

## **Re-thinking the roles of regional councillors in Poland. Evidence from Wielkopolskie and Lubelskie regional assemblies**

The project outlined in this paper is still in progress.  
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**Abstract:** In its present form, self-government at the regional level was established in Poland in 1998 as a result of the so-called ‘second wave of decentralization’. Different tasks were devolved to the regions, including issues as important as the formation of conditions for economic development, creation of the labour market and acquisition and merger of public and private funds. Moreover, it seems that the role of regional self-government has been gradually and substantially strengthened and at present it holds a strong position vis-à-vis the central (governor) and local (municipal, county) authorities. However, the regional assembly should play an important role in stimulating regional development. The purpose of the article is to examine the roles of regional councillors as representatives of local communities, administrators and members of political parties. The article is based on empirical research conducted among councillors from the Wielkopolskie and Lubelskie regions. The evidence indicates that representing regional communities and defining priorities of regional policies are the most important tasks for councillors. Having a political affiliation and representing interests of parties plays, however, a much less significant role than commonly believed.

### **Introduction**

After the political transformation Poland underwent at the turn of the 1990s it was assumed that the processes of decentralization and deconcentration should be at the heart of the reforms aiming at reducing the power of central government. Jerzy Regulski, one of the founders of Polish local government, noted that these changes were based on a new vision of the state whose “primary purpose is to create (...) conditions for life and development for their citizens” (Regulski 2005:30). The Act on Local Self-Government, implemented in March 1990, introduced for the very first time in modern Poland solutions based on freedom and democracy (Nikolski 2011:47)<sup>2</sup>. On the basis of this Act nearly 2500 municipalities (gminy) became the basic units of local self-government. The second stage of decentralization was carried out in 1998, when the existing structure of single-tier municipal government was supplemented with more than 300 counties (powiaty), 65 cities with county rights and 16 regions (województwa), creating a three-tier system.

For several years European researchers have been interested in the roles elected representatives play in local government and the tensions they experience. In this context the role can be defined as “(...) a set of expectations oriented towards people who occupy a certain

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<sup>2</sup> The Act on Local Self-Government adopted on 8 March 1990, Journal of Laws 1990, No 16, item 95.

“position” in a social system or group” (Gouldner 1957:282 cited in Heinelt 2012:2). This research has recently intensified, as the governing process has been influenced by many new trends. These include the impact of the New Public Management paradigm, the shift from traditionally understood local government to local governance as well as the increase of citizens’ interest in participating in the decision-making process. Nevertheless, in most countries the changes have been occurring primarily at the municipal level; most researchers therefore focus their attention on these basic units (Heinelt 2012:1-5; Denters & Klok 2012:1-16). In the case of Poland, however, regional elites appear an interesting research field for several reasons.

Firstly, unlike in many other European countries, regional councillors in Poland are directly elected by the citizens, which increases their legitimacy. Secondly, the role of regional representatives is influenced by their operating on “the edge” of the state and (regional, local) self-government (Nalewajko 2011:8). On the one hand, the government-appointed governor (wojewoda) and his or her state apparatus are pivotal to regional governance. On the other, elected regional authorities influence the development of the counties and municipalities within the region. This system of mutual dependencies requires a coordination of actions and a search for consensus. Thirdly, since the creation of the regional self-government in 1998, a gradual emancipation and empowerment of its institutions in relation to the state administration has been observed (*Ibidem*; Swianiewicz 2011:502). Moreover, the inflow of EU funds and the key role of the regional self-government in their distribution has led to an increased prominence of that tier. Finally, in comparison to the municipal and county councillors, the role of regional representatives is far more determined by political parties.

The purpose of this article is to examine the role elected representatives play in regional governance. In particular, the article looks for the answers to the following research questions:

- How is the role and behaviour of councillors at the regional tier influenced by the institutional framework and arrangements for the conduct of regional government, democracy and representation?
- How do councillors perceive their own roles in multi-level governance?
- What is the impact of political parties on regional governance and the role councillors play within it?

In the analysis conducted the author refers to the empirical data obtained from the National Electoral Commission (Pol. Państwowa Komisja Wyborcza – PKW), the Centre for Public Opinion Research (Pol. Centrum Badania Opinii Społecznej – CBOS) and the results of several projects already conducted in Poland, which have focused on the changing role of regional councillors (Dojwa, Placenty 2006; Dojwa 2007; Nalewajko 2011). The author also refers to the results of the pilot-survey conducted by herself among councillors of two regional assemblies from Wielkopolskie and Lubelskie regions. 72 questionnaires have been sent to councillors from both assemblies<sup>3</sup>. The overall rate of return was 23.6%.

