



## SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT UNITS

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**Abstract:** Nowadays local government units are more and more often feeling the need to introduce innovative development methods. Modern strategies are based on the implementation of activities within the confines of sustainable development. The introduction of the principles of sustainable development depends on the will and assumptions of local governments entities. The activities carried out should be directed at the implementation of basic social goals. These activities are associated with a vision in which economic, social and spatial development becomes a priority. Building a development strategy that assumes a stable environment free from major threats is based on the principles derived from the concept of sustainable development. The research goal of this article is to present the role of local government units in the process of implementation of sustainable development strategy.

**Keywords:** local government unit, sustainable development, local development

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### Introduction

Sustainable development is recently becoming a more and more popular idea, based on the following assumption: “think globally, but act locally”. The initiation of sustainable development should begin at the local level, where the major initiative belongs to local government units. The activities of public sector entities in the discussed scope result from the economic functions they perform and statutory obligations.

It is believed that local government units can in the best way possible direct local development to eliminate the main social and economic problems, and ensure the priority of task accomplishments that benefit the entire society. The article aims to identify the role of local government units in the process of implementation of sustainable development strategy. In order to achieve the goal intended, the source literature has been analyzed thoroughly, and the selected aspects of the concept of sustainable development have been identified on the example of Kleszczów commune.

### The concept of sustainable development – the idea and application

Sustainable development (SD) is perceived as “economic development that does not meaningfully violate the living environment of humans, and at the same time reconciles the laws of nature with economic rights” (Górka, Poskrobko, Radecki

1995). SD gives an opportunity to build an affluent society. The prosperity manifests itself in economic growth, technical progress, social development and the improvement of the condition of the natural environment (Borys 2010). A number of various definitions of the concept of sustainable development have been created over the years. A dozen of notions that originate from the point of view of economics (a comprehensive approach to the problem of a long-term ability of current economies to develop), urban planning (satisfying the basic needs of communities, taking future generations into account at the same time) and economic sciences (maximizing the benefits that result from economic development while taking care of natural resources) can be distinguished ([www.popt.2007-2013.gov.pl](http://www.popt.2007-2013.gov.pl); Pabiś 2017, p. 10). Sustainable development means exercising the utmost care to achieve the best economic result while taking into account the natural environment and social development sustenance (Latoszek 2016, p. 25).

The performance of activities within the confines of sustainable development permits positive changes (quantitative and qualitative) in a given area, considering the natural environment and the entire society at the same time (Sekuła 2002, p. 98). Sustainable development is one of the best categories of socio-economic development. Investments in sustainable development:

- improve the comfort of life;
- stop the ongoing degradation of the environment;
- enable economic growth;
- satisfy the development needs of present and future generations;
- ensure rational use of natural resources;
- create tools and develop a policy that facilitates the implementation of existing demands ([www.popt.2007-2013.gov.pl](http://www.popt.2007-2013.gov.pl)).

One of the paramount goals of sustainable development is the perpetual improvement of the quality of life of society. The achievement of this objective is possible thanks to maintaining appropriate proportions among the priority aspects of sustainable development. These include the following aspects (Brzeziński, Zborowski 2013, p. 123):

- social aspect – takes cognisance of the ability of society to raise the standard of living;
- economic aspect – enables the ability to intensify and escalate economic development;
- ecological aspect – related to the ecosystem's ability to regenerate and self-renewal.

Sustainable development should be carried out in such a way that none of these aspects is violated significantly. It stems from the fact that all decisions made in a given area should be environmentally friendly, socially approved and economically efficient. In other words, it is the maintenance of general equilibrium. It is essential to pay attention in particular to the existence of mechanisms that may minimize adverse effects on the natural environment, economy, and society in the current economic processes. The principles of sustainable development postulate that every action should be socially acceptable, ecologically safe and economically viable

([www.irwirpan.waw.pl](http://www.irwirpan.waw.pl)). The discussed concept concerns socio-economic development closely associated with the natural environment, thanks to which a suitable and desirable environment (environment of functioning, life) comes into being in an unlimited perspective (Brzeziński, Zborowski 2013, p. 123).

