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Model of Local Democracy” as Perceived
by the Elites of the Local Government of Wielkopolska**

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1. Introduction

From the perspective of political philosophy the question of the rule of law at the local government level is inextricably linked with the issue of the legitimisation of local authorities and their relation to the political community they represent. The observations of this paper are based on the following empirical and theoretical foundations:

– firstly, selected empirical data obtained through a survey of local government authorities in Wielkopolska, carried out by a group of Poznań-based sociologists, presented in a report entitled *Znajomość i przestrzeganie prawa przez samorzady a rozwój regionalny w Wielkopolsce* [Awareness of and respect for the law among local government authorities and the regional development of Wielkopolska]¹, as well as theoretical conclusions drawn on the basis of the study by its organisers;

– secondly, the results of qualitative studies in the form of individual in-depth interviews conducted with heads of communes and city and town mayors of three counties of Wielkopolska, presented in a report entitled *Wielkopolscy burmistrzowie i wójtowie o sobie i swoich gminach* [City and town mayors and commune heads of Wielkopolska reflect on themselves and their communes]².

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¹ M. Kokociński, *Znajomość i przestrzeganie prawa przez samorzady a rozwój regionalny w Wielkopolsce*, Poznań 2005; see: T. Buksiński, K. Bondyra, J. Jakubowski (eds.), *Demokracja – samorządność – prawo*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe IF UAM, Poznań 2007, pp. 269-294.

² K. Bondyra, M. Otworowska, *Wielkopolscy wójtowie i burmistrzowie o sobie i swoich gminach. Raport z badań jakościowych realizowanych w ramach projektu badawczego „Znajomość i przestrzeganie prawa przez samorzady a rozwój regionalny w Wielkopolsce”*;

We will contain our discussion, however, to a consideration of the obtained results, which on the one hand show a participation of citizens in the political life of local communities, on the other hand present the relation between the local government and civil society, as perceived by the representatives of highest local government authorities taking part in the survey (city and town mayors, heads of communes and chairpersons of commune councils).

Against the above background we will attempt a reconstruction of the local democracy model that is prevalent in the opinions of local government elites of Wielkopolska, a model which – we can safely advance such a hypothesis on the basis of numerous other studies of local government over the past few years – can be applied more broadly in reference to the upper echelons of Polish local authorities that emerged and developed in sovereign Poland after 1989.

2. Empirical and theoretical foundations of further observations

The report titled *Awareness of and respect for the law among local government authorities and the regional development of Wielkopolska* was drawn up following a March 2004 survey of a purposely selected sample of representatives of local government authorities in Wielkopolska³. It is worthwhile to note from the start that the study has elitist bias, because was deliberately targeted at the representatives of the highest authorities, which is reflected in the report. First of all, the study concentrates exclusively on local government representatives (and leaves out opinions of ordinary citizens). Second of all, rather than on the entire group of councillors, it focuses solely on local government elites (city and town mayors, heads of communes and chairpersons of commune councils).

While on the one hand such a narrow selection of the sample limits the potential for the generalisation of the final results (we get to know the opinions of local government elites only), on the other hand it furnishes a unique opportunity to observe the views and opinions of persons holding executive authority positions in their respective local government bodies.

see: T.Buksiński, K.Bondyra, J.Jakubowski (eds.), *Demokracja – samorządność – prawo*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe IF UAM, Poznań 2007, pp. 295-322.

³ An in-depth discussion of the underlying assumptions and methodology of the empirical studies constitutes the first part of the report; see: M. Kokociński, *Znajomość i przestrzeganie prawa...*, op.cit., pp. 269-272.

They are local government elites that exert both the biggest degree of influence on the policy of the local government and on the views of their communities⁴.

The following considerations will look into one of the many issues subject to the survey and the report, namely *the perception by local government elites of the question of civil participation and engagement in the political life of local communities*. Therefore, out of the major study questions posed by the researchers, we will focus exclusively on those that are immediately concerned with what is our interest in this paper⁵:

1. What is the perception of the surveyed sample of the current state and obstacles for the development of local government in Wielkopolska? What are the factors that influence this perception?
2. What are the opinions of the respondents on direct elections to local government?
3. What media play a dominant role in the relations between the local community and the local government?
4. Do local government authorities support local press and if so, in what way?
5. What is the adopted strategy for conflict resolution in the communities? What does the choice of such strategy depend on?

