

# **Governing Polish Cities: Changes in Local Leaders Attitudes**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Recent years has brought many changes in governance styles of several European cities in many countries. Depending on which dimension of changes is considered these process is identified as shift from local government to local governance, as developing new management techniques identified with the New Public Management or focus on new economic development policies focusing on quality, environment and amenities instead of costs and physical infrastructure.

To what extent these trends are noticeable also in Central-East European countries, and especially in Poland? Do Polish mayors' attitudes towards management of their municipalities absorb tendencies observed in Western part of the continent? There are reasons to expect high level of convergence. The conduct of council business in 1990s was highly influenced by Western consultants working within the frame of EU, USAID, World Bank of British KHF donor programmes and their advices filled the vacuum of own experience in management of local issues in market economy environment. The increasing number of direct contacts with local governments in other countries (related to the process of EU integration) also supports the trends toward convergence. But at the same time there are several factors which may slow down this process. The low level of social trust and weakness of civic society is a barrier for voluntary, horizontal governance coalitions. The same applies to the weakness of local private sector, which has often insufficient resources to become a strong member of local urban regimes.

The paper tries to draw conclusions on the outcome of these contradictory factors, basing on empirical results of the survey of over 120 mayors of Polish municipalities. However, the picture is far from being clear. On the one hand several NPM and other ideas are widely present in the consciousness of local leaders. But on the other hand their verbal declarations are much more rarely supported with actual implementation of these ideas. There is also a strong variation among local governments (with a relatively small group of "innovators" and a larger group of traditional local governments) and the paper tries to investigate factors explaining this variation.

**Key Words:** new public management, location factors, convergence, Polish mayors