

Małgorzata Madej

University of Wrocław (Poland)

ORCID: 0000-0002-5274-8614

e-mail: malgorzata.madej@uwr.edu.pl

Ancillary Units as a Tool of Sublocal Governance in the Polish Major Cities

Abstract: After the post-communist transition, decentralisation and subsidiarity have become one of Poland's major principles of political organisation. Moreover, especially the original 1990 reform and establishment of self-governing communes are regarded as a success story, not only in improving the quality of governance and public service provision but also in the civil society and citizen participation, as evidenced by the development of modern urban movements. The article explores legal possibilities for further decentralisation of municipalities, analysing the role of ancillary units in regional capitals. Ancillary units in Poland have developed differently in the countryside and urban communes. Relying on publicly available information and data provided by the respective municipal offices, the article describes the ancillary units' statutory role, competencies, and actual activities. The findings enable the assessment of the application of the sublocal decentralisation solution in Polish cities and the identification of its benefits and shortcomings.

Keywords: *decentralisation, municipalities, ancillary units, Poland, territorial self-government, governance, community building, participation*

Introduction

Discussion on decentralisation is widespread in the modern scientific literature, referring to variable issues including good governance, efficiency, participation or subsidiarity. It is frequently explored within the framework of multi-level governance within international integration systems. Another important question concerns the bottom limit of decentralisation: how far devolution of responsibilities should go to keep the decision-making and policy implementation systems effective and efficient. In Poland, the main tier of self-government is the communal level (*gmina*). However, provisions of law allow for further division of communes into sublocal entities referred to as ancillary units.

The paper focuses on decentralisation, exploring its sublocal dimension in Poland. The objective of the presented study is to analyse how major cities in Poland apply these provisions and what contributions are brought into the municipal governance by the ancillary units. The current condition of the ancillary units analysed based on materials published and provided by the respective municipal offices is compared to the functions typology introduced by Swianiewicz, Krukowska, Lackowska and Kurniewicz (Swianiewicz et al., 2013).

The paper begins by discussing decentralisation which is the central theoretic concept and starting point of the analysis. Within this framework, I present the role sublocal units may play in municipal governance and community building, also referring to the legal provisions on ancillary units in Poland. The next section discusses the applied methods and obtained findings. Finally, the findings are discussed and conclusions provided.

Decentralisation

Decentralisation is an important process in modern governance (al Farid Uddin, 2018), in terms of increasing efficiency (Mukrimin, 2018, p. 233), transparency and accountability in governance (Faguet, 2011), as well as the legitimacy of the authorities (Olum, 2014, p. 24). The establishment and empowerment of local governments are perceived by many scholars as a major element of democratisation (Saito, 2008, p. 2), and nowadays – as a way to oppose the populist tendencies of democratic backslide (Sześciło, 2019, p. 18). Poland is also one example of a state where populist central authorities are confronted by local and regional representatives of opposition or local and regional movements. The establishment of the self-government and its evolution is described as one of the major successes of the post-communist transformation (Levitas, 2018).

Decentralisation brings clear benefits to the community and its self-government, allowing for customisation and adaptation of policies to local conditions: “Once again, this affords local leaders greater flexibility to make the most of local opportunities” (Longlands & Round, 2021, p. 4), and for broader inclusion of diverse interests in policy making: “In fact, all forms of decentralisation have a conflict reduction and ethnic cohesion rule in multi-ethnic societies, by consenting different groups to involve in the political decision-making and the administration of local affairs including the development and empowerment of groups and their areas. Under a decentralised system, minorities and regionally concentrated groups will also be treated equally and empowered with political, administrative and financial powers in their local affairs” (Yusoff et al., 2016, pp. 55–56). Devolution has also been shown to lead to administration downsizing (Makreshanska-Mladenovska & Petrovski, 2019, pp. 54–55) and financial savings: “Results suggest that some municipalities could manage their resources more efficiently if they were granted more power. Although these decentralised economies do not emerge for all municipalities, their magnitude overshadows the diseconomies found if downscaling of decision making goes too far and least decentralised municipalities dominate” (Balaguer-Coll et al., 2010, p. 572).