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<sup>3</sup> Altogether 135 questionnaires have been sent to the councillors from 4 regions: Wielkopolskie (39), Lubelskie (33), Warmińsko-Mazurskie (30) and Podkarpackie (33). However, at the time of writing this article only the data from the Wielkopolskie and Lubelskie regions were available.

The paper is divided into three main parts. The first one elaborates councillors' role from a theoretical perspective and refers to the broader context of regional governance in Poland. The author pays particular attention to the historical conditions and the process of creation and development of regional authorities. This section extensively examines the tasks of regional authorities as well as the legal and institutional framework which shapes and influences councillors' roles. The second part of the article concentrates on the results of the pilot-survey conducted among the councillors of Wielkopolskie and Lubelskie regions. Finally, the paper concludes that the roles councillors play in regional governance are determined by many factors. In the case of Poland, one major factor was the process of political transformation and the way regional self-government was created. Institutions built in the 1990s clearly related to 'party democracy' rather than 'citizens' democracy' (Vetter 2009). On the other hand, the results of the empirical survey indicate that regional councillors, whatever their political affiliation, consider representing regional communities to be their most important task. However, the dynamics of the change at regional level are creating more and more tension, forcing councillors to confront a number of new challenges. One of the most important of these is an increased participation of stakeholders and actors participating in regional governance. This may influence the process of creation and development of the new roles. Nevertheless, additional empirical research is clearly needed to gain insight into the changing role of this regional political elite.

### **Councillors' roles and regional governance: the Polish context**

The idea of electing representatives who make decisions on behalf of the local community constitutes an important concept in local government. The process of election is a significant act of political participation for citizens as it gives them a chance to replace local representatives, bring decision-makers to account, but also to show their views on different issues (Sweeting, Copus 2012). The role councillors play in local government is, however, complex and full of challenges. What is more, it is determined by at least two groups of factors.

First, it can be argued that the role and behaviour of councillors, as well as their attitudes towards reforms at the local level, are shaped by both formal and informal institutional structures and/or by their personal characteristics. Secondly, the behaviour and role perception depend also on the notion of democracy as an expression of councillors' basic beliefs about appropriate behaviour and subjective norms (Heinelt 2012:1-2).

Many typologies of councillors' roles can be found in specialist literature. Many authors underline that councillors act first and foremost as the representatives of local communities. As such, they are supposed to translate the needs and issues emerging from society into political actions and constitute a reliable and effective link between citizens and local authorities (Heywood 2002, Mouritzen & Svava 2002 cited in: Verhelst, Steyvers, Reynaert 2009:6). However, even this basic role may have different dimensions and meanings, as councillors can act as free-agents of the electorate's interests, delegates who place the wishes of the people at the centre of their political attention and action, or politicians who act as trustees where possible or delegates when required (Eulau 1959 cited in: Copus

2008:593). Secondly, councillors have an administrative role, as beyond representing the citizens, they determine the priorities for local/regional government and control the executive power. This role is, however, more internally directed than the former as the councillors have to confront other local organs and politicians (Verhelst, Steyvers, Reynaert *ibidem*). In addition, in many countries where local government is penetrated by political parties, councillors are also positioned as local politicians who represent the political formation they belong to. Moreover, notwithstanding the above typologies and classifications, it seems that councillors have to find a balance between these different roles. In addition, depending on the 'theatre' – council/assembly, public meeting, media – they act in a different manner (Copus 2004:193).

However, to understand the role councillors play in regional governance, as well as the capabilities to develop it and the tensions they experience, it seems necessary to refer to the broader context – the historical, structural and cultural determinants of a particular local government. In the case of Poland several issues seem to be worth noting.