⁴ This last view is backed up by the fact that the majority of the surveyed sample includes experienced local government representatives: as many as 63% of the surveyed have been actively involved in the work of the local government for more than 10 years, 19% – over 6 years, while only a mere 3% – less than 3 years (see report, p. 271). It is also noteworthy that as many as 85% of the surveyed have previously held some position within the local government structures (prior to their current tenure) (see p. 271), and the median age of the surveyed group was 50 years (in addition, the authors of the report point out that 90% of the surveyed sample were men, who constitute a majority within local government authorities; see p. 270). The above results trigger two conclusions. Firstly, the authors of the survey point to the “competence and expertise of local government representatives arising from their extensive professional experience”. Secondly, “this may indicate the dominance of the perception of the local community in terms of fixed patterns” (see p. 271). From the perspective of citizens’ participation in the local government of interest for us in this paper, without attempting a discussion on the justifiability of the above observations, it is first of all worth noting *a low degree of inclusion of new local government representatives* that can be observed on the basis of the research. On the one hand, this may reflect a limited interest in citizens’ participation in the public life of local communities and thus limited human resources available. On the other hand, this may indicate a hermetically sealed community of people who have already been actively involved in local policy-making and who may be interested more in ever-new reshufflings of local government elites than in the activation of new groups of citizens and therefore in the increase of competition on the local market when it comes to voters’ support.

Similarly, in the case of the other source, i.e. the report on a qualitative study *City and town mayors and commune heads of Wielkopolska reflect on themselves and their communes*, drawn up on the basis of 14 individual in-depth interviews with representatives of local authorities in selected communes of Wielkopolska, out of eight main subject areas referred to in the interviews⁶, our special interest focused on the following three issues:

1. a comparative study of the relation between local authorities and residents in Poland as compared to other countries on the basis of personal experience, partner exchange etc.;
2. a sense of community among the residents of a commune;
3. a record of former activity within local government of the city and town mayors and commune heads surveyed.

The present study will not provide a detailed systematic analysis of the results of the surveys and interviews included in both the aforementioned sources. Instead, we will attempt to treat the emerging picture in a comprehensive manner, pointing out a general vision of local democracy prevalent in the views of the local elites of Wielkopolska.

3. The Schumpeterian sting

We will commence our considerations from a quick look at a response of local government authorities in Wielkopolska that is both symptomatic and significant from the point of view of our further analysis. The response in question concerns the perception of an absence of public involvement on the part of local communities as a potential obstacle to the development of local governance. The answers provided to this question – with 5 standing for “decidedly yes”, 1 signifying “decidedly no”, and 3 for the answer “no opinion”, treated by the authors of the report as illustrative of an ambivalent opinion – were as follows: the median value amounted to 2.9 in the case of the question related to the entire country, and 2.8 in the case of the respondent’s commune. In other words, in both cases the values obtained were nearly identical. The authors of the report sum up the findings for the entire country as follows: “The respondents do not perceive a limited involvement of the local community as a developmental obstacle”⁷. It should be emphasised that the above conclusion provides no explanation as to

⁵ M. Kokociński, *Znajomość i przestrzeganie prawa...*, *op. cit.*; see pp. 269-270.

⁶ See K. Bondyra, M. Otworowska, *Wielkopolscy wójtowie...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 295-296.

⁷ M. Kokociński, *Znajomość i przestrzeganie prawa...*, *op. cit.*; see p. 273.

the reasons for such an answer on the part of local government authorities. This is because the question whether an absence of public involvement on the part of local communities is an obstacle or a serious hindrance in the development of local governance in Poland can be answered in two ways, depending on how we interpret the question. First of all, the respondent may see the lack of involvement implied in the question as a fact, but deem it of little consequence for the development of local governance. Secondly, the respondent may feel that we cannot speak about a lack of involvement on the part of local communities as they are engaged to a sufficient degree, and thus this proves no obstacle for the development of local governance. It seems that the ambivalence in interpretation calls for more precision.