However, the cons of decentralisation should be taken into account, too, including fragmentation of policies (Tomaney, 2016, p. 7). It is still important to consider the best possible degree of devolution of competencies for the particular system in this context. Decentralisation should strive to establish a balanced and sustainable system, considering all the circumstances and characteristics of the particular environment: “The elusive goal of an ‘optimal’ level of decentralisation has kept researchers engaged with an examination of causes and effects of government decentralisation with varying methodologies and data” (Goel et al., 2017, p. 181). It has been stressed that the achievement of advantages of decentralisation depends on a range of factors (Robinson, 2007, p. 15; Smoke, 2015). Sometimes the outcomes of decentralisation may be disappointing, as the process itself is not a guaranteed success: “In the past decade, decentralisation has faded from the policy agenda in the postsocialist [Central and Eastern European] countries, raising questions about the relationship between the related principles of democracy and efficiency and the persistence of inequalities in the region” (Loewen, 2018, p. 118). Without the right system of responsibility division matched with sufficient resources and competencies, regional or local authorities may be counter-effective.

As a specific form of local self-government, urban governance has become an important subject of research (Lukas, 2019), also in terms of its innovative potential in governance (Mukhtar-Landgren et al., 2019, pp. 1–3) and promotion of participative governance (Gräv- ingholt et al., 2006, p. 26). However, the decentralisation of metropolitan areas is usually associated with mega-metropolises (Gómez-Álvarez et al., 2017), while in Poland, only one city exceeds the official number of one million residents.

Poland has a three-tier system of self-government with sixteen provinces on the regional level, 314 districts on the subregional level and 2,477 communes on the local level (Samorzząd terytorialny w Polsce – JST dataset). However, some communes also establish ancillary units – smaller entities with no legal personality, which perform some tasks for the communes on the sub-local level. They may act as an additional tier of decentralisation. However, their actual role is controversial, given their narrow responsibilities and low recognisability (Swianiewicz et al., 2013). Therefore, the paper’s objective is to compare the functioning of sub-local ancillary units within the Polish self-government in the selected cases of the major cities (province capitals).

Role of Sublocal Units in Governance and Community Building

One of the objectives of decentralising local governance to the sublocal level involves the economic efficiency of governance in line with the principle of subsidiarity (Lopatka, 2019). Similarly, the World Bank’s definition provides “more effective policy implementation, better management of resources, strengthened service delivery, openness, and transparency” (Governance Overview). It thus serves as a tool for better allocation of scarce resources, more focused spending and adaptation of local policies to diverse needs within the local

community. These issues are relevant in all types of communes – either in rural communities spread over larger territory and functioning in multiple, separate villages, or in metropolises where living conditions, needs, and interests differ between different quarters, especially in the centre-periphery continuum.

This issue is also related to the legitimacy of local decisions, as the “smaller the population of a government, the greater the influence of an individual voter on budget choices; the larger the local government, the less likely it is that local voters will see their preferences matched by budget outcomes” (Bahl, 2013, p. 86). Thus, citizens are more aware of their impact on local decision-making and more willing to participate in the process and control it, contributing to increased transparency and accountability (Bojanic, 2018, p. 3). It is also an important mechanism for encouraging participatory and deliberative governance within communities.

The other area of benefits of sublocal decentralisation involves the potential for community building available to such units. Therefore, smaller units may become a response to the modern challenges of globalisation and alienation observed particularly – although not uniquely – in cities. As urban governance is undergoing immense transformation, facing variable challenges (Skeltcher, 2013), communities return to the historical concept of the right to the city. Community building may have various aspects: “by building community in individual neighbourhoods: neighbours learning to rely on each other, working together on concrete tasks that take advantage of new self-awareness of their collective and individual assets and, in the process, creating human, family, and social capital that provides a new base for a more promising future” (Kingsley et al., 1997, p. 3). Therefore, it is focused on individual inhabitants of the area and on providing them with a possibility to satisfy various group- and affiliation-related needs.

Community building can be based on various activities and measures that involve members of a given community, such as one-time or regular meetings, hobby clubs, training, offers for all inhabitants, such as picnics, or specific group, e.g., children or senior citizens etc. (Lazarus et al., 2017, p. 5). Building relations and bonds between residents increase the social capital and cohesion of the community. Although the measures taken are not necessarily related to local policies and authorities, a stronger community is an important component of efficient governance.

Ancillary Sublocal Units in the Polish Local Government

The Act on Communal Government (Act on Communal Government, 1990) provides for various forms of civic participation in local self-government to improve governance and enhance decentralisation. Ancillary units are mentioned in chapter 2 (“Scope of responsibilities and competencies of communes”) in this context, in item 17 of art. 7, listing among the self-governments tasks: “support and promotion of the concept of self-governance, including by creating conditions for operations and development of ancillary units and by

the implementation of programmes to stimulate civic activity” (Act on Communal Government, 1990, art. 7). This provision creates a clear framework, making ancillary units rather a part of community building processes than an element of municipal administration, even though communes are not restricted in planning tasks and devolving competencies to sublocal entities as “development of the scope of operations of ancillary units, terms of handover of property components for use and terms of provision of budgetary assets for the units’ performance of their tasks” is an unrestricted responsibility of the communal council. The provisions are more precise in the case of institutional organisation of such units. In a village (*sołectwo*), resolutions are taken by the village assembly and in a quarter (*dzielnica*) an elected council should be established. In the case of a borough (*osiedle*) either solution can be applied. Interestingly, if a commune chooses another name for its ancillary units, they are treated as a different form of unit, thus earning more freedom in shaping the institutional solutions.