Firstly, the tradition of self-government at regional level in Poland is long although restricted to nobility (Szewc 2008:31). It dates back to the dietines (sejmiki ziemskie; comitia minora), first formed in the 16<sup>th</sup> century as the basic institution of local self-government for nobility; for the higher echelons of society it was at the same time the main mode of participation in the political life of the state (Nikolski 2011:45). This tradition ceased upon the partition of Poland in 1772. By the time Poland regained independence in 1918, diverse solutions and institutions had evolved in the Prussian, Russian and Austrian Partitions; the idea of regional democracy was most fully implemented in the Austrian Partition. After independence was regained in 1918, attempts were made to construct self-government at the regional level. However, directly elected assemblies operated in only two out of seventeen existing regions (Nikolski *Ibidem*). After World War II and the onset of the communist regime, the regional self-government was abolished, with national councils (rady narodowe) created in its place. The need to recreate this level of local self-government was not debated until the 1989 Round Table negotiations<sup>4</sup>. At that time, however, the immediate introduction of this tier of government proved impossible (Borodziej, Garlicki 2004:278) and regional self-government was established in 1998<sup>5</sup>.

Secondly, it has to be emphasized that, owing to its complicated history, Poland lacked authentic regional structures, shaped organically as a result of centuries-long historical processes and the existence of cultural diversity (Bandarzewski, Chmielnicki, Kisiel 2006:120 cited in Nikolski 2008:54). For this reason, the formation of regions in 1998 was an administrative, top-down exercise (Izdebski 2008:43-44). Poland was divided into 16 regions, formally known as voivodeships (województwa), which differed in terms of their demographic and economic potential. The number of the regions was an outcome of a political game between the then government, president and political parties. Political parties in particular showed an intensified activity and an interest in increasing their leverage at the regional level. This is evident in the attempts by the parties to alter the electoral system as well as in most regional representatives having a party affiliation. In the 2010 regional election, only 21 out of 561 elected councillors were independents (Table 1; PKW 2013). Parties not only have a substantial influence on the shaping of regional elites; they also use

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<sup>4</sup> The Polish Round Table took place from February 6, to April 4, 1989. The communist government initiated the discussion with the banned trade union Solidarity (Solidarność) and other opposition groups in an attempt to defuse growing social unrest.

<sup>5</sup> The Act on Regional Self-Government adopted on 5 June 1998, Journal of Laws 1998, No 91, item 576.

these elites as repositories of candidates for parliamentary elections (Dojwa, Placenty 2006:14; Nalewajko 2011:19). In the 2005 parliamentary election, 205 councillors stood for election; of these, 86 were allocated top places (1, 2 or 3) in their party lists on the ballot. 47 councillors went on to obtain a seat in the election (Nalewajko 2011:20).

Thirdly, the tasks of regional government and regional authorities ought to be noted. According to the Act on Regional Self-government regions are recognized as associations of residents formed to exercise appropriate functions<sup>6</sup>. Authorities at that tier are responsible for economic and cultural development and must concentrate their activities in four areas: promotion of economic development; management of public services of regional significance such as higher education, specialized health care and some cultural institutions; environmental protection and management of natural resources; development of regional infrastructure, including management of roads and regional transport and communications. These tasks substantially differentiate the functions of regional authorities from those of municipalities (gminy) and counties (powiaty), whose primary function is to meet the direct needs of residents (Regulski 2003:114). Residents of a region exercise power by making decisions directly or indirectly, through elected representatives. The regional assembly (sejmik) holds legislative and supervisory powers; executive powers rest with the regional board (zarząd) headed by the marshal (marszałek). Each assembly comprises 30 directly elected councillors for the first 2,000,000 residents of the region; for every 500,000 residents over that number there are three additional councillors. The board comprises five persons elected by councillors from among themselves. Both these bodies are elected for a term of four years.

Fourthly, as indicated in the introduction, the dual function of regions has implications for governance at this level. On the one hand, regions have directly-elected self-government bodies; on the other, the region is an administrative unit of central government and the seat of the regional representative of the central government, the governor (wojewoda). Though there is no hierarchical subordination between the two, it has to be noted that at the time when regions were created in 1998, the position of the regional administration (governor) was stronger than that of regional self-government bodies. Subsequently, however, the position of the regional self-government was progressively reinforced in what has been termed 'creeping decentralization', where, despite the lack of extensive institutional reforms, competences were gradually devolved from the centre to the regions (Swianiewicz 2010:502). As experts point out, when regions became functional in January 1999, the ratio between the powers of the regional self-government and the governor constituted 30% to 70%; however, in 2009 the proportions turned and at present they are 70% to 30% in favour of the regional self-government. This process was aided by Poland's 2004 accession to the EU and the inflow of EU funds.

