
Assessing the Effectiveness of Managers' Use of Legislation in Self-governing Organisations

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Abstract:

Purpose: The article aims to diagnose the use of social welfare by local government organisations (SGOs) observed from the perspective of the application of law by managers.

Design/Methodology/Approach: The first part of the study examined the literature on the tasks performed by SGOs in the context of public sector reforms in Western Europe. The second part analysed the results of a survey conducted among SGO managers. Using the collaborative research approach from the action research group, the analysis of data obtained from all SGOs in Poland was discussed. The study was conducted on a selected research sample of 2,573 SGOs. A separate set of formative indicators was determined for each aggregate, creating indexes, which gave the construct scale a multi-index form. The significance level was 0.05.

Findings: The presented conclusions provide information on the extent to which SGO managers apply legal acts and on how these activities are adapted to the real needs of clients in the social welfare system.

Practical Implications: The need to define new development directions was confirmed, requiring adaptation of legal norms to management systems operating under new conditions. The statement that something is a new challenge for social policy can be understood as the hypothesis that we are dealing with a new social problem and the suggestion that it can be solved with the help of a reformed legal system. It is necessary to rationalise public spending by implementing instruments characteristic of managing private-sector organisations, such as privatisation, efficiency measures, cost accounting, and benchmarking solutions.

Originality/Value: It was confirmed that junior managers believe that applicable legal acts effectively help those in need. Strong correlations were found between statements 32 (The organisation does not confine itself to carrying out only the basic tasks arising from current legislation and legal acts) and 78 (Existing legislation makes it easier to reach out to those in need in SGOs). This warrants further interdisciplinary research across law, management

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science, and quality to improve legislative processes in social policy. This should also consider active social policies aimed at permanently removing individuals at risk of poverty and social exclusion from the social assistance system.

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1. Introduction

The state, local governments, and nongovernmental organisations are called upon to serve and shape the living conditions of the population. Public policy management is undergoing dynamic changes (Zelek, 2023, pp. 9-14). One of the most critical changes is demographic change, which poses a challenge not only for states' senior citizen policies but also for societies (Zrałek *et al.*, 2024). Failure to take appropriate action in this regard can have irreversible consequences for countries' social, economic, and demographic structures.

The dynamic socioeconomic environment drives changes in the approach to the provision of public services, while strengthening the relationship between institutions and legislative processes (Kotkas and Veitch, 2018). Social policy is a deliberate activity of the state, local government, trade unions, and other organisations operating within the social welfare system. The demand for social services should be the basis for developing and seeking new, effective forms of assistance.

Applicable legal standards regulate how social services are provided to clients. In the public sphere, there are opinions from local governments about the increasing number of tasks assigned by central authorities to local governments. The lack of consultation at the stage of legislative processes regulating social policy at the local level is a serious problem for the quality of social services (Vanhercke, Sabato, and Spasova, 2023).

In view of the above, this paper addresses the research problem in the context of the legal possibilities and limitations for managers in self-governing organisations (SGOs) to implement basic and additional tasks. The opinions of managers from all

SGOs in Poland were analysed and identified. A cooperative research method was used, involving managers in the design of the research tool.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Identification of Managerial Governance in SGOs

Public sector reforms in the area of social policy, which have been carried out in Western European countries over the last 30 years, have been achieved through the economisation of social assistance systems by opening up the private sector to the production of social services (Egeberg and Trondal, 2016, p. 586; Drakeford, 2000, pp. 18-19). In many countries, reforms were possible because they were most consistent with the post-Fordist (Scott and Storper, 1992, pp. 43-65) organisation of production and consumption.

The Fordist era was characterised by mass production and consumption, with everyone offered the same service packages. Post-Fordists believe that the days of powerful bureaucracy providing uniform services for all are over. As P. Hoggett noted: We live in an era of postbureaucratic forms of social service provision (Hoggett, 1991, p. 247). Supporters of privatisation emphasise that privatisation redefines the social functions of the state, the actions it takes, and its goals, as well as reorganising the relationships between social institutions and groups receiving assistance (Johnson, 2013, pp. 371-375).

