (but not all)	65.4	34.9	51.9
Less than a half	30.3	58.1	42.6
One	0.5	—	0.3
None (respondent does not know)	0.5	4.1	2.1
No data	0.5	1.2	0.8

Table 3. Choice right or wrong (in %)

Commune authorities should have offices	Village inhabitants interviewed		
	commune of Puchaczów N=217	commune of Ludwin N=172	total N=389
In village they are in now	85.7	72.7	79.9
In another place	12.0	22.6	16.7
Hard to say (respondent does not know)	1.4	1.2	1.3
No data	0.9	3.5	2.1

Table 4. Justification of choice (in %)

Commune authorities should have offices in village they are in now	Village inhabitants interviewed		
	commune of Puchaczów N=217	commune of Ludwin N=172	total N=389
Because it is situated centrally	26.3	37.2	31.1
Because it has all offices and institutions	12.4	10.5	11.6
Because it is the largest village	23.0	2.9	14.1
Other arguments	19.8	18.0	19.0
No reason given	4.2	4.1	4.1
Total	85.7	72.7	79.9

FUNCTIONING OF LOCAL AUTHORITY

While the new administrative division into communes, the size of the communes and the place where their offices are located are all generally approved, the evaluation of the functioning of the new structure varies much more. Generally speaking, over 60 per cent of the respondents think well of their functioning (Table 5).

Table 5. Change in the situation of inhabitants brought about by structure of new commune (in %)

Any improvement in the situation of local people due to structure of new commune?	Village inhabitants interviewed		
	commune of Puchaczów N=217	commune of Ludwin N=172	total N=389
Yes, (no substantiation)	6.0	2.3	4.4
Yes, because all offices are in the same place	22.1	11.6	17.5
Yes, because new authority has extensive powers	19.8	37.2	27.5
Yes, because there is less disorder and bureaucracy	2.8	2.9	2.8
Yes, other arguments	10.6	5.2	8.2
Total	61.3	59.2	60.4
No difference, nothing has changed	36.9	31.5	34.5
Respondent does not know	1.8	9.3	5.1

EXPERTS AND BUREAUCRATS

The carrying out of the new reform, whose object was to intensify productivity in the communes, has of necessity involved the creation of new institutions run by professionals, especially those who specialize in cattle-breeding and plant cultivation, but also those who would educate villagers and look after their health. As a result, the administration of the new commune created new posts. Our questions were designed so as to help us find out what people knew about new specialists and how they evaluated their work. The process of increasing the variety of services was evaluated in a most contradictory manner by different individuals. Some people were convinced that it led to increased bureaucracy and formalism, that is, they viewed the process with disfavour. Such was mostly the opinion of village inhabitants. Others thought well of the process, arguing that it was necessary to have experts if one wanted to create an efficient administration indispensable in intensive economy. This positive evaluation was reflected mostly in the replies of the people

employed in the offices of the administration and in those of social activists (Tables 6 and 7).

At this point it should be observed that authority becomes personified, that is respondents identify an institution with the person of its chief, his professional knowledge, his conduct, his morality, his attitude towards the inhabitants of the commune. A large number of respondents (about 40 per cent in one commune) were doubtful about the worth of a single

Table 6. Knowledge of village inhabitants about institution and organizations operating in the commune

Degree of knowledge	Commune of Puchaczów		Commune of Ludwin		Total	
	village		village		absolute figures	%
	central	remote	central	remote		
Respondent names services available and those not offered	6	—	1	1	8	2.1
Respondent names 3 services	48	16	9	43	116	29.8
Respondent names 4 to 6 services	41	15	4	34	94	24.2
Respondent names more than 6, but not all	12	2	2	2	18	4.6
Respondent names all basic services	8	—	1	9	18	4.6
Other replies	1	1	1	2	5	1.3
Respondent does not know	21	26	14	18	79	20.3
No data	12	8	9	22	51	13.1
Total	149	68	41	131	389	100

Table 7. Acknowledgement that institutions and organizations operating in commune are necessary (in %)

Organizations and institutions needed in commune	Village inhabitants interviewed		
	commune of Puchaczów N=217	commune of Ludwin N=172	total N=389
Agricultural	32.8	8.9	22.1
All now existing	16.6	9.3	13.4
Commercial or offering services	10.1	5.2	8.0
Educational or cultural	3.7	11.0	6.9
Political	3.2	4.1	3.6
Others	15.7	25.5	20.1
None necessary	0.9	1.7	1.3
Hard to say, respondent does not know	12.9	21.5	16.7
No data	4.1	12.8	8.0

institution only because its head lived in Lublin and travelled to work ⁸, i.e. was merely a commuter and therefore could not be concerned about the conditions in the commune.

PERSPECTIVES

Intensified industrialization and urban growth are not yet clearly reflected in the consciousness of the respondents who are as yet unable to imagine the effects of these processes on themselves, their village or their commune. Young people expect easier living, whereas older inhabitants regard these processes with reserve or distrust (Tables 8 and 9).

Table 8. Future profits for inhabitants of commune to be brought by coal-mine (in %)

Profits foreseen	Village inhabitants interviewed		
	commune of Puchaczów N=217	commune of Ludwin N=172	total N=389
Work for local people and good earnings	44.7	36.7	41.1
More coal	13.4	20.3	16.5
Higher living standard, more cultural opportunities	14.3	9.3	12.1
More goods in shops	3.7	4.7	4.1
Development of industry	4.1	2.3	3.3
Increased demand for agricultural produce	3.2	2.3	2.8
Others	7.8	7.6	7.7
No profits foreseen	—	0.6	0.3
Respondent does not know	6.5	8.1	7.2
No data	2.3	8.1	4.9

Table 9. Damages likely to occur after construction of coal-mine (in %)

Damages foreseen	Village inhabitants interviewed		
	commune of Puchaczów N=217	commune of Ludwin N=172	total N=389
Air pollution	30.0	8.7	20.6
Resettling, expropriation	9.2	5.2	7.5
Water shortage possible	2.3	5.8	3.9
Fields and crops may be ruined	4.1	0.6	2.6
Decline of agriculture	0.5	0.6	0.5
Others	5.1	5.8	5.4
No damages foreseen	19.8	11.6	16.2
Respondent does not know	20.7	34.4	26.7
No data	8.3	27.3	16.8

⁸ The distance is 30 kilometres.