We believe that on the basis of the answers provided we may draw an evident conclusion that while representatives of local government elites do agree that the level of civil involvement is low, to their mind it is hardly an obstacle or a hindrance for the development of local governance, both on the level of the whole country and their own communes. However, the above conclusion should arouse our concern since it is indicative of an elitarian (or at best paternalistic) approach of local government elites. We may risk an assumption that representatives of local government elites adhere to the *Schumpeterian elitarian-competitive vision of the democratic system*, where local government elites which present alternative programmes of local development vie for the support of voters during an election. The voters confine themselves to choosing their representatives but in the period between the elections, with the exception of occasional questions that arouse much social interest and for a short time awaken them from their civil lethargy, they remain passive observers of the social and political life of their local communities and do not get involved with governance⁸.

As a consequence – as we can assume – the local government elites will be sceptical of, or outright reluctant to, any institutional changes aiming at increasing citizens' participation in the political life of a local community and thus to subjecting the authorities to a more extensive citizens' monitoring and to the need for broader social consultations. Naturally, representatives of local government authorities never directly voice such a stand, but

⁸ See Joseph A. Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism, Democracy*, New York: Harper and Row, 1975, Chapter XXII. It is self-evident that Schumpeter's theory did not arise in a theoretical vacuum and in the perspective of the theories of democracy we should point to earlier considerations by Max Weber over the "plebiszitäre Führerdemokratie" on the one hand, and the critique of traditional conceptions of democracy as advanced by such elitarians as G. Mosca, V. Pareto, and R. Michels, on the other.

numerous remarks made by them in the interviews and responses to the survey are clearly indicative of it. It goes without saying that from the perspective of a “manager-mayor / manager-commune head” the necessity to interact with members of local community during consultations which are frequently long-lasting, difficult and demanding reasoning with citizens, is a burdensome factor that reduces the effectiveness of taking political decisions. Let us quote a very characteristic statement made by one of the mayors: “the social climate has changed, people let us do less and want to have everything spelled out, so they say ‘no’ just in case and we need to put in a lot of effort to reason with them”⁹.

The picture of representatives of local government elites emerging from the study shows them as individuals who not only hold the highest offices within local government, but who are likewise local leaders exerting principal influence on the life of their communities. They possess a significant sense of responsibility and do their best to truly transform the reality they work within. All of this is reflected in their vision of democracy at a local level and their own role within it.

We can observe, however, that all the attempts made towards cooperation with citizens were based on standard methods and manners of contacts with citizens. These were, for instance, annual meetings with residents, cooperation with the local media (press, radio, TV in cities), consultations with non-government and civil society organisations (it is in order to mention here K. Bondyra’s interesting observation of a *sanguine type of social activity* represented by such organisations¹⁰), the publication of a local paper or information bulletin¹¹, the creation of a website, as well as duty hours of the councillors and the facilitation of residents’ contacts with the local authorities and administration in offices. Some of the respondents indicated the activation of citizens through their participation in community events held in a particular town or commune, i.e. the zone of participation in the culture life of the community (e.g. an interesting project “My village is involved”, celebrations of historical events, rural customs, regional fairs, etc.). While this type of activity is of prime importance for the local community

⁹ Quoted after: K. Bondyra, *Wieś a miasto – zróżnicowane wzory samoorganizacji społecznej w opinii wielkopolskich włodarzy samorządowych* [Country vs. city – differentiated patterns of civil self-organisation in the opinion of local government authorities of Wielkopolska]; see: T. Buksiński, K. Bondyra, J. Jakubowski (eds.), *Demokracja – samorządność – prawo*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe IF UAM, Poznań 2007, p. 261.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 263.

¹¹ *Ibidem*, p. 261.

as it enhances its identity and historical awareness, this does not change the fact, of major significance in our perspective, that the ideas of *sharing authority* or citizens' co-participation during *making political decisions that are vital for the community* were in practice non-existent.

Still, we know that "citizens' participation is simply part of modern management of the public sphere, where differences of interests and expectations cannot be resolved solely by administrative decisions or purely market mechanisms; rather than that, they need to be negotiated and agreed upon"¹².

All those forms of contacts with citizens initiated by local government authorities have little to do with the *empowerment of citizens in local governance*, making them co-participate in decision-making and assuming responsibility for the life of the local community. On the one hand, they are limited to merely making it possible for citizens to signal both local and personal issues that are important for them, on the other hand they are restricted to notifying residents of the local community about the activities of local government authorities. This aims at meeting the – vital and desirable – conditions of the accessibility of the authorities for citizens and the transparency of the activities taken by those in power, which does not change the fact, however, that through such activities they are in no way included into the co-participation in local community governance¹³.

