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## **LOCAL DEVELOPMENT – THE DEFINITION ASPECT IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY**

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The purpose of the article is to present a definition of development in the local view. The first section treats the concept of locality, while the second section concentrates on a review of definitions of local development in Polish literature from the viewpoint of the entity criterion, i.e. local communities and from that of the activity criterion, i.e. perceived as a process of transformation.

### **1. THE LOCAL SCALE**

The transformation of the political and economic system in Poland has many aspects. One of them, a presumably very important one, is the local scale of the transformations taking place.

The starting point for determining the definition of local development is finding an answer to the question: what do the terms *local*, *local scale*, *local community* and *local government* mean?

Locality, often treated as a distinguishing feature, regards a relatively small area. Despite the fact that the term “local” is often understood as “limited to a given area”, the term relates not only to a specific space. A local arrangement, delimited by parameters of administrative division, should take into account also the sum of such features as: the history of the area, specific social and economic features, cultural features and even geographical features.

The local scale includes the territory “with diversified land area, characterised by economic, social, cultural and political homogeneity and a common, broadly understood identity” [1, p. 363]. Broadly understood identity denoted not only cultural relations, but also similar behaviours with regard to attitudes, interests, habits and activities. This is why local communities are characterised by strong bonds between inhabitants.<sup>1</sup> Through local authorities (local governments), inhabitants have the right to “(...) decide about all matters of the local community with the exception of those areas reserved for state institutions” [2,

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<sup>1</sup> Locality is often identified with so-called “little homelands”

p. 31], this right regards both satisfying needs in everyday life and making decisions treating social and economic development. One should, however, bear in mind that in order to trigger permanent, irreversible dynamics of development, the local scale has to have an appropriate, critical mass expressed by an appropriate concentration of institutions, number of persons participating in the local community's life, and all necessary relations among them and between them and the outside" [3, p. 91].

## 2. DEFINING LOCAL DEVELOPMENT

The subject matter of local development, taken up many times in economic literature, is very broad and does not have unequivocal criteria. Contemporary definitions vary, reflecting the complexity of the problem. A comparative analysis allows us, however, to introduce a certain classification. In literature treating the topic, several basic tendencies in defining local development can be distinguished. This article makes out two groups (Fig. 1), in which the main criteria assumed were:

- the local community and its needs,
- changes taking place within the local arrangement.

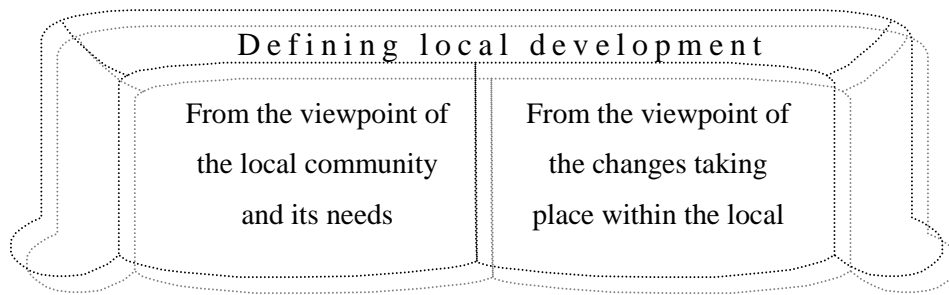


Fig. 1 Criteria distinguishing definitions of local development

Source: author's own work

Notions counted among the first category are characterised by attention directed towards those whom the development is to benefit, opinions counted among the second group concentrate on the effects of changes taking place as a result of development on the local scale. The two classes listed above should not be treated as mutually exclusive, but rather complementary.

The significance of a local community is determined by its possession of a special attitude to the territory it inhabits. Inhabitants, leading their everyday lives in their area, pay more attention to their nearest neighbourhood (i.e. within the local situation), as it is within this neighbourhood that most of their problems are solved and most decisions regarding them are taken. A representative of the first approach is E. Nowińska. She clearly links local (communal) development with the area encompassing the administratively assigned commune territory subject to local government's authority. Local authorities' institutions, organisations and individuals engage in this process in order to use local resources and opportunities and perform activities in various domains with benefit to the people forming the local community" [4, p. 67]. A similar point of view can be observed with J. Parysek, who emphasises that local development, performed from the position of local communi-

ties, is the result of co-operation of local (i.e. living in a local territorial unit) communities, local government, and other organisations and institutions, mainly non-profit ones [cf. 5, p. 37, and 6, p. 46]. A. Myna, on the other hand, distinguishes five groups of initiators of local development: local authorities, ecological lobbies, social and cultural societies, investors and local communities. Despite the difference, consisting in inclusion of business-people among initiators of local development, both authors agree that the leading role belongs to the local government. The listed groups, in co-operation, energising the entire community, lead to the achievement of commonly accepted local development goals. However, “a special role in these processes belongs to local authorities (local government), which both initiate and co-ordinate and support activities aiming at overcoming obstacles for local development and preventing their appearance” [2, p. 32]. This obligation derives from two factors. Firstly, the local government is the actual landlord of the area. Secondly, the local government is obliged by law to form the local environment and to represent local communities. As A. Sztando notes, “the local government is expected to be the driving force of local development while representing the widest possible range of interests of the local community. These interests are no longer just to satisfy current needs. Such a form, or rather its limitation, is a thing of the past. Nowadays, the interest of the local community lies in creating and maintaining the development of a set of utilitarian values and productive powers of the local arrangement” [7, p. 14-15].