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1. The reform of territorial division which was carried out in Poland and the strengthening of the basic administrative unit, that is the commune, is in harmony with the general tendency, at least one observable in Europe.⁹ Generally speaking the reforms carried out, which were determined by the political system, the current socio-economic situation or the traditions of particular countries, reveal certain analogies¹⁰:

- a) tendency to decrease the number of units of administrative division of the basic level;
- b) extending the powers of local authority;
- c) strengthening communes as basic units.

In harmony with this general tendency, in Poland, too, the following changes have occurred:

- a) deflating administrative structure as a result of introducing a two-level division instead of a three-level one;
- b) enlarging the lowest administrative unit — the rural commune — with simultaneous extension of the power of its authorities in order to achieve maximum efficiency in economic and social activity.

2. Experts were added to administrative structure in order to facilitate production and consumption in the commune by means of specialized services.

3. As there is the general meeting of inhabitants of each village, beside the post of the village head — the *soltys*, the commune realizes the idea of socialist democracy. In our investigation we found that 75 per cent of all inhabitants take an active part in these meetings thus participating actively in the management of village affairs.

4. Owing to industrialization there is disintegration of old bonds which are replaced by new ones. This is mainly achieved by the participation of village inhabitants in various organizations and institutions which have their counterparts on the level of district or central administration (political, social and economic organizations). Through their membership in these organizations the inhabitants come to see their particular interests in the perspective of the affairs of the district or even of the whole

⁹ J. Łętowski: *Kształtowanie się koncepcji podziału terytorialnego w europejskich państwach socjalistycznych* [Formation of the Concept of Territorial Division in Socialist Countries in Europe], „Problemy Rad Narodowych” [“Problems of National Councils”], 1974, No. 29. J. Monod, Ph. de Castelbajac: *L'aménagement du territoire*, Paris 1971.

¹⁰ Cf. W. Kawalec: *Systemy władz lokalnych w wybranych krajach europejskich* [Systems of Local Authority in Some Selected European Countries], Warszawa 1979, p. 526.

country and in such a manner, through everyday experience, the villagers become conscious of wider issues.

STRESZCZENIE

W latach 1976—1978 Zakład Teorii Państwa i Prawa przeprowadził szerokie badania socjologiczno-prawne w dwu gminach: Puchaczów i Ludwin, położonych na terenie nowo powstałego Lubelskiego Zagłębia Węglowego (wschodnia część Polski).

W ramach tych badań przygotowano 3 kwestionariusze — każdy zawierający około 100 pytań — adresowane do: 1) mieszkańców gmin, 2) osób zatrudnionych w administracji i organizacjach gospodarczych, 3) aktywu społecznego. Pytania dotyczyły poglądów respondentów na temat reorganizacji terytorialnej dokonanej w latach 1972—1975. Chodziło w nich o opinię dotyczącą celowości i skuteczności nowych struktur oraz o ocenę funkcjonowania podstawowych jednostek administracji, gospodarczych i społecznych, znajdujących się na terenie wymienionych dwu gmin.

Zebrane odpowiedzi poddano analizie i obliczeniom przy pomocy maszyn elektrycznych. Wyniki zestawiono w ponad 2 tysiącach tabel zawierających relacje pomiędzy wypowiedziami respondentów. Z tego obszernego materiału wybrano 9 tabel, aby w syntetycznej formie przedstawić poglądy respondentów na temat: 1) nowego podziału administracyjnego, 2) funkcjonowania lokalnych władz, 3) działalności urzędników oraz pracowników służb fachowych pracujących w gminie, 4) przewidywanych zmian w gminach w związku z powstaniem zagłębia węglowego.

Na podstawie badań poznano oddziaływanie norm prawnych na stosunki społeczne oraz ustalono wiele czynników hamujących efektywność funkcjonowania instytucji i organizacji w gminie.

РЕЗЮМЕ

В 1976—1978 гг. кафедра теории государства и права Университета им. Марии Кюри-Склодовской провела широкие социологическо-правовые исследования в гминах Пухачув и Людвин, расположенных на территории недавно построенного Люблинского угольного комбината (восточная часть Польши).

Были приготовлены 3 анкеты, каждая из них содержала по 100 вопросов, адресованных: 1) жителям гмин, 2) лицам, занятым в администрации, 3) общественному активу.

Вопросы касались взглядов анкетированных на тему территориальной реорганизации Польши, проведенной в 1972—1975 гг. — целесообразность и эффективность новых структур, оценка функционирования основных административных, хозяйственных и общественных органов, действующих на территории этих гмин.

Собранные ответы анализировались при помощи электронных машин. Реляции между ответами анкетированных представлены в 2 тыс. таблиц. Из этого широкого материала мы выбрали 9 таблиц для того, чтобы в синтетической форме представить взгляды анкетированных на следующие темы: 1) новое административное деление, 2) функционирование местных органов власти, 3) деятельность служащих и специализированных служб гмины, 4) возможные изменения в связи с созданием угольного бассейна.

Эти исследования дали возможность лучше узнать воздействие правовых норм на общественные отношения, установить многие факторы, тормозящие эффективность функционирования учреждений и организаций гмины.