

## Leadership style, political interest and rationality of municipal executive bodies in the implementation of public policies: the case of Poland<sup>1</sup>

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### Abstract:

**Purpose and Originality:** The article focuses on the circumstances influencing the political and social consequences of the rationalization of the school network with regard to the executive bodies of municipalities. The purpose of the article is to verify whether unpopular decisions made by the local authorities influence the range of political and social support.

**Method:** The article is based on preliminary research. The analysis is mostly focused on the qualitative studies (in-depth interviews, semi-structured interviews) conducted among selected actors involved in local educational policy creation and implementation. The theoretical framework of the article defines the concept of transformational leadership.

**Results:** Making unpopular decisions is inevitable for local authorities. Although they are rational from the point of view of the municipality as a whole, they can have negative consequences for local executive bodies. However, the results of the study show that not always the unpopular decision taken by the executive body results in the loss of political support. The study identifies situations in which the leadership style and mode of action were significant.

**Society:** The research problem presented in this article has been present for several years in the Polish public debate as well as in the academic discourse. The question of the style of leadership and its impact on public policies implementation is particularly relevant due to the reform of the education system and consequently changes in the local educational policy.

**Limitations / further research:** The results presented in the following paper are merely initial, but reflect the problem and allow to make only preliminary conclusions. It is necessary to conduct further research focused on the relationship between leadership style and the form of the implementation of public policies in municipalities.

**Keywords:** leadership, public policy, educational policy, local governance, public administration.

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## 1 Introduction

The functioning of municipal executive bodies (mayors) has recently reemerged as the subject of public and academic discussion<sup>2</sup>. Controversial plans to limit the term of office of mayor<sup>3</sup> have highlighted the particular role of the executive body in the structure of municipal authorities. The gradual strengthening of the position of mayors with respect to the municipality board, which culminated in the transformation of the collegiate executive body into a direct-elected monoclonal one, caused the local community representatives to identify the local authority with the mayor as a head of the municipality. Often, although wrongly, they are accredited powers they do not actually hold. Associating local authorities with mayors and holding them fully responsible for the decisions that are taken also made them the subject of potential social discontent with the policy of the municipal authorities.

In this article, the authors focus on the circumstances influencing the political and social consequences of the rationalization of the school network with regard to the executive bodies of municipalities. Decision-making bodies have been omitted on purpose, despite their crucial role in the process of rationalizing the network of municipal schools, have been decisive in their role. The purpose of the article is to verify whether unpopular decisions made by the municipal authorities translate into a loss of political and social support for executive bodies. The following hypothesis has been assumed, consequently: controversial decisions regarding the rationalization of the school network, including its most radical form, i.e. closure, do not always result in reduced public support, contrary to popular opinion and the conviction of the executing authorities themselves. The reaction of the local community to the planned changes in the municipal network depends largely on the current position of the executive body and the style of its leadership.

The article is based on a two-stage research study. The first was done in 2012, while the other has been in course since 2016. The theoretical framework of analysis is the concept of transformational leadership, and the methods used include: institutional and legal analysis, behavioral and comparative methods. The text uses primary (mainly legal acts and official documents) and secondary sources (surveys and in-depth interviews).

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<sup>2</sup> The authors use the term “municipality” to describe the smallest administrative unit in the territorial division of Poland (Polish: *gmina*). The term municipality is used in the article to describe both rural and urban-rural units (municipalities).

<sup>3</sup> In this article, the authors use the term “mayor” to describe the executive body of municipality (head of municipality). The term “mayor” will be used to describe municipal heads that function in both rural and urban-rural municipalities. In Polish, the name of the municipality head (executive body) is differentiated according to the type of municipality. In rural municipalities the executive body is called “wójt” (head of municipality) and in case of urban-rural municipalities “burmistrz” (mayor). For the purpose of this article no distinction will be made and the term “mayor” will be used to describe the executive body in both rural and urban-rural municipalities.

