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TOWN CENTER MANAGEMENT IN POLAND FROM A EUROPEAN PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract: *Town center management (TCM) has become a popular public management tool among European countries. Scholars mostly focus their attention on western European countries, while little attention has been paid to the central European region. The aim of this paper is to examine the relevance of existing TCM in Poland. This topic was researched using a case study approach, was conceptualized within an existing framework, and seeks to classify TCM schemes by the types of services they deliver and their structural formality. In conclusion, the authors argue that the Polish models of TCM are more focused on delivering public services, and their performance is strictly linked with the types of services that they are concentrated on. The recommendation is to develop the social impact of TCM work by strengthening its contact with the local community and councilors.*

Keywords: *town center management, local governance, urban regeneration, local development*

Reikšminiai žodžiai: *Mmiesto centro valdymas, vietos savivaldos valdymas, miestų regeneracija, vietos savivaldos plėtra.*

Introduction

Town center management (TCM) is commonly accepted as a practical response to the problem of revitalization in town centers. However, the European perspective of

research on this topic is mostly concentrated on the western part of the continent (Whyatt 2004; Stubbes, Warnaby, and Medway 2002; Guimareas 2018; Coca-Stefaniak et. al. 2009; Otsuka and Reeve 2007). Much less emphasis has been placed on the central part of Europe, where TCM schemes have also been implemented.

This paper begins with a consideration of the concept of TCM implemented in Poland; the authors analyze all cities where town center managers have been appointed, using an institutional approach. Following this, a matrix containing TCM schemes is presented. This matrix seeks to elucidate various types of formal structures of TCM schemes in relation to the priorities declared by managers via questionnaires and focus group research, which included all of the managers working in Poland. The purpose of this is to establish whether and how institutional arrangements exert an influence on the way that TCM operates and, in addition, the kinds of skills that a TCM manager needs to properly deliver services. The final section outlines how the Polish schemes might evolve in the future.

Defining town center management

As a result of the increased emergence of shopping centers, the centers of many Polish cities have suffered economic and societal decline. Better shopping conditions and increased marketing possibilities have given shopping malls a competitive advantage over high streets. The process of redirecting footfall into other parts of cities has not only had consequences for businesses, but has also created a desperate need to regenerate city centers. TCM is one of many different strategies that have been implemented across many European cities to address this need.

Due to different local circumstances, there is no single widely accepted definition of TCM. Warnaby, Medway, and Alexander (1998, 17–18) defined TCM as the search for competitive advantage through the maintenance and/or strategic development of both public and private areas and interests within town centers, initiated and undertaken by stakeholders drawn from a combination of the public, private, and voluntary sectors. Meanwhile, Polese, Tartaglione, and Carrubbo (2012, 56) paid more attention to the organizational aspect, defining TCM as a managerial attempt to coordinate and bring together local commercial, natural, and historical resources, allowing for an effective value creation process through the production and distribution of consumer goods as well as through the tourism industry, thus uniting shopping and leisure activities.

Such a huge number of shareholders that are potentially interested in collaboration in order to compete with shopping centers creates some functional problems related to the coordination of initiatives and policies to create increased demand. In light of these conditions, TCM needs to respond with adequate tools in order to remove differences between parties and occupy a pivotal position, not only for trade activities but also for social, civic, and cultural life (Musso 2010, p. 43–44). This is the reason why TCM projects have generated considerable comment in the literature of both practitioners and academics, which can provide an overview of this topic (Jones 1990; Wells 1991; Whyatt

2004; Nisco, Riviezzo, and Napolitano 2008; Coca-Stefaniak, Radominski, and Ryczek 2009; Gawłowski and Makowski 2020).

Methodology

In order to pursue this project, the authors set out the following research strategy: (1) analyze internal documents that cover the institutional settings of TCM schemes in Polish cities; (2) conduct the first round of the questionnaire survey of TCM managers at the beginning of 2019; (3) hold focus group discussions with all TCM managers in Poland in May 2019 during the network meeting; and then (4) conduct the second round of the questionnaire survey of TCM managers after the previous discussions in summer 2019. It is worth noting that, at present, there are five TCM manager positions in Poland based in Gdańsk, Bydgoszcz, Toruń, Łódź, and Lublin. However, the TCM manager from Łódź failed to respond to the second round of questionnaires, thus we had to omit this city from this part of the research. Given the exploratory justification of this research, an interesting proposal for further consideration within this topic might involve a comparison with international examples.