Finally, it has to be noted that, having existed for 14 years, regional self-government is a relatively recent institution, and as such it continues to evolve dynamically. This is exemplified by, among others, the high turnover of political party elites. Since regions were created in 1998, the only party with a constant presence at the regional scene has been Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe (PSL; Polish Peasant's Party). Analyzing institutions of local government at regional and county (powiat) levels, Gąciarz notes that regional self-government was founded on "a deeply imbalanced system of territorial democracy" (Gąciarz 2004:263-265). He points to the following factors as reasons:

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<sup>6</sup> Ibidem.

- 1) Informality of rules, lack of transparent procedures and precise regulations, which would eliminate arbitrary decision-making. This has resulted in a “leaky institutionalisation”, which afforded too little protection against “the weaknesses of human nature”;
- 2) Insufficient competences in relation to the tasks allocated to regional self-governments. This has led to treading water and a dependency on other authorities;
- 3) A discrepancy between social expectations towards reform with the outcomes of actions by the self-government;
- 4) A “historical” personal continuity in the regional authorities, which resulted in “following patterns of behaviour belonging in a reality which had little in common with self-government” (*Ibidem*).

Though these factors are slowly abating, many regional authorities continue to follow a model of the so-called “grand politics”. Collective action is often the dominant mode in regions; citizens are viewed primarily through the prism of indirect democracy (elections), that is as electorate to be influenced. Moreover, the media message is the default form of public debate (*Ibidem*; Nikolski 2011:9-10). This is reflected in the public opinion’s assessment of the activity of regional self-governments and the turnouts in regional elections, both of which are low. Regional authorities as institutions are becoming increasingly important, participating as they do in the allocation of EU funds, often central to the development of a region; despite this, only 40% voters view the decisions of these authorities as important (40%). The respondents see municipal, or even county self-government as more important (64% and 50% respectively); (Table 2; CBOS 2010:5). Moreover, just over a half of Poles (55%) believe regional councillors represent the interests of the region’s residents (34% feel they represent the interests of all Poles; 21% - of specific residents). 54% of the respondents believe that councillors are guided by their own self-interest, or the interest of their political party, profession or acquaintances (Grabowska 2010). These opinions may conceivably translate on electoral turnouts, which average 45.67% (Table 3; PKW).

### **Councillors about themselves. Evidence from Wielkopolskie and Lubelskie regions**

As noted in the introduction, empirical research was conducted on councillors from two regions, Wielkopolskie and Lubelskie. 72 questionnaires were sent by mail to 39 councillors from Wielkopolskie and 33 from Lubelskie. Each questionnaire contained 24 questions grouped in the following categories:

- The roles of councillors;
- Regional assembly and other regional actors;
- The opinions of councillors on regional democracy;
- The political careers of the councillors.

Overall, 23.6% questionnaires have been returned (18% from Wielkopolskie and 30 from Lubelskie). The result of the research cannot thus be treated as representative; it is nonetheless indicative of certain trends in the way councillors view their role.

There were several reasons behind the selection of the two specific regions. Firstly, for historical reasons their development progressed along different paths. The present Wielkopolskie was part of the Prussian Partition for over a hundred years, while Lubelskie was controlled by Russia. This legacy has significantly influenced the shaping of regional institutions as well as the size of economic and social capital, and the two regions continue to show substantial differences in terms of their potential. Secondly, there are political differences between the two regions. Wielkopolskie leans towards the left and centre-left, while Lubelskie tends to support candidates from the right or centre-right (Nikolski 2011).

Wielkopolskie is currently governed by a coalition of the Civic Platform (PO) and Polish Peasant's Party (PSL). The regional assembly comprises 39 councillors, of whom 17 represent the Civic Platform; eight belong to the Democratic Left Alliance (SLD), seven to the Polish Peasant's Party, and six to Law and Justice (PiS); there is one independent councillor (Table 4). Questionnaires were completed by representatives of all political parties.

In the first category of questions, which concerned the regional councillors' perception of their roles, the responding Wielkopolskie councillors found their most important tasks to be representing the interests of the residents of the region (100%), monitoring the implementation of the region's strategy (87.5%) and defining priorities in the development of the region (71.4%). In reference to the first of these issues, they assessed their capabilities as very high (42.8%) and high (42.8%). 42.8% of the councillors found they have a moderate influence on monitoring the implementation of the region's strategy, while 28.5% described that influence as low. The councillors found their influence on defining the region's priorities to be very high (28.5) or moderate (28.5%). All the councillors indicated that their primary role is to represent the interests of their constituency (100%), followed by the interest of the whole region (57.1%) and their political party (57.1%)<sup>7</sup>.