One of the most important benefits of the transformation in the area of social assistance in Western European countries is considered to be the replacement of administrators with managers (Criado, Dias, and Sano, 2021, pp. 451-464) in order to increase the effectiveness of organisations (Gupta, 2020, pp. 10-15). There has also been a greater emphasis on enhancing managers' competence, their cognitive processes, and the sustainable management of the organisation's intellectual capital (Holub-Iwan and Kupczyk, 2021; Gross-Gołacka, Brzozowska, and Balcerzyk, 2024). The problem facing Europe is the rapid ageing of its population, as the baby boom generation retires and the number of economically active people in the EU begins to decline.

The number of people over 60 years of age is growing at twice the rate it did before 2007, that is, by approximately 2 million people per year – previously it was 1 million per year (Eurostat, 2025). The smaller working-age population and the increase in the number of pensioners will place an additional burden on EU social welfare systems (Graziano, 2024, pp. 27-38). The report *Efficiency and Effectiveness of Social Spending*, which is a Commission Staff Working Document (EC, 2008a), sets out the direction of social policy reforms through the prism of social spending. Point 5 of the document reads: Reforms in public administration, changes in personnel management in public offices, and greater use of information and communication technologies are recommended.

Social policy systems can be considered in two ways. They can refer to the actual policies pursued in different countries. They can also be developed in isolation from practical solutions, constituting logical constructs of desired social policy strategies (Abts *et al.*, 2021, pp. 21-40). The first approach prevails in the literature, with references to welfare states being more common than references to social policy systems (Timms, 2020).

The most important factors for analysing social policy systems in European Union countries in accordance with the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) are:

- conditions for access to benefits and services,
- selectivity or universality of social protection,
- Quality and level of benefits and services, scope and objectives of labour market policy (right to work or proper to benefits),
- role of public authorities in meeting the basic social needs of citizens, as well as methods of financing social programs.

2.2 Basic and Assigned Tasks of SGOs in Poland

In Poland, the organisation of social assistance and the provision of social services are the responsibility of the state, which guarantees the security of citizens who are unable to meet their needs on their own (Sierpowska, 2012, p. 10). The entities providing social services are: government and local government authorities, social and nongovernmental organisations, the Catholic Church, other churches, religious associations, and natural and legal persons (Miruć, 2014, pp. 153-166). Within the public sector, social services are provided by self-governing organisations (Maciejko and Zaborniak, 2008, p. 400).

Table 1. *The tasks of SGOs in Poland*

Basic mandatory tasks	Basic tasks	Additional tasks in the field of central administration
1) Implementation of the municipal strategy to solve social problems; 2) preparation of an assessment of social assistance resources and reporting for the needs of the governor; 3) providing shelter, meals, and the necessary clothing to people deprived of them;	1) granting and paying special-purpose benefits, assistance for economic independence in the form of benefits, loans, and assistance in kind; 2) running and ensuring places in social welfare homes and support centres with a municipal reach, and referring people requiring care to them;	1) Organising and providing specialist care services at the place of residence; 2) granting and paying out targeted benefits to cover expenses related to a natural or ecological disaster; 3) implementing tasks resulting from government social assistance programs;

4) granting and paying permanent, periodic, and specific benefits;	3) developing and implementing social projects;	4) paying remuneration for care.
5) social work;	4) undertaking tasks resulting from the identified needs of the municipality, including creating and implementing protective programs;	
6) organising and providing care services;		
7) running and providing places in sheltered housing;	5) Cooperating with the District Labour Office in the dissemination of job offers and information on vacancies.	
8) arranging funerals, including for homeless persons;		
9) referral to a social welfare home;		
10) assistance to persons having difficulties adapting to life after being released from prison;		

Source: Own study based on data from the Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy in Poland, <https://www.gov.pl/web/rodzina/formy-udzielanej-pomocy>.

2.3 Social welfare in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE)

The analysis of studies in the field of social policy led to the establishment of several classifications that present various systems for implementing social welfare policy. A review of the literature shows that the most significant classifications were created by the following.

- Richard Titmuss (Titmuss, 1974);
- Norman Furniss and Dorothy Tilton (Furniss, Tilton, 1977);
- Gøst Esping-Andersen (Esping-Andersen, 1990).

Gøsta Esping-Andersen's concept distinguished between social policy regimes applied in different regions of Europe (Esping-Andersen, 2007):

- liberal regime,
- conservative-corporate regime,
- Mediterranean regime,
- social democratic regime,
- post-communist regime.

In Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries, there is a lack of in-depth research that takes a comprehensive approach to the provision of social services. Research

conducted in this part of Europe takes a holistic approach to public sector management, failing to account for the specific nature of social policy. In his original classification of social welfare systems, G. Esping-Andersen placed Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries, including Poland, in the post-communist model of social welfare, characterised primarily by centralised management, a uniform organisational structure with elements of a conservative welfare state (Esping-Andersen, 2007, pp. 3-6). Countries that underwent systemic changes after 1989 had to abandon state ownership, a centrally planned economy, and autocratic governance.

A period of introducing private ownership, a free market, and democratic systems of government began (Cerami, 2008, p. 5). Rapid changes led to a lack of systemic coherence (Dixon and Macarov, 2017). Elements of a conservative welfare state and liberal concepts can be observed here, but they still retain features of the socialist system. In some countries, centralised management and a uniform organisational structure still exist (Esping-Andersen, 2007, p. 3). Countries where this regime operates include Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Lithuania, Latvia, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia.

2.4 Increased Effectiveness of Social Service Management in SGOs

Drucker believes that every public utility institution must be as entrepreneurial and innovative as any company, and even more so (Drucker, 1985, p. 177). Innovation and risk-taking are the most important factors explaining the scope of entrepreneurial activity in the public sector (Miller, 1983, p. 770). The transformation taking place in the United Kingdom, Scandinavia, the United States, and New Zealand focused on attempts to implement solutions used by businesses (Zelek, 2023, pp. 113-132).

The increase in the effectiveness of social service management is in many ways linked to legislative conditions, privatisation, service orientation, and decentralisation (Kettl, 2000, pp. 1-2). Cross-sector and intra-sector cooperation, co-governance, interactive, and partnership-based management are also important (Izdebski, 2010, p. 24). In the era of Industry 4.0, it is important to implement innovative solutions across the technological, social, cultural, and organisational dimensions to improve outcomes and create social value (Ravšelj *et al.*, 2022).

From the perspective of the effectiveness of social services in European countries, multilevel management systems are critical, as they can significantly influence service delivery (Eick, Im, and Leschke, 2024, p. 551). A review of the research reveals a clear deficit in both theoretical analyses and empirical studies, as well as methodological solutions concerning the limitations in the application of legal acts by social welfare managers.

The above analyses constitute a research problem that led to a diagnosis of the level of implementation of non-statutory tasks by SGOs. For the purposes of this chapter, the following research hypotheses were adopted.

H1: Self-governing organisations also perform services that do not result directly from legal acts.

H2: Applicable legal acts facilitate the provision of assistance to those most in need.

3. Materials and Methods

The study covered managers from self-governing organisations (SGOs) in 2,573 organisations. The Participatory Action Research (PAR) method was used (Eden and Huxham, 1996, pp. 526-542), ‘which involves a scientific approach to solving practical problems in the social world with the broad participation of those affected by the problem, for the benefit of social knowledge’ (Brydon-Miller, Kral, Ortiz. and Aragón, 2020, pp. 103-111). The basic assumption was to empower respondents (Heron, 1996, p. 236) in a two-stage research process.

The first stage involved creating initial versions of the research tools, which were made available to SGOs and experts for refinement (Cornish, Breton, Moreno-Tabarez, et al., 2023, pp. 1-14). Then, for each observable variable, statements were created to assess the variables in the OPS-OpenIndex electronic form (Diamantopoulos and Winklhofer, 2001, p. 271).

After consultation and consideration of comments, OPS-OpenIndex was uploaded to the server at www.google.com. An email was sent to 2,573 SGOs inviting them to participate in the study, along with a link to the form, which was active for 14 days (Kafel, 2016, p. 29). As a result, 1,959 correctly completed questionnaires were received (Table 2).

Table 2. *Summary of statistical data*

Surveys	SGOs
Forms sent	2 573
Surveys completed	1 959
% of surveys completed	76.1%

Source: *Own study based on research results.*

All responses were exported to MS Excel and subjected to statistical analysis in Statistica 13. The following tools were used to perform the descriptive statistical analysis of the research results.

- Cronbach's α coefficient to assess reliability (internal consistency of constructs),

- Cramér's V coefficient to examine the relationship between qualitative variables.