## 2 Theoretical framework

### 2.1 Evolution of the electoral system of municipal bodies in Poland

Restitution of local self-government in Poland began in 1990 with the establishment of municipal governments. In the Act amending the Constitution of the Republic of Poland (Journal of Laws 1990, No. 16, item. 94), it was decided that the municipal bodies would be the municipal council - the governing body and the governing board of the municipality - the executive body managed by the mayors. In the same legislative act (Article 1.7), the municipal council was elected by the citizens according to statutory rules and the choice of executive bodies was made by the municipal council. Detailed solutions were included in the system law and in the electoral law of municipal councils (Journal of Laws 1990, No. 16 item. 95).

In the years 1990-2002, the governing body of municipalities was elected by the council. In the 1990, an act was passed, according to which the functions of the executive body would be held by 4-7 members of the governing municipal council, managed by the mayor whose election was subject to several conditions: he or she had to be elected in a secret ballot and by an absolute majority of votes in the presence of at least  $\frac{2}{3}$  of the statutory council members. When it comes to the composition of the municipal council, the mayor had the opportunity to put forward candidates only for his or her deputies, while the other members would be elected by the council from among the councilors.

Adoption of such solutions was the cause of political disputes within the decision-making bodies, with *quorum* often being broken and thus making it impossible to elect the head of the municipality and prolonging the state of uncertainty (Leoński, 1998, p. 87). This phenomenon intensified especially after the subsequent local elections in 1994. Consequently, changes were made to the Local Government Act (Journal of Laws 1995, No. 124, item. 601), setting a six-month term for appointing a board (otherwise, the municipal council was legally dissolved);  $\frac{2}{3}$  of the council required to be present at the election of the mayor (it was sufficient to obtain the absolute majority of votes in the presence of at least half of the statutory council composition) and the mayor was granted the right to nominate candidates for all members of the board, which strengthened their position in the local government.

The indirect election system of multi-person executive bodies met with criticism. Among other things, the weakness of the municipal board, dependent on local political arrangements, or the dispersion of responsibility for collective decisions, were pointed out (Chmaj, Skrzydło 2011, p. 176). In 2002, a major change in the municipal system was introduced - in place of the municipal board, a single direct-elected executive body were to be appointed (Journal of Laws 2002, No. 113 item. 984).

The manner of electing the executive body exerts a significant influence on the relationship between the municipal authorities and to whom the executive body bears the political

responsibility for the actions taken (see: Kotarba, 2016, pp. 209-229). The early 1990s saw the subordination of executive bodies to municipal councils, resulting from the statutory division of powers<sup>4</sup>, but above all from the fact of the appointment and the possibility of dismissing the mayor and the board at any given moment (and without any special requirements). The stronger position of the municipal council in the realm of local authorities made the board responsible to it, with the mayor at the forefront.

Obviously, the members of the board had to work for social support, but most of all for the majority of the governing body that entrusted them with the function. Their interest was the re-election of councilors who offered them support in the first place. This increased the likelihood of reappointing board members. The effects of the unpopular social decisions were also borne by the mayor and other members of the board, but indirectly, and the political costs spread between the two municipal bodies. Gradual strengthening of the municipal council's position<sup>5</sup> did not result in the transfer of the main burden of responsibility to the executive body. However, it created the conditions that favored transforming the function of the mayors into an independent body with a strong position in the local authorities, stemming the legitimacy of the electorate (Piasecki, 2006, p. 71).

By introducing a direct election of the executive body of the municipality and turning it from a collegial into a monocratic one, it was not entirely settled what role the mayor should play in the local power system. As noted by J. Regulski, when introducing the reform, it was necessary first to answer the question whether he or she were to be a politician or a manager. If the former, they should be a local authority dealing with local development policy, setting goals, priorities and assigning tasks to the executive body. If the latter, they should be an efficient manager, focusing on the management of the municipality and the exercise of public authority (Regulski, 2000, p. 309).

Despite this normative vagueness, it seems that direct election works in favor of the mayor who is a politician, although it does not relieve them from managing the municipality and exercising public authority within its boundaries. As proved by practice, the mayor is, or should be, both a politician and a manager (Piasecki, 2006, p. 71). However, the question arises as to what extent a direct-elected mayor is a social leader, and to what extent – an entity exercising power and using their powers to operate the municipal unit and implement local public policies? Another question is: what is the consequence of maintaining public support in the context of making unpopular decisions motivated by the need for rational action from the perspective of the interests of the local government unit?