In the questions regarding the regional assembly and other regional actors, the councillors considered the board of the region and its head, the marshal, to be the most influential (100% and 85.7% respectively). 57.1% of the responding Wielkopolskie councillors found the heads of department at the marshal's office to have a relatively high influence on the decisions made in the region. The councillors' own influence on actions taken in the region was in turn described as moderate (71.4%). Further, the research showed that councillors are aware of the connections between the different tiers of self-government, with 57.1% of the councillors noticing the influence of regional administration on decisions made in municipalities and 42.8% perceiving this influence for decisions made at the county level. The same percentage of the councillors (42.8%) noted the influence of central government and the EU on decisions made at the regional level.

In the questions relating to broadly defined regional democracy, 57.1% of the councillors agreed that residents should actively and directly participate in making decisions concerning regional affairs, and that they should have an opportunity to express their opinion before a decision is made by the region's authorities. The same percentage of councillors, however, conceded that it would often be difficult to reach a broad consensus and efficiently solve a problem at the same time. 42.8% of the councillors completely or partly agreed that councillors should make decisions in accordance with their own beliefs, with no regard to the opinion of the region's inhabitants. 71.4% of the councillors deemed elections the most efficient feedback from residents; direct meetings with residents, party meetings and

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<sup>7</sup> More than one answer could be selected.

consultations with local communities were judged as fairly useful by 71.4% of the councillors. Interestingly, 28.5% of the councillors found local referendums to be insufficiently useful.

The questionnaire included a section where the councillors were able to give their opinion on desirable changes in the way the region is governed and decisions made. The most useful change according to 71.4% councillors would be to broaden the procedure of consultation, through which the region's residents could be informed about and comment on the assembly's proposals. At the same time, over half of the councillors (57.1%) did not find it necessary to introduce direct elections of the marshal or the option to recall the marshal in a referendum.

An analysis of the attitude of the responding Wielkopolskie councillors to political parties shows that most (71.4%) believe that regional party structures have a substantial influence on the decisions of the councillors in the assembly. At the same time over 70% are of the opinion that a councillor should vote primarily in accordance with his or her beliefs, while over 40% believe that party discipline should be preserved. As for their future plans, all the councillors wished to continue their political careers, either by standing for re-election to the regional assembly (50%) or by running for a parliamentary seat (50%).

The assembly of Lubelskie comprises 33 councillors, with eleven representing Law and Justice, nine the Civic Platform, nine the Polish Peasant's Party and four the Democratic Left Alliance (Table 5). Lubelskie as well as Wielkopolskie is currently governed by a coalition of the Civic Platform (PO) and Polish Peasant's Party (PSL). The questionnaires returned from Lubelskie were completed by councillors from Law and Justice, the Polish Peasant's Party and the Democratic Left Alliance.

In questions concerning the role of regional representatives, all the responding Lubelskie councillors (100%) found their most important task to be defining the region's policy priorities. 80% declared that representing the residents of the region was very important, while 60% indicated that representing the views and interests of minority groups was important. Half of those responding (50%) defined mediation in conflicts existing in regional communities as fairly important. Assessing their influence on defining the region's policy priorities, the councillors saw it as high (50%) or moderate (40%). 40% of the councillors described their capabilities to represent the interests of the residents as high, while 30% viewed these as very high. A clear majority of the councillors believed themselves to represent primarily their own constituency (90%), followed by their region (80%) and finally their political party (40%)<sup>8</sup>.

Describing actors involved in the process of regional governance, the councillors indicated the marshal and the board of the region as the most influential person or body (90% and 70% respectively). Other influential actors in the councillors' assessment included the heads of departments at the marshal's office (80%), the chairman of the assembly (60%) and the Catholic church (50%). Half of the councillors viewed themselves as having a moderate influence on the initiatives taken in the region, while 30% described that influence as high. Just like in Wielkopolskie, the Lubelskie councillors are cognizant of the connections between the different tiers of the state, with 60% noting the influence of regions on municipalities and 50% on counties. Over half of the councillors (60%) perceived a

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<sup>8</sup> More than one answer could be selected.



substantial influence of the EU on the politics of the region. Interestingly, only 30% of the responding councillors agreed that the central government has an influence on the decisions taken in the region.