According to the same Act, the “organisation and scope of responsibilities of ancillary units are defined by the communal council by way of a separate statute upon consultations with inhabitants”. This provision, too, leaves much freedom to the local authorities. However, it also refers to consultations with residents, highlighting the possibility and need to involve local activists who may express interests and needs specific to particular regions of the commune. According to H. Izdebski (2015, p. 224), “if ancillary units are exclusively a ‘top-down’ form of deconcentration of performance of communal organs’ tasks, it becomes almost automatic [...] that operation of ancillary units of uniform organisation cover the entire town. On the other hand, if ‘bottom-up’, ‘community’ aspects are considered, one cannot assume uniformity of ancillary units’ structures”. To put it more broadly, the responsibilities, competencies and framework shaped by the ancillary units’ statute may reflect a vision behind their establishment. Considering that ancillary units do not hold a legal personality (Augustyniak, 2010), this vision must be shaped or negotiated with the respective communal authorities.

Sublocal Units in Polish Metropolises

Most Polish major cities have established sublocal ancillary units. In most cases, they refer to traditional divisions and estates, and only exceptionally the administrative division was developed to respond to current needs (most notably in Zielona Góra). Ancillary units’ existence and operation are regulated by resolutions of respective municipal councils and supervised by designated municipal offices. Since the ancillary units appear in those cities, performing some tasks, incurring costs and affecting the sublocal communities, a question about their place in a broader framework of city governance needs to be asked.

Objective of the Study and Materials

The paper presents the findings of an original study. Its objective was to identify the characteristics of the ancillary unit systems in the selected Polish major cities to identify patterns and differences in a consideration of whether they serve a specific goal of enhancing the local governments' governance potential and quality. It was designed to verify the hypothesis that despite the developing and successful decentralisation in Poland, ancillary units in Poland's major cities do not have a clearly defined role and mission within municipal governance.

The study concerned capitals of provinces (regions), excluding the capital city of Warsaw, covered by separate legal provisions. Two province capital cities, Kielce in Świętokrzyskie province and Gorzów Wielkopolski in Lubuskie have not established ancillary units (although the latter was considered a respective project in the 2010s). Thus, the study included 16 cities in 14 provinces (two provinces have two capitals).

Table 1. Cities covered by the study

City	Province	Population in 2019
Białystok	Podlaskie	297 554
Bydgoszcz	Kujawsko-Pomorskie	348 190
Gdańsk	Pomorskie	470 907
Gorzów Wielkopolski	Lubuskie	123 609
Katowice	Śląskie	292 774
Kraków	Małopolskie	779 115
Lublin	Lubelskie	339 784
Łódź	Łódzkie	679 941
Olsztyn	Warmińsko-Mazurskie	171 979
Opole	Opolskie	128 035
Poznań	Wielkopolskie	534 813
Rzeszów	Podkarpackie	196 208
Szczecin	Zachodniopomorskie	401 907
Toruń	Kujawsko-Pomorskie	201 447
Wrocław	Dolnośląskie	642 869
Zielona Góra	Lubuskie	141 222

Source: Bank Danych Lokalnych, Statistics Poland, www.bdl.stat.gov.pl

Information provided directly by the respective municipal offices (via a public information enquiry) and data published by the municipal authorities allowed exploration of tasks set for ancillary units, their statutory responsibilities, their actual activities, and the scheme of reporting their operations to the city authorities. That, in turn, served to evaluate the potential significance of these units in their current shape for municipal governance and decentralisation, considering whether they serve a specific objective defined by the municipal authorities within a broader strategic management plan.

Facts. Structure of Decentralisation of Polish Major Cities and Statutes of Ancillary Units

The ancillary units' system in Polish cities differs in terms of its overall organisation, history and declared visions, and viability of the units themselves.