This no doubt lets us also map out how a resident of a local community is perceived by representatives of local government elites in Wielkopolska. This perception rests on the assumption that citizens, when electing their local representatives, entrust them with the

¹² D. Długosz, J. J. Wygnański, *Obywatele współdecydują. Przewodnik po partycypacji społecznej* [Citizens co-participate in the decision process. A guide to civil society participation], Stowarzyszenie na rzecz Forum Inicjatyw Pozarządowych, Warsaw 2005, p. 21.

¹³ In this context an interesting fact was brought to my attention by a councillor of the City of Poznań, Prof. Antoni Szczuciński, who has served on the city council a number of tenures. He observed that the same representatives of local government authorities and councillors that overtly opt for an increase in the autonomy of and in financial resources for communes, are at the same time very reluctant to share power and resources with auxiliary local government units, seeing this as a limitation of their influence. This statement is corroborated by the results of the survey on the efficacy of different forms of social communication as seen by representatives of local government elites. Out of 10 different methods of communicating

governance “of bodies and souls”, or at least of the local commune coffers and in the period preceding the following elections should refrain from evaluating their actions. Such evaluation will take place during the election itself and will be reflected in either a victory or a defeat of a particular candidate. This is in full conformity with the analyses carried out by Schumpeter, who wrote in his book as follows: “. . . normally voters in no way monitor their political leaders, unless they refuse to re-elect them . . .”¹⁴.

The empowerment of citizens is limited, however, also in the very electoral act, which was pointed out by Schumpeter, who commented on the role of voters as follows: “The choices made by them – ideologically elevated to represent the ‘will of the people’ – do not arise by themselves but are modelled and it is this modelling that constitutes the major role of the democratic process. Voters do not make decisions about particular issues. Neither do they select deputies to Parliament from among eligible citizens completely freely. As a matter of course, the initiative rests with the candidate who decides to run for Parliament and with local leaders. Elections are confined to the approval of this offer and to either accepting it as the better of the competing two, or to rejecting it”¹⁵.

In the period between the elections citizens remain passive observers of the political life of the local community, and even if they are involved in some projects, it is the authorities that initiate those projects.

4. The populist sting (single-seat constituencies)

The authors of the report chose as one of their study problems the views of the local authorities on the introduction of the principle of direct elections. The survey posed questions about the already adopted institutional arrangements and their assessment. It also inquired about possible new changes which on the one hand would extend the institution of direct

with citizens, forwarding the case to auxiliary local government was seen as the least commendable. See M. Kokociński, *Znajomość i przestrzeganie prawa...*, *op. cit.*, p. 277.

¹⁴ Joseph A. Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism, Democracy*, New York: Harper and Row, 1975, quoted here after the Polish translation by M. Rusiński, PWN, Warsaw 1995, p. 340.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*.

elections onto county and provincial heads, on the other hand would introduce single-seat constituencies¹⁶.

Regrettably, we do not learn from the study what motivation lies behind the views of the respondents when a vast majority of them opt for single-seat constituencies. As we know, this form of elections allows a voter to choose a particular person rather than a political party. The significance of this choice is highlighted by Dieter Nohlen in his analyses of contemporary electoral systems: “A single-seat constituency is seen as the most important functional element that allows a choice between particular persons, which in turn facilitates the emergence of a relation between voters and representatives that manifests itself in personal acquaintance, trust, and accountability”¹⁷. Single-seat constituencies personalize voting, no doubt strengthening the position of the elected representative both from the perspective of legitimising his actions and in relation to the political group that backs him up (most often a political party). It should be borne in mind, though, that the price the voters pay when this solution is adopted is a lack of impact on what candidate is chosen by a given political party to represent it in a given constituency. In other words, they are forced to choose from a group of candidates pre-selected most often in a less democratic way, behind the scenes, by a narrow group of local and central party activists. According to Nohlen “a single-seat constituency strengthens the role of the party in the process of influencing electoral will”¹⁸. This was much earlier observed by Schumpeter who wrote as follows: “However, even this little electoral initiative connected with the approval of one of the competing candidates is further limited by the existence of a party”¹⁹.