Both task planning and implementation of goals within the framework of sustainable development are carried out not only by private sector entities but also by public authorities that work for the harmonious development of a given area. The compilation of a strategy based on sustainable development requires a prior analysis of the economy, linear trends and all resources possessed.

### **The role of local government in sustainable development**

The concept of sustainable development is regarded as a response to the uncontrolled economic growth accompanied by natural environmental degradation, particularly massive environmental pollution and depletion of natural resources, as well as a reaction to ignoring the expectations of key stakeholders and social groups (Wielewska 2012, p. 12). The performance of actions taking into account sustainable development allows for detailed planning of socio-economic development, enabling meeting the expectations of residents, that is achieving the desired goal while preserving the principles of environmental protection (Sroka, Pogan 2015, p. 288-289; Strzelecka 2011, p. 665). A valid perception of sustainable development is global. However, its implementation belongs to local units. A key role in this sphere is played by commune units whose tasks are carried out in order to meet the basic needs of residents (Prus, Grabowski 2016, p. 212-213).

The importance of local units in carrying out tasks directed at sustainable development has become even more significant, and has been emphasized in the developed document called "Agenda 21". The document was adopted in Rio de Janeiro in 1992 at a conference organized by ONZ. "Agenda 21" constitutes a set of guidelines that should be enforced in order to pave the way for permanent and sustainable local development (Leśniewski 2010, p. 51; Kauf, Stec 2017, p. 94). In accordance with the provisions contained in the document "Agenda 21" of the role of local authorities in task accomplishment is of overriding importance. The role of local government units is essential from the point of view of creating local development. These units perform many tasks at the same time, for example, create technical and social infrastructure, deal with spatial development, and implement pro-ecological policy. The necessity to fulfill the mission related to maintaining the principles of sustainable development in a given community also rests on local authorities' shoulders. Moreover, local authorities must dialogue with a group of stakeholders and hammer out the best solution together (Lorek 2017, p. 26). The ideas of sustainable development have gained great popularity in most countries belonging to the European Union. The principles of sustainable development have recently become significant also in Poland. These records can be found in the Constitution of Poland (article 5), and in "The Strategy of Sustainable Development for Poland" developed in 1999. The strategy assumes:

- institutional changes;
- introduction of control mechanisms;
- identification of institutions and funds for introducing changes;
- aspects related to environmental management;
- the role of science;
- an indication of the key role of international cooperation in terms of sustainable development, and the necessity to determine indicators essential for sustainable development, enabling effective and efficient planning and monitoring of performed actions (Prus, Grabowski 2016, p. 212-213).

The concept of sustainable development is considered to be an integral part of activities both at the central and local level (local territorial governments carrying out tasks aimed at public utility). Sustainable development is also an integral part of state policy. State authorities facilitate rational and effective actions on economic, social and ecological grounds. The policy of sustainable development should include the following principles (Żylicz 2004, p. 200-202):

- guarantee all citizens equal development and opportunities;
- take cognisance of the natural environment when performing actions (with future generations in mind) – natural environment protection;
- bear in mind the needs of the local community when making decisions by authorities;
- rational use of natural resources;
- nature protection when accomplishing human goals.

The implementation of the concept regarding the principles of sustainable development depends on the standpoint of local authorities. The competences of local government units include the selection of basic priorities and the creation of a direction that makes the sustainable development of a specific local community possible. Local government performs the most crucial function in the accomplishment of activities directed at local development.

### **Sustainable development – Kleszczów commune**

The commune of Kleszczów is a commune located in central Poland, in Łódź Voivodeship. It is situated in Bełchatów County and belongs to rural communes. The open-pit Bełchatów Brown Coal Mine is localised on the premises of the Kleszczów commune. The open-pit mine workings of Pole “Bełchatów” have a substantial impact on the current structure and spatial development of the commune. The mining areas cover 1852 hectares of the commune’s area. Industrial buildings regarding the power plant and the brown coal mine are also concentrated in this commune. There is a clear spatial division in the commune, which divides the areas of the commune into economic-industrial and residential-recreational parts. The division is conducive to maintaining spatial order in the commune.

