Mariusz Popławski, *Municipalities and Local Associations as Subjects of Public Power Decentralization: On the Example of the Kujawsko-Pomorskie Region in Poland*, Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek, Toruń 2014, pp. 246

Zuzanna Osmólska*

The self-government and public administration researchers in Poland know that there are not many books focused on public power decentralization. Perhaps, because it is a complex and difficult issue. It requires great courage and caution, because of connection between legal, economic, and administrative issues. There are even less publications based on empirical research. The public power decentralization descriptions usually end on theoretical considerations, which – although important – often do not show the complexity of the issue and do not relate to a specific reality. Therefore, and even more, Mariusz Popławski, the author of the reviewed book, should be congratulated. Not only because of the “research courage” in undertaking such a difficult issue, but also for its effects.

It should be noted that Mariusz Popławski is a specialist in local government, the third sector, and decentralization issues. He received his PhD at the Faculty of Political Science and International Studies, Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń, based on paper, translation of which is the subject of this review. He is the author of many articles relating to local government, public administration, and NGOs. However, above all, he is truly interested in decentralization issues, which is proven in his book.

The book, what is unique, focuses on the problem of public decentralization in the context of two types of local actors and their relationship to each other: municipalities and local associations. The author’s main purpose is the attempt to answer three research questions: (1) what is the character of the relationship between municipalities and local associations?; (2) what are the differences between municipalities and local

* Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń, Faculty of Political Science and International Studies.

associations in regard to relative independence from the public centre?; (3) what are the most often problems that occur within local associations and municipalities relations? (Popławski 2014: 9). Author presents three hypotheses for each question, which have been verified by using both quantitative and qualitative methods. It should be noted that methodological sphere is a real strength of the book. The author pays attention to the selection of appropriate research methods and techniques and to preparing the survey – a tool needed in verification process of the research hypotheses. This can be evaluated by reviewing the questionnaire, which was included in the appendix of the book.

The book's content is divided into five chapters. First one, entitled *Decentralization of Public Power. The Dispute over the Essence of the Process and Definitions*, relates to defining the basic category – the public power decentralization. The author presents two decentralization approaches, analyzes a lot of definitions and finally, formulates his own definition, and a very unique one. He also identifies points to distinguish decentralization from centralization, deconcentration, and delegation.

Second chapter – *Municipality as a Subject of Public Power Decentralization* – refers to problems connected with self-government concept. At the beginning the author presents local government characteristics and its history in Poland. It is the introduction to full analyses of municipality as a subject of public power decen-

tralization, including legal status of municipalities, the decision-making process, statutory and control organs, management and executive organs, and supervision of municipalities. The author also dedicated a part of this chapter to characterize tasks, competences and resources of municipalities as objects of public power decentralization. It is worth noting that this chapter presents an unusual perspective on municipalities issue, which certainly goes beyond standard “textbook” approaches.

The third chapter is entitled *Local Associations as Subjects of Public Power Decentralization*. It includes such issues as the social nature and local association definitions, the legal status of associations in Poland, and – as in the previous chapter – tasks, competences and resources of local associations as objects of public power decentralization. In this part, the author shows that he is well-versed in the law and rules of local associations' operations. He makes a thorough analysis of the fundamentals of their actions.

In the next chapter – *Lower Subjects of Public Power Decentralization: Municipalities and Local Associations* – the author focuses on theoretical foundations of cooperation of municipalities and local associations. He also presents selected aspects of potential of local associations for taking part in the correction of imperfection of decentralization. It is a very important and very innovative part of the book. It explains circumstances encouraging interactions between the municipalities and local associations

that have been built, which has its roots in the public power decentralization processes.

In the last chapter, the author presents results of his own research. The aim of the survey was to gather opinions of local associations' representatives on cooperation with municipalities on their actions' territory. It is to commend the author for selected questions and for the quality of his analysis, the effect of which can be found in relevant conclusions.

It should be noted that the reviewed book was prepared with an enormous solicitude. Evidence of this is well-prepared and very rich bibliography, well thought-out book construction, and interesting graphical presentations. Such details will facilitate the publication's reception.

But most importantly, the reviewed book concerns a very innovative issues. Most books in Polish language dealing with the matter of self-government and local associations focus on the law and institutions. Meanwhile Popławski not only describes issues that are not often undertaken, but also makes it in a very interesting context of public power decentralization.

Subject taken in the book is a major asset. This publication is one of the few which refers to so important issues as the cooperation between local associations and municipalities. The author presents them in a concise and synthetic way, but without neglecting important problems such as legal problems and its potential.

A big advantage is also an interesting research perspective used by the author. Popławski decided to put his main subjects – local associations and municipalities – in a very complicated context of decentralization. He presents an innovative theoretical contribution in the presented issues, which can certainly be used in other publications related to the municipalities and local associations functioning.

A positive quality of the book is also the fact that the author based it on his own research. It is not very usual in Polish political science. Furthermore, they are made with remarkable methodological maturity, leading to really interesting conclusions.

All of these arguments make the book *Municipalities and Local Associations as Subjects of Public Power Decentralization: on the Example of the Kujawsko-Pomorskie Region in Poland* an excellent elaboration on very important though rarely undertaken problems of local associations and municipalities cooperation in the context of public power decentralization. It perfectly combines issues from different fields of law, public administration, and political science. The book is certainly worth recommending for students who look for something more than typical textbook presentation. But it is absolutely a "must read" book for all of officials and third sector employees, who are interested in their municipalities and local associations cooperation.