There are no patterns concerning the history of the creation of ancillary units. In Gdansk establishment of the 35 quarters was determined by bottom-up initiatives of sublocal communities, but the ancillary units play an opinion-giving role, initiating measures important for their inhabitants. A special measure was taken to encourage participation in the sublocal elections: the level of funding depends on the voter turnout in quarter council elections (the lowest rate for turnover below 14% and the highest for turnover above 16%). In Łódź, the establishment of its 36 boroughs was preceded by consultations with sublocal communities, while in Olsztyn, the municipal council resolved to establish 23 boroughs, but the process was based on the binding legal acts on local government rather than on local consultations. Szczecin has 37 boroughs, established early during the post-communist transformation, with no consultations preceding the decision or demarcation. They range from fewer than 900 inhabitants to over 23,000. Similarly, in Wrocław, the smallest borough has 500 inhabitants, while the largest – almost 35,000. Even though the quarters were established in Lublin two decades later, the Municipal Office holds no documentation on the city's division and whether it was consulted with the sublocal communities. In Zielona Góra, contrarily, the establishment of ancillary units was an important element of a broader process and consequence of a fusion between the city itself and the neighbouring rural commune in 2015; thus, a complex system was created with the former urban commune part not covered by ancillary units, and the former rural part including a single quarter divided into 17 villages. In most cases, however, it may be concluded that the development of boroughs in Polish cities was rather a spontaneous process – either bottom-up or top-down – than a considered scheme aimed to achieve specific goals.

It is reflected in the lack of vision concerning the role of boroughs in particular cities. While the statutes of Bydgoszcz quarters define their objective as “striving to satisfy needs of members of its community and cooperating with Municipal self-government to that end”, their actual competencies suggest a much less prominent role, focused on support for sublocal initiatives and providing advice for municipal authorities, also by communicating interests of residents of the quarters. Katowice established 22 units (without a special name, referred to in documents simply as “ancillary units”), and their role is to ensure conditions for citizens to fully participate in the consideration of issues relevant to their unit. However, their independent role as creators of sublocal policies and decision-makers is very limited, as reflected in their financial competencies: according to the statute, the ancillary units spend resources on administrative needs of the units themselves, culture, sports or recreation events, and implementation of tasks entrusted by the municipal authorities.

Characteristically, even when cities establish ancillary units, this is not always a viable solution. Białystok has established boroughs, but new elections were not held after the expiry of the borough councils' term in 2018. Thus, the borough system was discontinued and did not operate in practice. In Opole, there have been established 13 quarters, but only 12 of them are active, as there are not enough candidates for the thirteenth one's council. Similarly, in Rzeszów, out of 30 boroughs, three do not operate as no borough authorities were chosen due to too low voter turnout. In Toruń, out of the thirteen established circles, only seven operated after the 2016 elections. The others were not appointed due to the insufficient number of candidates or too low voter turnout at circle assemblies.

Kraków is one of the cities with the broadest competencies assigned to ancillary units. The statutes of 2014 that define responsibilities and borders of the 18 quarters had been developed in consultations with citizens. Another exception concerns Poznań, which has 42 boroughs, and although uniform statute provisions are a standard solution, there are some differences between statutes, adapting them to the specific needs of the boroughs and sublocal communities.

With few exceptions, the overall framework of ancillary units in the studied cities is similar, and their objectives are strictly limited. Sublocal activists have rarely initiated the establishment and operation of ancillary units. However, it requires a combination of the will of municipal authorities and some involvement of the unit's community, at least in terms of candidates for participation in ancillary units' institutions, if not a participation in the elections itself. It is certainly a big challenge for the sublocal units of the major Polish cities, as shown by the voter turnout in sublocal elections.

Table 2. Voter turnout at sublocal elections

City	Voter turnout
Gdańsk	11.63%-37.64% (2019 elections of quarter councils)
Katowice	8.52% (2019 elections of ancillary units' councils)
Kraków	12.14% in quarter elections in 2014, a sharp fall from 34.54% in 2014
Lublin	2.6%-18.97%, excluding 6 quarters where the elections were not held, as the number of candidates did not exceed the number of seats (quarter elections in 2019)
Łódź	1.45-26.31% (borough elections in 2019)
Opole	7.049% (quarter elections in 2019)
Poznań	3.32%-27.04% (borough elections in 2019), however notably the voter turnout grew between 2011 and 2019
Rzeszów	1.9% (borough elections 2019)
Szczecin	6.5% (borough elections 2019)
Wrocław	5.5% (borough elections 2017)
Zielona Góra	21% (quarter elections 2019), 15.3% (village elections 2019)

Source: Original development of data provided by the municipal offices.