It is precisely the empirically confirmed result of the adoption of single-seat constituencies in the form of the inevitable development of a dual-party system, that poses the biggest threat to democracy both on a national and local levels. At best in the course of two successive elections it wipes out smaller parties and local electoral committees. This results in a dual-

¹⁶ It is a pity that the survey was not additionally used for posing questions concerning other institutions of direct democracy such as first and foremost a referendum, but also grassroots social initiatives (taken by residents of a given local government area), the institution of dismissal from office or social consultations.

¹⁷ D. Nohlen, *Prawo wyborcze i system partyjny. O teorii systemów wyborczych* [Polish translation of *The Electoral Law and the Party System. On a Theory of Electoral Systems*], Scholar, Warsaw 2004, p. 90.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 91.

¹⁹ J. Schumpeter, *Kapitalizm, Socjalizm, Demokracja, op. cit.*, p. 352.

party system, which contemporary theoreticians of democracy, also those who live in countries which have adopted this very electoral system, warn us against. Since there is still time to prevent the introduction of such a solution in Poland, let us see what Ian Shapiro thinks on this issue:

“It is truly surprising that the spokesmen of social interest, activists, political commentators (not to mention political theoreticians) do not advocate attempts at the application of anti-trust law solutions in the fights with the two-party system in politics. If competing for power constitutes the foundation of democracy, seeking a two-party consensus (along with the attendant ideal of a bipartisan agreement) is a conspiracy against competition that hinders democracy”²⁰.

Single-seat constituencies only seemingly increase social monitoring of the electoral process since the mandate goes to the candidate with the majority (qualified or absolute, depending on the electoral system adopted²¹) of the people’s vote. In reality, however, they decrease the impact of citizens on the ultimate composition of the elected body (city or commune council, etc.) for three basic reasons.

Firstly, as has already been pointed out, they limit the choice of party followers to only one candidate on a given party list, which in the commandship-oligarchical party practice of the functioning of political parties in Poland²² results in the objectification of the voter (in multiple-seat constituencies with an open list the suggested and preferred order of candidates on the party list may be changed as a consequence of the elections).

²⁰ I. Shapiro, *The State of Democratic Theory*, Princeton University Press, 2003, quoted here after the Polish translation *Stan teorii demokracji* by I. Kisilowska, PWN, Warsaw 2006, p. 81.

²¹ See the classification of electoral systems put forth by Nohlen in: D. Nohlen, *Prawo wyborcze i system partyjny...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 164-166f.

²² This would call for separate analyses that cannot be attempted here. Regrettably, we have to note, however, that inter-party democratic procedures in Poland are either non-existent or are completely superficial and in the case of virtually all major parties the key programme is drawn up and personal decisions taken by the leader, backed up by a small group of trustworthy party oligarchs. In full-fledged parties of Western democracies an electoral defeat most often results in the change of party leadership, while in Poland it merely leads to inter-party purges that attenuate the influence of those party members who put forth suggestions to this effect. The most recent parliamentary elections in 2005 and 2007 and the local elections of 2006 furnish a plethora of examples to substantiate the above observations.

Secondly, elections in single-seat constituencies decisively favour large parties and their candidates, which results in their overrepresentation in local government and in an elimination or limitation of the presence of representatives of minority views (not to be mistaken with so-called minorities). Thus, local government authorities do not reflect the actual representation of voters' preferences. The authorities elected during majority elections in single-seat constituencies can no doubt govern more efficiently thanks to the division of mandates between major political forces dominant in a given political community (dominance of the criterion of the efficacy of the electoral system), but the elimination of smaller parties may result – paradoxically in the context of increasing the legitimacy of individual councillors – in a limited legitimisation of the council as a whole, as a reflection of the views and of the fullest possible representation of citizens of a given political community, since rather than the majority vote, it is “proportional representation that leads to a policy that is closer to the preferences of a median voter”²³.

Thirdly, as a consequence of the above two reasons, this leads to a restriction of the need to reach compromise with a few political partners in ongoing political activity, an absence of pressure for wider social consultations, and therefore a more competitive managerial form of exercising authority, to use the language we have proposed. In the context of a democracy model he himself put forth, Schumpeter justified the majority vote as follows: “If the acceptance of leadership is the true function of the people's vote, the argument for proportional representation fails since the assumptions it was based on are no longer binding. As a consequence, the democratic principle means only that governance should be transferred to those who have more support than any of the competing individuals or groups (leadership teams). This, in turn, seems to uphold the position of the majority system within the logic of the democratic method, even though we might still condemn it for reasons lying outside this logic”²⁴.