The above theories emphasised local communities that were to be benefited by development. However, many leading researchers of local conditions try – without diminishing the importance of local needs – to present the transformations caused by the people’s active participation in local development. These transformations rely in creation of new values (Fig. 2), mainly:

- products, goods, services meant to satisfy internal and external needs,
- employment, new companies creating new jobs,
- non-material values, such as: knowledge, higher qualifications and skills,

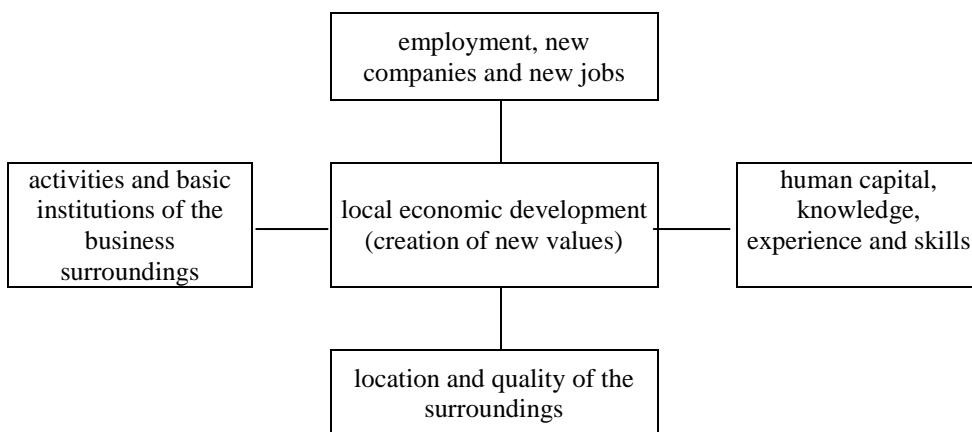


Fig. 2 Local economic development

Source: Klasik A. “Local economic development and methods of building it”, p. 24

- attractive location proposals consisting of “hard” elements, such as buildings and technical infrastructure and “soft” elements understood as excellent natural surroundings [cf. 8, p. 11, and 1, p. 361-362 or 9, p. 23].

The approach of A. Klasik, who perceived local development as the creation of new values in the surroundings, knowledge, work and capital is very helpful in understanding the essence of this notion. However, it is rarely encountered. Other authors, emphasising the complexity of the idea, the variety of purposes and activities, make certain generalisations. According to R. Brol “we speak of local development when harmonious and systematic activity of a local community, local government and other entities functioning in the commune strive to create new and improve existing utilitarian values of that commune, to create favourable conditions for the local economy and assure spatial and ecological order” [8, p. 11]. For L. Bagdziński, local development involves four planes: economic, social, political and cultural. “In the economic plane, development consists mainly in development of enterprise, both private and created by the local authorities, as well as by institutions of local government and local communities” [10, p. 15]. A. Jewtuchowicz connects transformations on a local scale with changes in an economy that can adapt to variable conditions. “Local development is, above all, flexibility. It is the idea of an economy capable of rapid adaptation and managing systems that are complex and diverse with regard to culture, society, technology, as well as taste and changing needs and products satisfying those needs” [11, p. 58], Supporting local development is equal to bringing about changes in the economic units of the local arrangement. L. Wojtasiewicz, on the other hand, has isolated two necessary factors determining the existence of local development. There must be “a distinct social and territorial structure possessing a set of economic, spatial and cultural features characteristic to it, expressing its own needs and hierarchy of values” [12, p. 14], in other words, a local arrangement. When positive qualitative transformations and quantitative increase come to existence within this arrangement, we can speak of local growth” [cf. 12, p. 17; 13, p. 100]. This concept coincides with the theory of D. Waldziński, who links development with qualitative changes taking place within a given territorial unit [cf. 14, p. 89].

### 3. SUMMARY

In this paper, an attempt was made to present the output of Polish authors within the area of local development theories. On the one hand, one can notice that there are no ready solutions for local development. This is surely because each local arrangement is a unique unit, a combination of human, economic, geographic and spatial factors. However, the presented definitions are undoubtedly characterised by a certain concurrence of views. The quoted authors note that:

- local development is an ongoing process and therefore cannot be carried out “in one go”
- local development regards an area and is therefore a territorial development, not a sector development,
- the fact that it regards a local arrangement favour the mobilisation of a community, causes a feeling of belonging to a community and place,
- initiative, creativity and inventiveness of local entities depend to a great degree on the awareness that they can influence the direction of development,

- it exemplifies the autonomous development model, i.e. one that is based on the potential of a given unit. Such a situation favours the involvement of local entities in the process, gives a sense of independence and awareness of “determining one’s own fate”,
- should be created by various entities, whose activities ought to be based on co-operation, while the result of negotiations should lead to the creation of a commonly accepted agenda of development,
- an unquestionable role in local development is played by local authorities.

The conclusion comes to mind that variable factors determining the functioning of the economic system, especially abandonment of centralised sector development logic have resulted in the fact that local development is gaining special significance. Taking into account the current direction of changes, that is, away from state subsidies and central planning, towards a greater autonomy of local communities, one should assume that the importance of local development in the social and economic development of the country will increase.

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### **ROZWÓJ LOKALNY – ASPEKT DEFINICYJNY W XXI WIEKU**

Celem prezentowanego artykułu jest przedstawienie definicji rozwoju w ujęciu lokalnym. W części pierwszej odniesiono się do pojęcia lokalności, natomiast część druga skupia się na przeglądzie definicji rozwoju lokalnego w literaturze polskiej z punktu widzenia kryterium podmiotowego, czyli społeczności lokalnych oraz czynnościowego czyli jako procesu zmian.