In the questions concerning regional democracy, the councillors agreed (60%) or partly agreed (40%) that the residents should be actively and directly involved in decisions concerning the affairs of the region. Opinions were divided as to whether the residents should be able to express their opinion before the authorities make a decision, with 40% of the councillors supporting the view that they should, and another 40% selecting the “yes and no” answer. As few as 20% of the councillors partly or completely agreed that councillors should make decisions in accordance with their beliefs, independently of what the opinions of the residents might be. Elections as well as regional and local media were considered the most useful sources of information on the beliefs and opinions of local residents (60% and 50% respectively). Party meetings were described as fairly useful (60%), as were questionnaires surveying the level of residents’ satisfaction (60%).

Just as in Wielkopolskie, the Lubelskie councillors were able to comment on potential reforms of the system of regional governance. The potential introduction of a procedure of consultation, through which the region’s residents could be informed about and comment on the assembly’s proposals, was assessed as necessary (40%) or very necessary (30%). Direct elections of the marshal, who heads the board of the region, proved a controversial notion: 50% of the councillors found it unnecessary, while 40% supported the idea. 30% of the councillors were in favour of the option to recall the marshal in a referendum; the same percentage of councillors found that option unnecessary.

The Lubelskie councillors also note the existence of a complex system of interrelations between political parties and decisions taken at the regional level. On the one hand, most of the respondents (70%) believe that the sitting councillors from a given political party have a substantial influence on the decisions of the regional authorities of that party; on the other, over half of the councillors (60%) see substantial influence being exerted in the reverse direction. The opinion that decisions made at the regional level of the party are influenced by the national party leadership is shared by 40% of the councillors. At the same time the councillors believe that when voting, they should be guided primarily by their own beliefs (50%) or the wishes of the residents of the region (50%). Party discipline was not considered important, with no councillors selecting that option. Like in Wielkopolskie, all the responding councillors expressed the intention to run for re-election (100%), with 20% considering standing for a parliamentary seat.

## **Conclusions**

In many European countries, councillors are described as Janus-like, after the Roman god Janus: on the one hand, they have a responsibility towards the residents and constituency they were elected to represent; on the other, there is an expectation that they will further the interests of their political party (Copus 2003:32). The roles fulfilled by councillors are also affected by historical factors and the institutional context as well as their own beliefs and understanding of local/regional democracy.

Several points need to be emphasized in an analysis of regional-level representation in Poland. Firstly, the top-down creation of regions and regional institutions in 1998, a process in which political parties played a key role, has significantly affected representation at this level. Even today, most councillors are members of major political parties; independent councillors or those representing regional parties are rare. In contrast, most county and municipal representatives have no political party affiliation; this is particularly the case in the latter group. Secondly, regional representatives have always been directly elected, which gives them a greater legitimacy and creates a stronger bond with the electorate. Thirdly, the regional assembly is the body which acquired the right to elect the region's executive - the board and the marshal - and which was given the right to define the region's policy priorities. Furthermore, the regional level of government has dynamically evolved over time, strengthening its position and acquiring new competences. Therefore, considering the institutional factors at work, self-government authorities including councillors can be expected to play an increasingly prominent role in the system of regional governance.

Empirical research conducted in the Wielkopolskie and Lubelskie regions showed that despite the different history and potential of the regions, the councillors from the two assemblies have similar perceptions of their role, which in both cases is viewed as independent of political party affiliation. In both regions, they see themselves predominantly as representatives of the regional community and as administrators responsible for defining the region's policy priorities. Furthermore, both the Wielkopolskie and the Lubelskie councillors viewed themselves as representing first and foremost the residents of their constituency and then those of the whole region. Significantly fewer councillors positioned themselves as local politicians representing primarily their own party. Interestingly, the councillors in both regions do not regard themselves as the leading creators of the region's policies. The marshal, the board of the region and the department heads at the marshal's office were named as more powerful in this respect. Over half of the responding councillors described their influence on operations in the region as moderate. As for multi-level governance, the councillors note first and foremost the influence of the region on the municipalities and of the EU on the regions; they also perceive the influence of regions on the county-level local government.