The commune authorities are anxious to face up to the principles of sustainable development. They strive to maintain a favorable demographic situation, pursuing

at the same time an active housing policy of the authorities, and they attempt to perpetuate a significant share of investment and building grounds. Moreover, they strive for “Kleszczów commune to be a leader of a sustainable, intelligent development in Poland, offering the best working, housing, and investing conditions, as well as constituting a developing recreation centre over the developing Jezioro Kleszczowskie”.

The commune of Kleszczów foregrounds the accomplishment of the socio-economic goal in the first place. These actions are directed at developing investments and undertaking actions enabling the development of education and entrepreneurship (*Figure 1*).



**Figure 1. The development of the commune of Kleszczów**

Source: (Program Rozwoju Gminy Kleszczów ...)

*Figure 1* above presents the relations of activities affecting the development of the commune. Important factors are the external capital and utilizing the internal potential of the commune. Year by year in the commune of Kleszczów the number of manufacturing enterprises is increasing, mainly from the construction industry. This is caused by the availability of cheap minerals and energy, well-qualified staff and the intensive development of infrastructure. Investors operating in Kleszczów can count on considerable privileges, such as tax reliefs, public aid (up to 70%), low media and energy prices, professional formal and legal assistance and financial support that enables training for new employees. Tourist development of the areas where brown coal deposits are mined belongs to the key plans of the Kleszczów commune. In the future, it is also planned to create water reservoirs to facilitate the establishment of presentable terrains of domestic and transnational range.

The commune of Kleszczów is an area with numerous environmental threats. These threats are prompted by the industry, energy sector, and the still increasing car traffic. Production companies, power plant, and coal mine cause high emissions of pollutants, gases, and dust. The authorities are constantly monitoring geological threats, taking into consideration the risks associated with water depletion of the

discussed area. One of the largest pollution emitters in the commune (Bełchatów Power Plant) reduces pollution from year-to-year thanks to devices that reduce dust emission, as well as appliances that allow desulfurization of flue gases. There is a necessity to expand installations that would effectively protect the natural environment in the commune. The general state of the environment in Kleszczów commune is assessed as average and requires a number of repair programs. Both local and private government entities of the Kleszczów commune will undertake in the coming years numerous investments aimed at environmental protection.

On November 6, 2017, at an academic conference in Warsaw on “Sustainable socio-economic development of local government units”, the commune of Kleszczów won first place in the Ranking of Sustainable Development of Local-Government Units. Kleszczów became a laureate among rural communes in Poland. The ranking was compiled on the basis of information from the Central Statistical Office. The data developed concerned, among others, investment projects expenditures, number of economic entities, net migration rate and the number of people employed ([www.kleszczow.pl](http://www.kleszczow.pl)).

The commune of Kleszczów has set a number of long-term strategic goals in order to maintain the position of a leader of sustainable development. These goals are related to the following activities:

- education and science development;
- increase in the quality and standard of life of residents;
- creation of a recreation center;
- attracting investments, developing infrastructure and local entrepreneurship.

The commune introduced a number of activities when implementing these objectives, which are presented in *Table 1* below (including the financing method).

**Table 1. Selected programs implemented in the commune of Kleszczów in order to maintain the leading position of sustainable development**

Activities	Investment priorities	Source of financing
1. “Najłatwiejszy pierwszy krok” program – support for new business entities	- competitions for the best business plan; - the election of “business angels”; - joint promotion of “Made in Kleszczów”	- commune budget; - FRGK resources; - EU funds; - internal funds of private units
2. Support for existing companies	- financial support for business; - facilitating premises for rent; - business services development	- commune budget; - FRGK resources; - EU funds; - internal funds of private units
3. Spatial development	- the creation of criteria for the evaluation of offers and the execution of policy towards investors	- commune budget; - EU funds; - internal resources
4. The sustenance of energy production potential in the commune	- site preparation; - cooperation with the EKOenergy cluster; - energy production development with new sources	- commune budget; - EU funds; - internal resources