²³ I. Shapiro, *Stan teorii demokracji*, *op. cit.*, p. 84. Naturally, we do not mean here a complete proportional electoral law, with no electoral thresholds and limitations. Shapiro warns against it in his book in the following words: “The system of proportional representation may lead to more proportional results since voters are offered a greater choice of parties. This, however, does not necessarily result in more representative governance. We can see this on an ongoing basis in Israel, where small, extremist parties indispensable for the construction of a viable ruling coalition exert disproportionately high impact on the policy of the government, as a consequence of which the government is highly non-representative” (*ibidem*, p. 84).

²⁴ J. Schumpeter, *Kapitalizm, Socjalizm, Demokracja*, *op. cit.*, p. 341.

The introduction of single-seat constituencies may also result in a decision-making stalemate in commune and municipal councils since councillors, tied with the interests of their direct voters and to a large extent dependent on them in the context of forthcoming elections, may try and satisfy individual interests of particular residents of their constituencies (e.g. municipal districts), to the detriment of a comprehensive development of a commune; after all each commune has areas that are in pretty good shape and those that are under-funded. Councillors from small single-seat constituencies may exhibit tendencies to “fight by hook or by crook” to satisfy their voters instead of thinking and acting taking into consideration the common good of a given community.

Let us return to the results obtained in the study of the local government authorities of Wielkopolska. There is no doubt that as in the case considered in the preceding paragraph, we are again faced with an elitarian-managerial approach of the representatives of local authorities. Respondents decisively positively assessed the introduction of the direct election of commune heads and town and city mayors, stressing a marked increase in their position as a result of gaining a wide social legitimisation. This likewise inclines them to favourably assess the idea of introducing direct election of county and provincial heads (71 and 59% votes in favour, respectively)²⁵. Moreover, the positive experience with the introduction of direct vote leads representatives of local government elites to the acceptance of the idea of introducing single-seat constituencies to commune councils (58% votes in favour), which seems an overhasty jump to an election which is also local but has a markedly different character. We have discussed the attendant potential risks earlier in this text.

5. Competitive managerial model of local democracy

In my opinion the above considerations allow us to advance – in relation to the aforementioned democracy theory by Joseph A. Schumpeter – a thesis about a *competitive managerial model of democracy at a local level*, which we can arrive at following an analysis of the views of local government elites of Wielkopolska as aired in the course of the study. For a start, let us quote Schumpeter’s original statement from his work *Capitalism – Socialism – Democracy*: “The democratic method is that institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of a

²⁵ M. Kokociński, *Znajomość i przestrzeganie prawa...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 279-280.

competitive struggle for the people's vote"²⁶. In comparison with the traditional approaches to democracy, Schumpeter's definition brings about a fundamental change in the understanding of what democracy is. As Manfred G. Schmidt rightly points out, democracy ceases to be treated as an aim in itself or an aim to be reached, but simply becomes a political method instrumental for the election of political leaders²⁷. "The prime issue here is the fact that power can only be gained through competition and that it is held only for a specified period of time"²⁸, says Ian Shapiro. He points out the vital significance of Schumpeter's theory for contemporary democracy theories, seeing Schumpeter's theory as supplanting the language of representation characteristic of traditional approaches with a language of consumer sovereignty²⁹. Shapiro writes on: "From his point of view competition is doubly valuable: it disciplines leaders since they run the risk of losing power just as companies are liable for bankruptcy, and provides potential leaders incentives to being sensitised to a larger number of voters than their competitors"³⁰.

In connection with Schumpeter's theory and adopting it to considerations at the local government level, we would like to suggest a definition of local democracy on the basis of what arises from the study of local government elites of Wielkopolska. The following is our proposed definition:

Competitive managerial local democracy is an institutional arrangement for selecting political representatives who are vested with a great degree of autonomy in their authority to decide on the life of the local community (management) through a competition of candidates for the people's vote in free, frequent, and fair majority elections (a direct election of town and city mayors and commune heads, and proposals of single-seat constituencies for commune and county councils). Contact of the elected political representatives with their voters takes the form of methods which, while they ensure citizens' access to the people in

²⁶ J. Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy*, Harper and Row, New York 1975, p. 269.