A test probability value p less than 0.05 provided grounds for rejecting the null hypothesis. The strength of the relationship was then examined using Cramer's V coefficient, which takes values from 0 to 1 from a two-tailed interval. The higher its value, the stronger the relationship between the variables.

4. Results

Managers assessed whether their organisation takes additional measures to meet customer needs and whether the applicable legal acts are effective. The summary results of the research are presented later in this article. The statistical data analysis took into account the distribution of responses and the data obtained in relation to the seniority of statement no. 32: The organisation does not limit itself to performing only basic tasks resulting from applicable regulations and legal acts, and no. 78: Applicable legal acts make it easier to reach those in need with assistance.

The Cronbach alpha coefficient of 0.73 confirms the reliability of the 'organisational structure' construct, in which the results of the study for statement 32 in the SGOs were analysed. The analysis of the survey results showed that 41.04% of respondents moderately agreed with statement 32, confirming the relationship that they do not limit themselves only to performing basic tasks resulting from applicable legal acts. 25.06% of the respondents expressed strongly affirmative opinions. Only 3.57% of respondents strongly disagreed with this statement, and 9.49% moderately disagreed (Table 3).

Table 3. Distribution of responses for statement 32 ($N=1959$)

Class	Number of tasks: S_32 The unit is not limited to the implementation of statutory tasks resulting from the applicable regulations and legal acts.			
	Number	Cumulative number	Percent	Cumulative percent
Strongly disagree	70	70	3.57	3.57
Rather disagree	186	256	9.49	13.07
No opinion	408	664	20.83	33.89
Rather agree	804	1468	41.04	74.94
Strongly agree	491	1959	25.06	100.00
Lack of	0	1959	0.00	100.00

Source: Own study based on research results.

30.36% of respondents with more than 10 years of work experience strongly agreed with statement 32, indicating that their organisations undertake additional activities. This was confirmed by 17.22% of respondents with up to 2 years of work experience. The correlation is statistically significant ($p = 0.00$) and weak (Cramér $V = 0.12$). Detailed data are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Frequencies observed by age of the respondents (N = 1959)

Experience in the organisation	S_32 The unit is not limited to the implementation of statutory tasks resulting from the applicable regulations and legal acts					Total
	s_32 Strongly disagree	s_32 Rather disagree	s_32 No opinion	s_32 Rather agree	s_32 Strongly agree	
0-2 years	2	17	42	64	26	151
%	1,32%	11,26%	27,81%	42,38%	17,22%	
3-5 years	10	22	56	61	26	175
0-2 years	2	17	42	64	26	151
%	1,32%	11,26%	27,81%	42,38%	17,22%	
3-5 years	10	22	56	61	26	175
over 10 years	46	105	175	502	361	1189
%	3,87%	8,83%	14,72%	42,22%	30,36%	
I prefer not to give	4	17	76	83	43	223
%	1,79%	7,62%	34,08%	37,22%	19,28%	
Total	70	186	408	804	491	1959

Source: Own study based on research results.

The Cronbach alpha coefficient of 0.67 confirms the reliability of the ‘privatisation’ construct, in which the results of the study for Statement 32 in the SGOs were analysed. The analysis showed that 39.61% of the respondents moderately confirmed statement 32, stating that they do not limit themselves to performing only basic tasks resulting from legal acts. 10.67% of the respondents expressed strong affirmative opinions. Less than 7.50% strongly disagreed with this statement, and 23.48% of the respondents did not confirm the statement to a moderate degree (Table 5).

Table 5. Distribution of the responses to Statement 78 (N=1959)

Class	Count table: S_78 The law in force makes it easier to reach those most in need with aid.			
	Number	Cumulative number	Percent	Cumulative percent
Strongly disagree	147	147	7,50	7,50
Rather disagree	460	607	23,48	30,99
No opinion	367	974	18,73	49,72
Rather agree	776	1750	39,61	89,33
Strongly agree	209	1959	10,67	100,00
Lack of	0	1959	0,00	100,00

Source: Own study based on research results.

30.36% of respondents with over 10 years of work experience strongly agreed with Statement 78, indicating that their organisations carry out additional activities. This

was also confirmed by 17.22% of the respondents with up to 2 years of work experience. The correlation is statistically significant ($p = 0.00$) and weak (Cramér $V = 0.12$). Detailed data are presented in Table 6.