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<sup>4</sup> According to Z. Leoński, the municipal board was primarily the executive body of the council (Leoński, 1992, p. 61).

<sup>5</sup> Initiated in 1995 by the amendment to the Local Self-Government Act, consisting in tightening the conditions for the dismissal of the head of the commune and the municipal board as well as its individual members, weakening the role of the chairman of the municipal council (limiting its powers merely to organizing the functioning of the municipality council), reducing the number of municipal council members, all contributed to the increased importance of the head of the commune and their deputies.

### 3 Direct-elected mayors and local leadership

The direct election of the executive body has undoubtedly strengthened the position of the mayors, but it is difficult to say with certainty whether they enjoy broad public support, especially in the context of a low voter turnout for local elections (PKW, [http](#); Król, 2014; [http](#); Panicz, 2011). Certainly, a direct-elected executive body has a formal authority to exercise power, but they should not automatically be called a social leader (although there are municipalities where the mayor is continuously reelected thanks to high social support (Gendźwiłł, Swianiewicz, 2017, p.2).

Social support is crucial not only at the election stage but also during the term of office, as it also determines the future career of the mayors (that is, if they wish to continue it) and how to implement public policies. In the literature concerning leadership at the local level, formal leadership (Bennis, Nanus, 1988; Heifetz, Sinder, 1988, pp. 174-209) and the relationship between the leader and the local community (supporters) are strongly emphasized (Chaleff, 1995, pp. 142-148; Kelley, 1988, pp. 142-148).

Relationships between the ruling entities and the local community have become more important as the popularity of the governance model based increases. The increase in civic activity, the development of public participation instruments, created the conditions for cooperation and in a certain way "forced" the authorities to "open up" to other actors and their participation in the implementation of public policies. Thus, a formal leader becomes one of many actors, even though they have a special role to play (Crosby, Byson, Stone, 2010, pp. 200-204; Gašior-Niemiec, Kołomycew, 2013, p. 60). On the basis of the growing activity of non-public actors, there is also a category of *social leader*, but most often it is identified with active social groups, NGOs, or a charismatic individual with the support of the local community, able to motivate it to act (Kotarba, 2013, p. 345).

Due to the multitude of definitions and the different ways of understanding related categories of "ruler," "leader," "decision-maker" and "social leader," it is necessary to clarify how they are understood in this article. Under the concept of "the ruler", the authors understand the head of the local authority elected to have executive powers. It is referred to as a formal (or traditional) leader (van Wart, 2005, p. 26; Huxham, Vangen, 2000, pp. 1159–1175).

Having (formal) power, however, is not to be confused with being a social leader. The authors clearly distinguish the two categories, emphasizing that the mayor is not always the real leader of the local community, i.e. social leader. The combination of these categories is an

ideological situation, although there are some municipalities where mayor does not enjoy broad public support<sup>6</sup>.

Referring to P. Żukiewicz's definition, leadership is "a social process in which a social subject (e.g. a citizen, a social group or an organization) supports another social subject (...) because he recognizes them as the best fit for the current social ideal of a leader" (Żukiewicz, 2011, p. 48). In this sense, the leadership category the same with the leader category and it is similar to the concept of "social leader". Leadership requires time, labor, social acceptance for the activities being carried out, and the development of respect and social support for action (Żukiewicz, 2011, p.49). Leadership does not stem from the office held, but rather from the process of introducing measures that gain social approval (Habuda, 2007, p. 69). Thus, it can be said that the executive body, although in power, is not always a leader. At the same time, the leader may be an individual who is outside of the local authority but enjoys broad social support and trust (Kotarba, 2013, p. 345).

Both the formal exercise of authority by the individual and the leadership process are time-based. In the first case, the time of power is determined by the law indicating the length of the term of office (possibly with the possibility of re-election or dismissal). In the second case, leadership time is determined by the local community expressing support for the leader - leadership ends with the end of this support. As per the former, the time of power is determined by the law indicating the length of the term of office (possibly with the possibility of re-election or dismissal). As per the latter, leadership time is determined by the local community expressing support for the leader and it ends with the end of this support.