²⁷ M. G. Schmidt, *Demokratietheorien*, Leske + Budrich, Opladen 2000, p. 201.

²⁸ I. Shapiro, *Stan teorii demokracji*, op. cit., p. 76.

²⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 78.

³⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 77. Shapiro likewise points out the risks that are in practice tied with the theory of democratic competition, such as its being limited to "oligopolitical competition" in two-party systems. Nevertheless, he stresses that these are the faults of political practice rather than of Schumpeter's theory itself and indicates the need for adequate reforms: "Reforms that

power (duty hours of councillors, meetings with citizens) and the transparency of work of the authorities (information on the action taken in the local media, brochures, etc.), members of the civil society are seldom included in the decision-making processes (if so, usually through non-deliberative methods such as referenda).

The self-assessment of local authorities as to their own role in the local community is one of the key arguments bearing out our assumption about the competitive managerial vision of democracy as prevalent among the local government elites of Wielkopolska. The respondents were asked to “indicate the desirable method of exercising local government authority”³¹. The answers provided fully back up our assumption. “In the view of the respondents – observe the authors of a follow-up report on the survey results – those at the top of the hierarchy of local authorities should be first and foremost local *leaders* that determine the directions and aims of the local community (a 4.7 average on a scale from 1 to 5)”³² as well as *managers* who efficiently manage their communes, towns, and cities (a 4.68 average on a scale from 1 to 5). A far smaller minority of the polled considered that being a politician is an important feature (a 2.03% average on a scale from 1 to 5).

The dominant role of a commune head, a town or city mayor in the local government community is stressed by the polled representatives of local authorities also in the context of analyses of the efficacy of strategies of conflict situation resolution. Out of the nine strategies given, the respondents pointed to the personal mediation by a commune head, a town or city mayor as the most efficient. A commentary of sorts that substantiates the undeniable presence of the above understanding of democracy can be noticed in the statements made during the mayoral election in the City of Poznań by a candidate backed up by the Civic Platform, Maria Paśło-Wiśniewska, who sees the role and duties of the mayor as follows: “While the process of electing candidates for such positions as that of a mayor of a big city is a political one in our model of democracy, the exercise of the mayoral function is more of a leadership and managerial challenge . . . Poznań needs a manager today”³³. Further, asked whether she saw

increase the number of major parties might contribute to an increase in competitiveness” (*ibidem*, p. 81).

³¹ M. Kokociński, *Znajomość i przestrzeganie prawa...*, *op. cit.*, p. 280.

³² *Ibidem*, p. 280.

³³ “*Z wieloma rzeczami się nie zgadzam*” [I disapprove of many things], an interview with Maria Paśło-Wiśniewska, a deputy to the Polish Parliament, a candidate of the Civic Platform

the Poznań of the future as a business corporation, not solely as a centre of decision-making authority, Paśo-Wiśniewska responds as follows: “Managing a city is a business of sorts which aims at a maximum satisfaction of the needs and expectations of the residents. Corporations have multiple client groups at which they target their offer. The city must satisfy the needs of many groups of residents...”³⁴.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion we would like to point out three major issues connected with the theory of local democracy studies. We consider them of prime importance from the point of view of their further development and the possibility of applying theory in a practice that raises not only the knowledge of the processes taking place in the local government authorities and in local communities, but also in equal measure allows the application of the results obtained both in the practice of improving the quality of Polish local government and in a comprehensive civil education, aiming at a gradual increase in citizens’ participation in the processes of making decisions about life of local political communities.

Firstly, we should explicitly stress that the assumption adopted by many scholars, believing that there is one exemplary model of local democracy which should be incorporated here and everywhere, is incorrect. To our mind, we should assume a certain continuum of models of local democracy, seeing all models along the continuum as permissible, depending on the local circumstances. In communes exhibiting a low level of development of civil society and civil awareness, an absence of the habit of negotiations and compromise, rampant individualisation (manifesting itself in the prevalent desire to “have one’s own way” rather than seeking compromise solutions), the competitive managerial democracy model is far more efficacious than the participation-deliberative one. If the latter were introduced too hastily and without a gradual activation of residents and without them being taught and familiarised with the new methods of co-managing a political community, it might result in more harm than good, for instance in the form of a decision-making impasse.

in mayoral elections in Poznań, conducted by Mariola Zdanewicz and Przemysław Grociak, *Merkuriusz – Poznań*, No. 6, September 2006, p. 5.