Among those cities that have introduced ancillary units, a vast majority organised them on the entire territory except for Zielona Góra. The municipalities have developed templates for statutes to be uniformly applied in all ancillary units, and the only exception involves the city of Poznań, where slight modifications were introduced in individual statutes. This uniformity of statutes is a solution that has the benefit of easier management of the units, as all are vested with the same competencies and responsibilities. It also provides a framework and sometimes encouragement for units which lack active participation. On the other hand, however, this limits the possibility of incorporating differences between particular parts of the city in the legal framework and restricts the diversity management potential of the ancillary units system. Especially in the case of large cities, as discussed herein, discrepancies between challenges faced by the city centres vs suburbs may render uniform statutes inefficient. At the same time, this may encourage cooperation between different ancillary units, if they want to persuade municipal authorities to modify the statutes – such a situation occurred in Wrocław.

Table 3. Uniform vs different status of ancillary units

Uniform statutes for all ancillary units	All city covered by ancillary units	Bydgoszcz (22 boroughs) Gdansk (35 quarters) Katowice (22 ancillary units) Kraków (18 quarters) Lublin (27 quarters) Łódź (36 boroughs) Olsztyn (23 boroughs) Opole (13 quarters) Rzeszów (30 boroughs) Szczecin (37 boroughs) Wrocław (48 boroughs)
	Only part of the city covered by ancillary units	Zielona Góra
Different statutes for particular ancillary units	Poznań (37 uniform borough statutes, and special provisions in five, three concerning the further subdivision of boroughs; one providing for the establishment of a senior citizens' borough council; one defining special electoral rule for a borough established through the fusion of two boroughs).	

Source: Original development of data provided by the municipal offices.

Findings. Responsibilities of the Ancillary Units

Analysis of Responsibilities

In most cases, responsibilities assigned to ancillary units in Polish cities are scarce (Table 4). In order to classify them into uniform categories, statutes of ancillary units were analysed, considering especially chapters concerning the structure and competencies of ancillary

units, their objectives, responsibilities of their organs, tasks assigned to ancillary units and forms of their implementation. The content of the chapters was identified by their titles. The author coded particular provisions and created and extended the list of categories.

As a result, the following general categories of responsibilities were defined:

- assisting municipal authorities in their responsibilities
 - organisation of the municipal consultation processes (e.g., “The Quarter’s responsibilities include [...] participation in organising and holding social consultations” – the statute of Lublin quarter §5.11).
 - issuing opinions on matters important for the cities (such as investment plans, budgetary plans, permits to sell alcohol, etc.) (e.g. “Issuing opinions on matters concerning the Borough, including especially: 1) study of land use conditions and directions for the city and local spatial development plans for the Borough, as well as their amendments, 2) changes of street names and introduction of new names in the Borough, 3) other draft resolutions submitting for opinion” – the statute of Rzeszów borough, §19.4).
 - participation in the handover of investments (e.g., “The Borough takes part in the implementation of the City’s tasks by [...] cooperation with real estate administrators within the Borough with respect to the management and diligent maintenance of the municipal property, indicating the necessary priority repairs, participation in receipt of completed works” – the statute of Łódź borough, §5.7).
- initiating changes at the sublocal level
 - motions concerning investments (e.g., “The Borough implements its tasks especially by: 1) motioning for inclusion of measures concerning the Borough’s territory in the municipal budget” – the statute of Poznań borough, § 9.1.1).
 - counselling for municipal authorities (e.g., “The responsibilities of the [circle] council include representing residents of the circle and expressing their needs by [...] issuing opinions concerning motions and claims by residents of the circle upon request of the Municipal Council. Municipal Council commissions, Mayor, or claimant” – the statute of Toruń circles, § 4.1.f).
- personnel issues
 - participation in the appointment of school headmasters or managers of other municipal units (e.g., “The scope of the Quarter’s responsibilities includes [...] participation in commissions [...] at recruitment competitions to select directors of municipal units operating in the Quarter, in accordance to the Mayor’s regulation” – the statute of Kraków quarter, §3.5.a).
- community building
 - support for residents’ initiatives (e.g., “The Borough self-government shall especially [...] support and initiate measures in favour of the local community and its integration” – the statute of Bydgoszcz borough, § 7.9)

- organisation of sublocal events (e.g., “Responsibilities of the [Ancillary Unit] Council include especially [...] initiation and organisation of cultural, sporting or recreation events and local celebrations” – the statute of Katowice ancillary unit, §6.9).
- organisation of regular activities for the residents (especially children and the elderly) (e.g., “The scope of the [Quarter] Council responsibilities includes [...] organisation of various forms of cultural, sporting and recreation, and other activities aimed at integrating the local community” – the statute of Opole quarter, §6.2.3).