The ideal situation from the point of view of the effectiveness of the implementation of activities in a territorial self-government unit would be to combine formal authority with real leadership, manifested through broad public support. A social leader should not be identified solely as a representative of the social sector, an active local community<sup>7</sup>, or a particular environment. The local social leader can – and should – also be an authority. In the case of local communities, it is often the leaders of the community who are recognizable, have a lot of contacts, are deserved in a local unit are involved in its development, that become formal leaders. Social support, which guarantees acceptance of planned actions, seems to be a prerequisite. In addition, social acceptance and trust of the community provides to the executive body facilitates the implementation of local public policies and the adaptation of plans to citizens' expectations, thus increasing the satisfaction of public service recipients. At the same time, it can facilitate the rationalization of activities that often violate the interests of certain social groups.

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<sup>6</sup> It should be noted that quite often the categories of the formally elected executive body, i.e. the formal leader and the social leader, are identified as the same. For more see: Indulski, 2001, p. 192; Nocoń, 2008, p. 13; Sielski, 2012, pp. 51-64.

<sup>7</sup> The term „local community” is used to describe the residents of the municipality, living in the area of municipality, connected with common interests and goals.

As E. Marciniak points out, leadership is also a set of personality traits (Marciniak, 2001, p. 98). Among those that decide whether a given individual is perceived as a local leader or not, one can point to, among others, authority (Krukowska-Szopa, Ruszlewicz, 1998, p. 41). A leader is an individual who stands apart from the rest, who is seen as trustworthy, whose knowledge and experience are appreciated by other people. On the basis of the theory of transformational leadership, the key characteristics of leaders are management competence, ability to introduce changes, adaptation to changing environment, determination, ability to motivate others and designate them, as well as the ability to estimate risk and responsibility. Possession of these qualities determines informal authority.

In the case of mayors, it is possible to distinguish those who possess only the formal authority assigned to the position and those who have dual authority – i.e. formal and informal. In the first case, it is possible to say that they are "only" the mayor, while in the other case they are in charge of "the mayor - social leader". Having double authority - formal and informal - is an ideal situation, but it must be remembered that social support is not permanent. Local community leaders who plan further career must take this into account in their activities and in their relationships with the local community (Legutko-Kobus, 2011, p. 128)<sup>8</sup>.

## 4 Methods

The explanation of the research problem, due to its complex and interdisciplinary nature, requires different methodological approaches used by such disciplines as political science, sociology, public policy and public management. The range of used research methods includes inter alia the institutional analysis. Thanks to this method, it was possible to recognize the legal, institutional and organizational framework of education policy at the local level. Another of the research method used was the comparative method. Its application helped to indicate and recognize similarities between municipalities as well as different solutions adopted by the local authorities in the field of education policy. This method was also useful to analyze adopted leadership styles. The research also required to use the analysis of academic discourse (including scientific studies/papers and elaborations, opinions, recommendations, reports) and the analysis of existing sources (desk research). In particular, the legal acts (including laws/acts adopted by the local national authorities), reports, research results and so far presented surveys, as well as expert's opinions. At the first stage of the research (to identify municipalities) the media discourse was analyzed.

The qualitative part of the research (crucial for the considerations presented in this article) was completed based on the questionnaire survey. Research, based on in-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted in selected rural and urban-rural municipalities of three Polish regions (targeted selection in both cases – regions and municipalities). The regions

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<sup>8</sup>Legutko-Kobus, P., (2011). *Rola lidera lokalnego w rozwoju gminy*, „Kwartalnik Kolegium Ekonomiczno-Społecznego. Studia i Prace”, No. 2, p. 128.

were selected based on the available statistical data on the scale of school liquidation. For further research the authors selected units with the largest, medium and smallest number of closed schools. The authors analyzed the years 2006-2014, covering two full terms of office of the relevant local governments. The interviews were conducted with the representatives of the following categories: mayors, commune officials, councilors, village heads (village leaders – Polish *soltys*), school principals and teachers, members of social entities involved in educational services implementation (in case of municipalities, in which associations run local schools). In total 60 interviews were conducted and analyzed. In this article only a small part of the collected material were used.