Expressing their views on regional democracy, the responding councillors from both regions agreed that the residents should actively and directly participate in decisions concerning regional affairs. At the same time, however, they appear to favour traditional means of ascertaining the citizens' opinion, such as elections or meetings, distrusting the institutions of participatory democracy. Furthermore, most of the responding councillors distanced themselves from the idea of electing the marshal in a direct vote, although the idea was not without its supporters in Lubelskie.

Interestingly, the results of the research on the relations between councillors and political parties do not confirm the common belief that councillors are primarily guided by the interest of their parties. They are admittedly aware of the mutual influence of the regional party structures and the party members who are sitting councillors; however, they claim that political party affiliation does not determine their voting behaviour. In both regions, over half of the responding councillors affirmed that voting should be guided first and foremost by a councillor's own beliefs and then by the wishes of residents; party discipline was allotted the least importance in this context. The councillors expressed an intention to either run for re-election to the regional assembly or stand for a seat in the Sejm or Senate.

In conclusion, it has to be emphasized that, while the research cannot be treated as representative owing to the small sample size on which it was conducted, it is nonetheless indicative of certain trends. Regional councillors perceive their roles in a rather traditional way, viewing themselves as first and foremost representatives of the regional community and administrators. They do not, however, see themselves as the most powerful actors in regional governance, nor do they believe that political party affiliation determines their decisions. Interestingly, it seems that the gradual strengthening of the position of regions and the increasing complexity of governance do not appear to influence the councillors' perceptions.

The recent attempts to foster participatory democracy and its institutions in Poland may well force councillors to increase their engagement with citizens, NGOs and other stakeholders of governance. This issue, however, needs further research conducted on a larger sample of respondents.

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## Appendix:

**Table 1: Results of the elections to regional assemblies in 2010**

Party/Committee	% Votes	Number of Seats
Civic Platform (PO)	30,89%	222
Law and Justice (PiS)	23,05%	141
Polish Peasant's Party (PSL)	16,30%	93
Democratic Left Alliance (SLD) and Green 2004	15,20%	85
Electoral committee of Rafał Dutkiewicz	1,64%	9
Electoral committee of Janusz Korwin-Mikke	1,22%	0
Silesian Autonomy Movement	0,97%	3
German Minority	0,4%	6
Other	10,3%	2 <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> - National Community of Local Self-Government: 1 seat in Pomorskie; Self-Government Agreement: 1 seat in Świętokrzyskie

Source: Own calculation on the basis of National Electoral Commission data (Pol. Państwowa Komisja Wyborcza – PKW)

**Table 2: Residents' opinion on the impact of different tiers on the community development (%)**

Impact	Municipal self-government	County self-Government	Regional self-government	Central authorities	UE
To large extend	64	50	40	30	34
To medium extend	25	31	35	27	24
To limited extend	5	8	12	30	28
Hard to say	6	11	12	13	14
Average rating	3.93	3.6	3.4	2.98	3.04

Source: The Centre for Public Opinion Research (Pol. Centrum Badań Opinii Społecznej – CBOS) 2010, Samorządność w Polsce. Bilans dwudziestolecia, [http://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2010/K\\_144\\_10.PDF](http://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2010/K_144_10.PDF) p. 5

**Table 3: Voter turnout in regional assemblies**

Year	1998	2002	2006	2010
Turnout (%)	45.4%	44.23%	45.79%	47.26%

Source: National Electoral Commission data (Pol. Państwowa Komisja Wyborcza – PKW)

**Table 4: Division of seats in Wielkopolskie regional assembly (1998-2010)**

	AWS	LPR	PO	PiS	PSL	Sam.	SLD	SDPL	UW	Ind.
1998	21				5		29		5	
2002		6	8		5	7	13	-		
2006		-	15	12	5	-	7	-	-	
2010			17	6	7		8			1

Source: Nikolski 2008:325; Own calculation on the basis of National Electoral Commission data (Pol. Państwowa Komisja Wyborcza – PKW)

**Table 5: Division of seats in Lubelskie regional assembly (1998-2010)**

	AWS	LPR	PO	PiS	PSL	Sam.	SLD	SDPL	UW	Ind.
1998	20	-	-	-	12	-	16	-	2	
2002	-	7	2		7	8	9	-	-	
2006	-	1	6	11	8	4	3	-		
2010			9	11	9		4			

Source: Nikolski 2008:305; Own calculation on the basis of National Electoral Commission data (Pol. Państwowa Komisja Wyborcza – PKW)