Thus, ancillary units generally serve communication purposes, mostly collecting residents’ opinions via official consultation or informal channels and providing them to the municipal authorities. Top-down communication is present, too, but this is visibly a less important task, possibly because municipal authorities find it easier to spread information directly with modern online communication tools. Communication may also take the form of issuing opinions and providing advice to the municipal authorities, although it should be stressed that the voice of ancillary units is not a binding one. Consulting ancillary units on matters concerning their sublocal communities may be voluntary or obligatory for the city, but after the opinion is submitted, sublocal activists hardly have any tools to enforce it. Except for borough or quarter funds applied in Kraków, decisions made by ancillary units in Opole, Zielona Góra (village fund), and Wrocław are rarely final. Unlike the countryside, ancillary units do not perform administrative tasks in the analysed Polish cities.

Table 4. Statutes of the ancillary units (includes cities with operating ancillary units systems)

City	Tasks	Tools
Bydgoszcz	striving to satisfy the needs of members of its community and cooperating with Municipal self-government to that end	organising consultations, issuing opinions, filing motions, cooperation with municipal institutions, support for citizens’ initiatives
Gdansk	representing residents’ interests together with municipal authorities; ensuring and encouraging citizen participation, organising sublocal activities and community integration initiatives, promoting responsibility for the common good	issuing opinions and filing motions with municipal authorities, organising events, support for bottom-up initiatives
Katowice	enhancing citizen participation, initiating and organising sublocal events, applying to the city about issues concerning the unit (e.g., investments, repair, public transport network)	applications to the municipal authorities, including budgetary initiatives, organisation of sublocal events
Kraków	selection planning and evaluation of tasks related to the quarter and its inhabitants (repairs of education facilities; greens; sports and recreation infrastructure; sublocal health and prophylaxis programmes), sublocal events, promoting local governance,	participation in the implementation of the tasks covered by statutes, issuing applications and opinions to municipal authorities, participation in recruitment committees of municipal units within the quarter (including school etc.) and receipt of completed investments

City	Tasks	Tools
Lublin	initiation and organisations of initiatives concerning the quality of life in the quarter, community building and promotion of local government, taking and supporting actions for environmental protection	filing applications with the municipal office, issuing opinions, co-organisation of social consultation processes
Łódź	initiation and organisation of measures to improve the quality of life of the inhabitants, actions aimed at environmental protection, promoting green areas, ensuring order	issuing opinions concerning municipal policies and draft acts, including the budget, cooperation with sublocal community and municipal units, evaluation of municipal institutions operating within the borough
Olsztyn	representation of the borough community, assisting municipal units in public tasks implemented for the borough community	filing applications and issuing opinions for municipal authorities, cooperation with municipal units
Opole	promoting civic society, participation and community integration, initiating and coordinating sublocal initiatives, environmental protection, development of culture and education	filing applications for measures and initiatives for the respective quarter with the municipal authorities, issuing opinions
Poznań	education, transport infrastructure, spatial order, environmental protection, community building	filing lists of investments and projects to be funded by the municipal authorities within the resources assigned to the respective borough, issuing opinions, filing applications for municipal measures, organisation of events and projects
Rzeszów	supporting municipal measures and events, promoting good community functioning, acting for public order, environmental protection, sublocal self-help	initiating measures, issuing opinions, organising events, support in the organisation of municipal consultations
Szczecin	supporting and inspiring local measures to improve quality of life, measures to develop the local community, supporting bottom-up initiatives, cultural events	applications for municipal funding and actions, issuing opinions, cooperation with the city and community
Toruń	representation of the circle's residents and articulation of their needs	organising residents' activities, issuing opinions for municipal authorities, providing municipal authorities with information on the sublocal issues
Wrocław	supporting sublocal initiatives and promoting self-government	issuing opinions and submitting motions concerning municipal investments in their territory; organisation of events
Zielona Góra	management of property handed to the units, village fund, community building and charity works, prevention of natural disasters	initiating measures, consultations, applications to the municipal budget, organisation of events

Source: Original development of data provided by the municipal offices.

In some cities, including Łódź and Wrocław, after the surge of urban movements, the municipal authorities resolved to reform the system of borough governance. The objective of the reform design team in Łódź, appointed in 2020 is comprehensive: “to develop the concepts and propositions concerning the scope of operation of ancillary units of the city of Łódź – boroughs and to prepare drafts for their amended statutes”. In the case of Wrocław, the first objective concerned decentralisation of the decision-making process concerning investments of sublocal impact, and the second one – the new framework of the ancillary units system. It may be a sign of a new trend in which ancillary units would be vested with a more explicit role within the municipal governance system.