## 5 Results and discussion

### 5.1 Political interest of public authorities and rationality in public policy implementation

According to R. Herbut, "interest" can be understood as "the conscious pursuit of an individual or a group to accomplish a specific objective" (Herbut, 2006, p. 380). Within the power, we have to do with political interests, i.e. a conscious desire to direct public policy as a whole, or individual decisions regarding the distribution of political values, toward what is perceived by the interested party as necessary to achieve the previously realized and articulated objectives (Herbut, 1996, p. 41). In the case of mayors, the political interest is to maintain power, or to lead to a situation that allows him or her to pursue another kind of political or professional (planned) career.

In the case of direct choice, pursuing such a defined political interest depends to a large extent on maintaining adequate social support. It is also possible that the mayor does not plan to be politically active after the end of their term of office, although it can then be assumed that maintaining the highest level of public support is desirable for them as it allows to complete the mission with a sense of satisfaction, subscribe to the memory of the local community and remain an informal leader - a social leader who works for the local community without seeking formal leadership. Under such circumstances, the mayor should pursue a local policy to meet the political interests in line with the expectations of the electorate. However, there are various conditions, including the ever-scarce resources that preclude the simultaneous satisfaction of the interests of the various social groups and the political interests of the commune head. This situation most often leads to the emergence of different aspirations, the need to choose priorities and even to local conflict (Kotarba, 2011, p. 9).

The most "risky" for the executive bodies on the municipal level is not so much to refrain from making decisions (especially those that are socially acceptable and expected by the community members), but taking activities and making decisions that violate the existing interests of local communities, deprive their position and privileges. Members of local communities generally express their dissatisfaction even if decisions made by local authorities are justified by objective reasons. An example of public policy that increasingly requires the rationalization of such socially unpopular activities, is local education policy.

The statutory regulations adopted since 1990 have made local governments an important subject of educational policy. The municipalities responsible for elementary schools and junior high schools play a special role (until they are closed in connection with the newly introduced education reform (Journal of Laws 2017, item. 59; Journal of Laws 2017, item. 60). The Education System Act (Journal of Laws 2016, item. 1943) imposed a series of tasks on them. In particular the establishment of a network of public schools because of the organizational and financial implications. Social attitudes support the creation of a dense school network, but local governments also have to consider the economic aspect, which unfortunately adversely affects the ability to create a large number of schools. This is primarily due to the way in which education is financed, which is linked to the number of students, and that has been decreasing for some time (Prognoza, [http](http://)). Demographic changes and the associated implications for municipal finances make it necessary to rationalize the school network, especially considering the share of educational expenditure in total municipal expenditure (Czudec, 2016, p. 98-103).

The most "drastic" among the actions that reduce the costs of implementing local educational policies is school closure. It most often triggers social discontent, especially among parents and teachers, and it threatens to decline support for the mayor. It should be emphasized that although the formal decision to shut down a school is made by the governing body, the strong position of the mayor, as a result of direct election and further reinforced by formal and reliable (legally non-binding) powers, often attributes the responsibility for such decision to them. Additionally, the social perception of the problem is based on emotions and is generated either by direct contact with school decommissioning or by media reports, often involving specific cases, such as the violent protests of parents and the intensification of relations with local authorities (Kotarba, 2013, p. 166-167).

The results of the research carried out among mayors in Podkarpackie Province confirmed their awareness of both the need to rationalize the school network by eliminating some of them (see Table 1) and the possibility of political costs involved in undertaking such activities (Table 2).

*Table 1.* Number of schools that should be closed in the opinion of municipal executive bodies (mayors) (N = 70)

Type of municipality	Number of schools to be closed			Number of municipalities with the need to rationalize the school network	Share among the researched municipalities [%]
	one	two	Three or more		
Urban (N <sub>1</sub> =6)	3	0	3	6	100,0
Urban-rural (N <sub>2</sub> =12)	1	2	5	8	66,7
Rural (N <sub>3</sub> =52)	4	13	14	31	58,5

Municipalities in total	8	15	22	45	63,4
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Source: Kotarba, 2014, p. 58-59.

Some respondents (35.6%) declared their willingness to transfer schools to other subjects, which would undermine (perhaps even neutralize) the negative social effects of rationalization in the field of local public policy regarding education.