Table 6. Frequencies observed by age of the respondents ($N = 1959$)

Experience in the organisation	S_78 The applicable legal acts make it easier to reach those most in need with help					Total
	s_78 Strongly disagree	s_78 Rather disagree	s_78 No opinion	s_78 Rather agree	s_78 Strongly agree	
0-2 years	10	27	32	64	18	151
%	6.62%	17.88%	21.19%	42.38%	11.92%	
3-5 years	20	31	52	61	11	175
%	11.43%	17.71%	29.71%	34.86%	6.29%	
5-10 years	20	54	53	80	14	221
%	9.05%	24.43%	23.98%	36.20%	6.33%	
over 10 years	81	305	169	497	137	1189
%	6.81%	25.65%	14.21%	41.80%	11.52%	
I prefer not to give	16	43	61	74	29	223
%	7.17%	19.28%	27.35%	33.18%	13.00%	
Total	147	460	367	776	209	1959

Source: Own study based on research results.

The analyses were carried out within the framework of two research constructs. The 'organisational structure' construct, within which the results of the study for statement 32 were analysed, and the 'marketisation' construct, within which the results of the study for statement 78 were analysed.

5. Research Limitations

Changes in the political and economic environment require public sector organisations to adapt to new conditions. However, these processes are progressing too slowly. It is necessary to look at social policy, taking into account different contexts and directions of influence. Discovering the determinants of change processes is extremely interesting. The management of social services by managers in local government social welfare organisations should take into account the specific nature of the public sector. It is necessary to increase management flexibility and transfer social services to lower levels.

This process should include decentralising management and delegating responsibility to SGO managers. Social policy instruments and tools should evolve toward integration, leading to changes in the legal regulations managers apply. The study was limited in geographical terms (all SGOs operating in the Polish social

welfare system). Therefore, in the author's opinion, it is extremely important to continue developing and testing the research typology in comparative research projects in CEE countries. The research results presented in this chapter serve as a starting point for a deeper analysis of the processes within the social assistance systems in Poland and the EU.

6. Discussion

Based on the survey results, it should be concluded that SGOs are not limited to performing only basic tasks resulting from legal acts, as confirmed by more than 66% of respondents. Regarding the theoretical part of the article, the first hypothesis (H1) should be confirmed: the organisation's management staff performs tasks beyond the basic functions of SGOs. Young employees with short seniority agreed with this to a moderate extent, negatively assessing this relationship. Employees with more than 10 years of service are moderately satisfied with inter-institutional cooperation, which confirms H1.

Analysis of the research results indicates that more than half of the respondents confirmed that the applicable legal acts facilitate access for the most needy, thereby supporting the research hypothesis H2. In the case of SGO H2, it should be confirmed that more than 70% of managers with more than 3 years of service confirmed that the applicable legal acts effectively help people in need. There was a strong correlation between statements 32 and 78 in SGO.

This is a reason to conduct further interdisciplinary research in law, management, and quality sciences on the possibilities for improving legislative processes in social policy. In doing so, aspects of active social policy aimed at permanently leaving the social assistance system should be taken into account for people at risk of poverty and social exclusion.

7. Conclusions

Despite the different social security systems across European countries, social policy in Europe aims to ensure a decent life for people and to integrate them into society. Social policy is subject to rapid change. It is necessary to define new development directions, which require adapting legal standards to management systems in new operating conditions.

The statement that something is a new challenge for social policy can be understood as a hypothesis that we are dealing with a new social problem and a suggestion that it can be solved with the help of a reformed legal system. It is becoming necessary to rationalise public spending by implementing instruments characteristic of private-sector management, i.e., privatisation, efficiency, cost accounting, and benchmarking.

As a result of the ongoing global financial and economic crisis, countries must consider what measures to take to reduce public spending. In most CEE countries, the role of the state has been consolidated as a provider of public services and as a welfare state.

Despite the conservative welfare systems in these countries, elements of the liberal concept can be observed, offering hope that CEE countries (the leading representatives of the post-communist model) will benefit from the achievements of Western European countries. It should be noted that social policy is implemented alongside employment and social security policy.

Legislation in the area of social policy is even more difficult. Increasing the role of private entities in social policy seems crucial to improving the effectiveness of social services.

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