Activities of Ancillary Units

The statutes reflect the general vision of the place of ancillary units within the cities. However, the other issue involves the practical application of their provisions. Even uniform statutes can lead to diverse practices, depending on the specific nature and potential of the unit. The actual activities taken depend on the social capital of the sublocal community, involvement of sublocal activists, and their efficiency in promoting the ancillary unit and its interests among the residents on the one hand, and with the municipal authorities on the other. It also involves the sublocal activists’ skills in obtaining municipal funding or striking cooperation with civil society institutions. Exploration of the ancillary units’ activities also served the purpose of verifying how municipalities supervise their ancillary units and whether relevant data are easily available for residents to verify the impact of this part of municipal administration.

While in most respondent cities, ancillary units prepared annual reports of their operations, it is not a general practice for cities to combine those reports into comprehensive documents that would allow the authorities and citizens to make comparisons between particular sublocal councils and – more importantly – to evaluate the overall effectiveness of the municipal decentralisation system.

As an exception, activities taken by Kraków quarters are included in the annual report on the situation of the commune, published online (before 2018 – report on the situation of the city). Expenditure assigned to the quarters amounted in 2019 to almost 0.8% of the entire municipal budget, and more than 23% of the quarters’ expenditure was spent on investments. Areas funded differed notably between quarters, showing that the spending is adapted to specific needs of particular parts of the city. However, transport, environmental protection and education were high on the investment agenda for most quarters, with smaller amounts allocated to investments related to social welfare support, public health, and public security. The city of Poznań, too, includes activities of its boroughs in its annual report published online. Considering the boroughs’ role in the investment budget, the major categories of their expenses in 2019 included roads and collective transport, education, communal management and environmental protection, culture, tourism, and social and

healthcare policies. Like in other cities, Poznań boroughs also organised initiatives for elderly citizens, children, residents with disabilities, sublocal feasts, and events.

In Gdańsk, quarter boards prepare reports, but there is no overall collective report. In their declarations, the boards refer to investments funded by the city at their initiative (especially in the areas of roads and transport or greens), organisation of activities and events for the community, and encouraging and assisting citizen participation in municipal debates and consultations. In Katowice, ancillary units are not obliged to report their activities, which is partially justified because a large portion of their activities concerns commissions by municipal authorities, which are reported on the current basis. However, they are encouraged to submit reports at the end of the unit council's term. The published reports present ancillary units as intermediaries collecting demands and postulates from residents of their area and communicating them to the municipal authorities. Another field of activities involves community building (regular activities for senior residents and youth and one-time feasts and events).

Lublin quarters' presentation of their activities relates mainly to two areas: organisation of social activities for the residents (e.g., courses, training, meetings) and participation in municipal consultative processes, including the civic budget (e.g., promotion of quarter-related civic budget submission). In Łódź, borough councils' resolutions are methodically uploaded to the boroughs' websites, allowing precise assessment of decisions taken and amounts spent. These concern mainly the organisation of sublocal events, either related to celebrations (such as Christmas Eves or children's days) or activities for children and families (such as local feasts and sporting events). While only a few Szczecin boroughs publish their reports online, those that do stress two main areas of their operations. The first one concerns the organisation of local events (feasts, children's days, etc.), while the other is focused on responding to everyday problems and inconveniences observed by the residents. In 2020, the latter group also included pandemic-related assistance.

Opole quarters have funding for their regular operations (from 20 to 40 thousand PLN depending on the population) and investment funding they can apply to the municipal authorities for (at least 100.000 PLN per quarter). A similar solution, with a specific algorithm applied to calculate amounts assigned within the city's budget to particular ancillary units which are authorised to designate investments to be funded within these resources by the city budget, is applied in Łódź and planned Wrocław. In Zielona Góra, village ancillary units received in 2019 the regular funding of 119.960 PLN and the village fund covered the amount of 757.327 PLN. The village fund projects concerned mainly the organisation of events (purchase of equipment for feasts, etc.) and community building (especially equipment for community centres and some playgrounds). Very few projects involved investment in infrastructure (e.g., sidewalks).

The reports and other information published online by the sublocal units show residents' interest in variable individual and cyclical events organised by ancillary units, as evidenced by their participation in such initiatives. They document that many people attend borough

or quarter feasts, charity and social events, and various interest clubs for the elderly and (to a lesser extent) children enjoy significant popularity among target groups. However, they indicate that sublocal units hardly ever play a role in governance or representing communities' interests.

Discussion

In most Polish cities, ancillary units play a limited role, focused on such responsibilities as issuing opinions for the municipal authorities concerning matters of the sublocal community, such as investment, collective transport system, schools etc., initiating repairs, modernisation works, and other investments or changes by filing applications to competent municipal units, assisting municipal authorities in organisation of relevant consultation processes, sometimes also in other administrative tasks. In most cases, they do not take direct responsibility for governance and their role as a part of the municipal administration.