*Table 2.* Reasons for not rationalizing the school network, as indicated by municipal executive bodies (mayors)

	<b>Reason for keeping the school network unchanged*</b>	<b>%</b>
1.	As long as the municipality can bear additional costs, for social reasons schools should be maintained despite economic inefficiencies.	84,6
2.	School closure is too difficult to perform.	23,1
3.	School closure can lead to partial loss of social support by the local authorities.	7,7
4.	Such a decision in my municipality is a „political suicide”.	7,7

\* the respondents could choose more than one answer

Source: Kotarba, 2014, p. 60.

The analysis indicated the reasons for the non-adoption of school closures were clearly confirmed by the effects of rationalization in the most drastic way. Although only two proposals were directly related to possible political expenses<sup>9</sup>, the others also indirectly suggested the mayors would face the consequences of a decision changing the *status quo* of schools. 23% of them believed that school closure was "too difficult to perform". Although it is difficult to fully verify this, it seems that this "difficulty" is mostly the expected resistance of the municipality. School decommissioning procedures are strictly defined by law and are not particularly complex in this layer. Similarly, according to 84.6% of the surveyed mayors, "as long as the municipality is able to bear additional costs, schools should be maintained in spite of economic inefficiencies for social reasons", which demonstrates the willingness to act in accordance with the expectations of the citizens. It may be assumed that the effect of meeting the expectations of the local community may be to maintain or even increase the social support granted to the mayor (and the municipal council).

Indeed, attempting to shut down a school tends to favor social discontent, which sometimes takes the form of a violent conflict. In some cases, an attempt is made to dismiss the executive and/or governing body during their term of office (Walczą..., 2011, http; Białek-Madetko, 2012, http; Będzie referendum..., 2012, http). But does conflict and social discontent in any case lead to the loss of social support resulting from the direct election of the mayor, affect his or her political interests and result in the loss of position?

According to the results of research on the social and political effects of rationalizing the school network, there are municipalities where, despite the most dramatic form of rationalization (closure), there were no negative results for the municipality leaders (see Table

<sup>9</sup>1) the liquidation of a school may lead to a partial loss of social support for the local authorities; 2) such a decision in my municipality is "a political suicide" - in both cases, 7.7% of the indications.

3). In spite of shutting down several schools in some municipalities, their heads managed to renew their mandates in future elections.

*Table 3.* School closure and reelection of municipal executive bodies (mayors) in 2006–2014

Province	Municipality	Number of closed schools 2006–2014	Re-election of the executive body	
			2010	2014
Świętokrzyskie	Chęciny	5	Yes	Yes
	Daleszyce	7	Yes	Yes
	Łączna	3	Yes	Yes
	Sędziszów	3	Yes	Yes
	Włoszczowa	7	Yes	No <sup>1)</sup>
Mazowieckie	Kadzidło	1	Yes	Yes
	Baranowo	4	Yes	Yes
	Brudzeń Duży	3	No	Yes
	Łyse	5	Yes	No <sup>3)</sup>
	Staroźreby	4	Yes	Yes
Pomorskie	Kolbudy	1	Yes	Yes
	Nowy Staw	1	Yes	Yes
	Mikołajki Pomorskie	1	Yes	Yes
	Nowa Wieś Lęborska	1	Yes	Yes
	Puck	1	Yes	Yes

1) Lack of re-election was not related to school closure; School closures were carried out in 2008;

2) Lack of re-election was not related to school closure; The current mayors did not re-run for the office;

3) Lack of re-election was not related to school closure; The issue of school decommissioning was raised in 2014.

Source: own study based on research.

It may be assumed that in these cases we are dealing with mayors who are social leaders. It should be noted that in the absence of political and social implications for the executive bodies, the form of the rationalization of the school network was of crucial significance. Social resistance concerned the closure of the school, which, in the case of small local communities (especially in rural areas), also had functions other than educational, serving as a cultural and social center. The threat of school closure has in many cases become a motivating factor for expressing dissatisfaction with the local government's decision (Kopeć, 2013, p. 365-366).