5. The improvement of transport accessibility of the commune of Kleszczów	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- roads building;</li> <li>- cooperation with neighboring communes;</li> <li>- modernization of the Piotrków Trybunalski – Zarzecze railway line</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- company resources;</li> <li>- State Treasury;</li> <li>- commune budget</li> </ul>
6. Education development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- the creation of a concept for the development of education;</li> <li>- the establishment of vocational school;</li> <li>- “talent” incubator</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- commune budget</li> </ul>
7. The development of scientific and research activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- the organization of Science and Culture Festivals;</li> <li>- the appointment of a group of ambassadors for the development of the commune of Kleszczów</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- commune budget;</li> <li>- UE funds (within the Smart Growth Operational Programme – SG OP);</li> <li>- private funds (and the grant-aid from the “Horizont2020” program</li> </ul>
8. Housing construction development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- a fast pace of communal, individual and rental construction</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- government programs, e.g., rental housing fund;</li> <li>- internal resources;</li> <li>- commune budget;</li> </ul>
9. Community mobilization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- the creation of a social benefits model;</li> <li>- the creation of meeting-places for residents</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- commune budget</li> </ul>
10. The creation of the New Commune Centre	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- spatial development coverage</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- commune budget</li> </ul>
11. The creation of touristic and holiday offers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- tourism strategy development compilation;</li> <li>- touristic promotion of the commune</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- internal resources; (attracting investors)</li> <li>- commune budget</li> </ul>
12. Activities for environmental protection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- “Wspieraj środowisko – oszczędzaj energię” program;</li> <li>- “Kup sadzonki” program</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- commune budget;</li> <li>- UE funds and grant-aids</li> </ul>

Source: Own study based on (Program Rozwoju Gminy Kleszczów ...)

The implementation of the above-mentioned activities will help the commune of Kleszczów to attract new investments, develop entrepreneurship, education and science, improve the quality of life of residents, and allow the commune to be perceived as a leisure center. The planned costs for the execution of the designated activities by 2020 amount to over PLN 126 million, of which the largest amount is estimated to be spent on activities associated with education and science (over PLN 50 million). Despite the fact that the commune of Kleszczów intends to incur large expenditures in order to maintain the position of a leader of sustainable development, such investments will enable a better life of the local community, and allow for a simultaneous economic, environmental and social development.

Detailed actions, which make it possible to follow the principles of sustainable development in the Kleszczów commune are developed in “*Program rozwoju Gminy Kleszczów do roku 2020*”, and in “*Długookresowa Strategia Rozwoju Gminy Kleszczów 2030+*”. An association called “*Stowarzyszenie na rzecz Zrównoważonego Rozwoju Gminy Kleszczów*” was established in the commune in order to make rational decisions regarding the region.

The commune executes many projects that are directed at the improvement of the condition of the natural environment. Significant contributions in this sphere are possible thanks to the received UE funding on targeted projects, and various forms of nature protection (“Łuszczanowice” nature reserve, a nature park “Dolina Widawki” and six ecological lands). Due to the complexity of sustainable development actions, the commune is unable to handle simultaneously all the activities resulting from this concept (these actions are related to irreversible landscape distortions, large amounts of waste, soil contamination, noise, serious industrial degradation and electromagnetic radiation). Despite a number of obstacles and barriers, the commune of Kleszczów advances in a consistent way, compatible with the priority assumptions of sustainable development, and introduces a number of new solutions (it constantly develops technical infrastructure devices, creates new workplaces, carries out research and scientific activities, undertakes activities that are associated with environmental protection, such as a resource-efficient, low-emission economy, creates environmental knowledge bases, uses renewable energy sources, and carries out pro-ecological investments). It is essential to remember that the implementation of the idea of sustainable development in full measure requires a lot of time and effort of all entities. The local government has a significant impact on sustainable development in commune units. The analysis carried out allowed a number of important conclusions to be formulated:

- local government units carrying out basic tasks greatly influence the level of development and the execution of the primary assumptions of sustainable development in a given area;
- proper use of financial resources by local authorities meaningfully stimulates local development (improper disposal of financial resources may completely impede development);
- current actions of local government units are directed at investments related to technical infrastructure, which is the determinant of changes in the economic and ecological sphere of sustainable development. The results of these actions are capital barriers, especially limited financial capabilities and significant long-term neglects in local infrastructure;
- financial measures for the development of technical infrastructure are more popular than expenditures on the development of culture, recreation or social infrastructure;
- most of the commune units have a developed strategy for sustainable development;
- local government units do not fully take into account the principles of sustainable development. Such state of affairs results either from the lack of knowledge of



the rules, or the unawareness of the concepts of sustainable development and related responsibilities;

- most communes do not inform or consult with the group of stakeholders (especially the local community) when implementing the planned activities;
- authorities of the commune are more and more often trying to disseminate specific strategic assumptions among the local community.

It can be concluded that local government units play an important role in implementing the principles of sustainable development. The actions of local governments enable the increase in social prosperity among local residents. Local government units as a result of the implementation of statutory tasks (own and commissioned) decide on the degree of performance of activities in the ecological, social and economic areas, as well as on the development of local governments in a fully integrated and sustainable way (Katoła 2011, p. 60-61).

## **Conclusions**

The concept of sustainable development is considered to be a multifaceted and complex issue. It enables the implementation of the basic economic and ecological goals (economic growth, environmental protection and sustainable development require a series of activities in all spheres of social life meeting residents' expectations). Successful and effective deployment of the idea of sustainable development requires a series of activities in all spheres of social life (Kubus 2013, p. 112-113; Paluch, Sroka 2013). Year by year the role of local authorities in creating sustainable development increases systematically. The competences of commune governments include spatial order assurance, infrastructure management and the supply of services enabling harmonious functioning of local communities. The activities within the framework of sustainable development are aimed at the execution of social goals and objectives (Rzeszutko-Piotrowska 2013, p. 160).

Even though sustainable development has significantly gained in popularity in recent years, local government authorities still face many relevant problems in its implementation. These include, among others:

- shortage of financial resources that would enable the implementation of the principles of sustainable development;
- lack of control and monitoring after implementing the idea of SD;
- lack of specific knowledge about the principles and main assumptions of sustainable development;
- deficiency of documents that should contain a clear aim and actions within the strategy of sustainable development;
- not taking into account all the aspects of sustainable development policy by local government units.

Problems faced by local governments when introducing the rudiments of sustainable development do not diminish the overall interest in this concept. Polish local government units undertake a number of actions in the social, economic and environmental areas at the same time. A noticeable improvement in the interest,

and later in the implementation of the idea of sustainable development can be pointed out.

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**Streszczenie:** W obecnych czasach jednostki samorządu terytorialnego coraz częściej odczuwają potrzebę wprowadzania innowacyjnych metod rozwoju. Nowoczesne strategie bazują na realizacji działań w ramach koncepcji zrównoważonego rozwoju. Wprowadzenie zasad zrównoważonego rozwoju uzależnione jest od woli oraz założeń organów należących do samorządów lokalnych. Prowadzone działania powinny być ukierunkowane na realizację podstawowych celów społecznych. Działania te związane są z wizją, w której priorytetem staje się rozwój gospodarczy, społeczny oraz przestrzenny. Budowa strategii rozwoju, która zakłada istnienie stabilnego otoczenia pozbawionego głównych zagrożeń, opiera się na zasadach wywodzących się z koncepcji zrównoważonego rozwoju. Celem artykułu jest wskazanie roli jednostek samorządu terytorialnego w procesie wdrażania strategii zrównoważonego rozwoju. Aby zrealizować zamierzony cel, poddano szczegółowej analizie literaturę przedmiotu oraz zidentyfikowano wybrane aspekty koncepcji zrównoważonego rozwoju na przykładzie gminy Kleszczów.

**Słowa kluczowe:** jednostka samorządu terytorialnego, zrównoważony rozwój, rozwój lokalny