The current findings can be compared to the analysis by Swianiewicz et al. (2013), who defined four potential roles of ancillary units¹:

1. *Herald*: this position concerns activities of ancillary units within top-down communication, informing residents of policies and explaining policies to them. Sublocal governments play this role, but it is not at the centre of sublocal activities or responsibilities. Municipalities have access to diverse – formal and informal – channels of communication with residents, and the low recognisability of ancillary units (as evidenced by low voter turnout in elections) makes them a less promising way of informing citizens. In most studied cities, for ancillary units to act as a herald would require an effort to improve the perception of sublocal units among residents.
2. *Representative*: the opposite role of an intermediary in bottom-up communication is more frequently recorded in sublocal units, which are involved in organising consultations and gathering information from the communities, reporting problems to municipal authorities. It is a very important contribution, improving the identification of challenges and inconveniences experienced and felt by residents. Consequently, municipal interventions can be better planned and fitted to the sublocal specifics. In rare and strictly defined cases, this role takes the form of the *co-decision-maker*, but more frequently, ancillary units act as *consultants* or *lobbyists*. Those forms, however, can easily degenerate into a *figurehead* with ancillary units' opinions expressed but not taken into account in the municipal decision-making process.

¹ The fifth role discussed by Swianiewicz et al., *the political career path* shall not be analysed, as it concerns significance of ancillary units for activists and politicians and not its place within municipal governance.

3. *Mini-local government* is a role which is the least frequent and restricted to very few circumstances, even though legally, municipalities may authorise their ancillary units to resolve individual issues by way of administrative decisions (Dolnicki, 2021, p. 144). In some cities, municipal offices and institutions branches are set outside the city centre, but the ancillary unit system is not used for this purpose (the case of Wrocław).
4. *Animator of local activity* is the most prominent role, with ancillary units acting both as the *organiser* of its own initiatives and the *catalyst* of ideas and projects proposed by sublocal communities and individuals.

Thus, sublocal units play the role of local associations rather than decision-makers and administration. However, with the development of urban movements, reforms are designed and implemented, starting with expanding the decision-making possibilities for ancillary units, which may lead to their expanded and transformed role in the municipal governance system.

Conclusions

A pattern can be observed in ancillary units in the studied cities despite the apparent diversity of solutions and organisation. Most Polish province capitals do not apply municipal decentralisation as an element of strategic governance within the territorial unit. They rather seem to maintain the system as a local tradition than a planned and designed system to achieve objectives that would benefit the commune. With few exceptions (notably Kraków and Zielona Góra), no clear vision or goal for the ancillary units can be observed based on their formal role. The lack of a clear and organised system of reporting and supervision of ancillary units confirms this observation. On the other hand, the sublocal units are weak despite their community-building activities. Their activities are related rather to social animation than administration. It is also the perception of sublocal communities, as evidenced by low voter turnout in sublocal elections. The residents do not treat ancillary unit councils as a tool to influence actual decisions which affect their lives, at best, they use the sublocal units as a lobbying channel, but not necessarily the only or major one. Thus, the study confirmed the original hypothesis that while ancillary units have the potential to affect municipal governance, municipal authorities in most regional capitals lack a general vision of areas in which ancillary units could be useful for the authorities and sublocal communities, or of tools to be applied to implement such a vision.

Since ancillary units are neglected both by the authorities and residents, the key to their development may lie with sublocal activists, and members of the councils. In those cities, where they can use the existing framework to achieve success perceptible to authorities and residents, they may trigger reform. However, such reform would require defining a basic vision and concept of ancillary units, while also considering the need to protect their achievements as sublocal community organisers.

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Gorzów Wielkopolski	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Letter no. WOR-III.1431.168.2020.KAa of 22 June 2020 from the Municipal Office in Gorzów Wielkopolski
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Wrocław	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• statute: Obwieszczenie Rady Miejskiej Wrocławia z dnia 23 marca 2017 r. w sprawie ogłoszenia jednolitego tekstu uchwały nr XIII/435/03 Rady Miejskiej Wrocławia w sprawie nadania statutu osiedla Jagodno• reports: made available at the Municipal Office of Wrocław in February 2020• website: Wrocławskie Osiedla – Biuletyn Informacji Publicznej Urzędu Miasta Wrocławia, https://bip.um.wroc.pl/artykuly/6/wroclawskie-osiedla
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A sample statute was analysed for cities where all ancillary units' statutes are identical.