With that being said, not always has the process leading to school closure had negative impacts on the executive body, manifested by the lack of support in successive elections or the organization of a referendum on their dismissal. Leadership style and the alternative offered for a school to be closed play an important role in that regard.

For instance, in one of the Świętokrzyskie municipalities surveyed, the local conflict was the threat of shutting down five schools. The proposal of the mayor to hand them over to non-state actors was a way of resolving the conflict. It turned out that for the local community it was of secondary importance who would manage the school (Interview S/1/W). In the process of rationalization of local education policy, the role of the mayor who: 1) appropriately

presented the situation of the municipality 2) explained the reason for the closure of the schools and 3) presented a solution to the problem and co-operated with non-state actors who overtook the management of the closed schools by offering them support, including that material.

The results of the research show that the municipalities leaders that also a real social leaders not only, in many cases, maintained their support, but even increased them. The financial relief of the municipality financed by liquidation (or the transfer of a school to a non-public entity) has enabled the implementation of other public tasks that have benefited all residents, not just the schools.

The results of the research show that the mayors who are social leaders not only in many cases maintained their support, but even increased it. The financial relief of the municipality resulting from the closure (or school takeover by a non-public entity) made possible the fulfillment of other public tasks benefiting all citizens, and not only school-related ones (Interview S/1/K).

The way to resolve local conflicts over the closure of municipal schools by mayors who could be defined as social leaders can be analyzed on the basis of the concept of transformational leadership. This type of leadership assumes that a unit or group interacts with other actors, while the leader's support is a source of motivation, mobilization for action, and ethical behavior, rather than escalation of conflict (Burns, 1978, p. 20). J.M. Burns' transformational leadership model became the basis for a new leadership paradigm based on charisma, influence and values identified as key elements of leadership processes (Northouse, 2010, p. 188). Transformational leaders strive to introduce changes, but by gaining supporters, so first of all they want to win the favor of the environment (Burns, 1978; Sułkowski, 2001, p. 196). The key element of transformational leadership is a sustainable community and the generation of positive interpersonal relationships that can translate into the shape and development of the public sphere (Grill, 2006, p. 50).

Referring to the concept of transformational leadership, B. M. Bass and R.E. Riggio pointed out that the role of a leader is to motivate, activate, intellectually influence the supporters to include them in social activities, but also to fulfill their protective and servant roles (Bass, Riggio, 2006, p. 224-225). A transformational leader must be open to changes that take place accordingly to the actions of motivated supporters, which in turn generate new expectations and create new circumstances in which the role and responsibilities of the leader in question also change. Therefore, the leader in the transformation approach is seen as an adaptive leader (Bass, Riggio, 2006, p. 224-225).

## 6 Conclusions

The evolution of the municipal executive body from the collegial board, elected by the municipal council to the monocratic entity – the mayor, directly elected by the citizens, brought with it a variety of consequences. Among them was the strengthening of the position and importance of the mayors in the local political system and the increase of their direct responsibility to the community. Maintaining a position and possible reelection require appropriate social support. This is difficult when the implementation of the public policy requires taking action beneficial to the territorial self-government unit as a whole, but affecting the interests of some part of its citizens.

An example of this is local education policy. Demographic changes and the associated consequences for municipal finances often require the rationalization of the school network. These are unpopular actions, arousing discontent of residents and threatening the loss of social support by the mayor. However, as has been shown in the analysis, there are cases in which even the most drastic form of rationalization of education policy, manifesting itself as the closure of schools, does not necessarily lead to negative outcomes for the mayor. The circumstances determining that fact is the style of leadership. Mayors, who are social leaders, belong to the category of transformational leaders and have the ability to reconcile their environment in difficult situations, school closure certainly being one of them. In many cases, they motivate the local community to make efforts to run a school (founding a NGO), which strengthens the local community as an active actor in local public policy (regarding education), while not negatively impacting the level of community support for the mayors.

The conclusions of the analysis positively validate the thesis. Contrary to popular opinions and the conviction of the executive bodies themselves, decisions regarding the rationalization of the school network, including its most radical form which is closure, do not always lead to the loss of public support. The reaction of the local community to the planned changes in the network of municipal schools is largely dependent on the current position of the executive body and the style of their leadership.

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