³⁴ *Ibidem*, pp. 5-6.

Secondly, the indication of the *competitive managerial model of local democracy* proposed by us in reference to the tradition of contemporary democracy theories lets us better capture its other characteristics which are not covered by alternative approaches (e.g. those stressing the autocratic character of local government authorities, but thereby in a way moving in its analysis beyond the conceptual horizon of democracy theories), such as an overall vision of the political sphere, various understandings of civil duties, or – seemingly distant yet fundamental for theoretical analyses of democracy – assumptions related to the rationality of individuals in democratic processes. This allows, for instance, to introduce order into the discussion on methods of activation of and increase in the participation of citizens through a clear-cut distinction between deliberative and non-deliberative methods. Both kinds of methods aim at the achievement of this same goal by different routes and each is propelled by a different vision of local democracy and of the role the citizens play within it. And thus the afore described *competitive managerial model of local democracy*, when seen against the map of contemporary democracy theories, fits the current of aggregative democracy theories, which assume exclusively an accumulation of citizens' preferences in the political process³⁵, rather than their transformation (which is an assumption of transformational democracy theories³⁶).

Thirdly, such a comprehensive approach to the questions of local government on the basis of theoretical underpinnings of contemporary democracy theories allows us to work out a holistic normative proposal of changes and transformations of the existing local communities, for example through entrusting local government authorities with the duty of a comprehensive civil education. In addition, an extensive theoretical background³⁷ allows us also to avoid

³⁵ See A. Downs, *An Economic Theory of Democracy*, Harper and Row, New York 1957; J. Buchanan, G. Tullock, *The Calculus of Consent*, University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor 1962; A. Kenneth, *Social Choice and Individual Values*, John Wiley, New York 1951; W. H. Riker, *Liberalism Against Populism. A Confrontation Between the Theory of Democracy and the Theory of Social Choice*, W.H. Freeman and Co., San Francisco 1982; *Rational Man and Irrational Society? An Introduction and Sourcebook*, B. Barry, R. Hardin (eds.), Sage, London 1982.

³⁶ See e.g. *Deliberative Democracy. Essays on Reason and Politics*, J. Bohman, W. Rehg (eds.), MIT Press, Cambridge 1997; *Deliberative Democracy*, J. Elster (ed.), Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1998; *Debating Deliberative Democracy*, J. S. Fishkin, P. Laslett (eds.), "Philosophy, Politics and Society" 7, Blackwell, London 2003.

³⁷ In considerations of local democracy we may refer not only to the contemporary democratic theory but also to other areas of science whose accomplishments may provide us with significant study tools. In an attempt to analyse the role of *local political leadership* we may – following the path delineated by Schumpeter – apply considerations from the area of

crude descriptivism and vulgar empiricism, only too frequent in studies on the work of local government (manifest, for example in the studies being limited exclusively to quantitative and statistical analyses). Reflection indicating desirable directions of change should then be connected also with explicitly expressed values, both those which are inherent in the very idea of local government (notably the construction of self-governing local communities) and those that arise from the adoption of particular assumptions on the role and position of citizens in a local community.

contemporary management theories, for instance reflect on the usability of the differentiation made by Renis Likert in his work *New Patterns of Management* (1961). He indicates two patterns of leadership behaviour, one focused on tasks, the other concentrated on employees. In our opinion, it is the former *leadership pattern focused on tasks* that may provide an interesting inspiration for describing the perception of their role by representatives of local government elites of Wielkopolska, even if not in Likert's version but in a situational model referring to it, advanced by Robert Tannenbaum and Warren H. Schmidt, who proposed a continuous seven-grade scale of leadership behaviour. It seems that the situational character of leadership behaviour adopted in this model and its flexibility may be the features allowing us to capture the dynamics of leadership processes in local democracy. See R. W. Griffin, *The Management of Organisations*, quoted after the Polish translation *Podstawy zarządzania organizacjami*, PWN, Warsaw 2005, Chapter 17: "Leadership and processes of influencing employees", pp. 552-587.

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