Another important aspect of this study to note is that the authors grouped the tasks delivered by TCM managers into two. The first, called soft tasks, are associated with business promotion, social integration, facilitating the cooperation between public and private partners, and supporting civil society. The second are linked with the investment process, revitalization, improving the quality of public spaces, and providing security and public order. The reason for this grouping is to allow the authors to observe how the formal position of a TCM manager exerts an influence on the tasks delivered by them and, as a result, what kinds of skills are needed in each position.

Models of town center management in Poland

According to Polish legal regulations, the position of the TCM manager is not compulsory. Managing town centers is based on the Revitalization Act, which gives city governments a wide variety of tools that can be implemented in order to pursue this task. For example, the following could be deployed: a revitalization strategy; setting up a revitalization committee; or a co-production approach to delivering public services. Taking this into consideration, it is fair to say that the TCM approach is only one of a number of possible options that cities could choose. Therefore, each case presents different examples of schemes, not only in terms of institutional arrangements but also in terms of delivering services.

The formal investment scheme: Toruń

Toruń has 201,000 inhabitants and is situated in the central part of the country. This city's TCM manager is the longest-serving in Poland; their post was established in 2008 by order of the Mayor of Toruń within the structure of the City Hall. According to the

latest amendment (No. 77 of the Mayor of Toruń of April 30, 2014), the position of the manager of the old town is akin to other local civil servants; however, the TCM manager is a senior management employee and is in charge of the Toruń City Centre Office. This position includes the following tasks: the integration and activation of the inhabitants of the TCM area; stimulating the growth of competitiveness and economic stimulation; identifying revitalization problems; coordinating work control with diagnostic works; cooperation in the field of safety and public order control; cooperation with European organizations and corporate work related to TCM issues; and conducting promotional activities. In order to pursue these tasks, the TCM manager supervises 5 employees and has a delegated budget based on local government and European funds. Fertile ground for delivering the activities of the TCM manager can be found in the Program of socio-economic activities for the Old Town, which was adopted in 2013 and is annually updated by the Mayor of Toruń. An additional advantage of the TCM is that they enable coordination and constant communication between local administration and third parties, which helps to overcome the silo effect. In this context, the most important skills that a TCM manager should have according to the representative from Toruń are: the ability to ease tension between different groups of stakeholders; knowledge about public finance and legal regulations; and project management experience. This means that the TCM manager understands their position as a translator and explainer circulating between the public and the private sector.

The public representative who promotes investments schemes: Lublin

Lublin has 340,000 inhabitants and is situated in the eastern part of Poland. The city center is composed of a historical area and a high street. The position of the TCM manager was created by order of the Mayor of Lublin on February 28, 2017. The TCM manager's tasks include: supervising activities related to the technical condition, image, and aesthetic of the Old Town area; stimulating the growth of business and economic stimulation; identifying revitalization problems; carrying out tasks related to the organization of public space and coordinating cooperation activities with organizational units of the office; the integration and activation of residents; and conducting information and promotion activities in the downtown area. The TCM manager is located in the Investment and Development Department of the City Hall. At the moment, there is no action plan or strategy exclusively devoted to the Old Town, but specific tasks are indicated – such as the preparation of a book of advertising standards for the Old Town and the organization of workshops for entrepreneurs in this area. The TCM manager does not manage the work of a team, nor do they have any financial resources allocated to carry out the tasks assigned to them. Due to their position within the structure of the City Hall, the TCM manager is subject to periodic reviews on the same terms as other local civil servants. It is worth noting, however, that the TCM manager is expected to be more open minded and creative than other colleagues. Given the TCM manager's answers to the questionnaires, it is reasonable to state that they are mostly focusing on such tasks as: the improvement of public space; preserving public security by linking local police with local business;

and serving as a mediator between private and public entities. Taking into consideration the delivery of tasks, the most important skills that a TCM manager should have, according to the answers of this TCM manager, are: knowledge about public finance and legal regulations; business experience; and the ability to cooperate with different kinds of stakeholders.

The formal entrepreneurial scheme: Gdańsk

Gdańsk has 470,000 inhabitants and is situated in the far north of Poland. The city center is bordered by both the high street and the riverbank. The idea of appointing a TCM manager appeared in the election program of President Paweł Adamowicz for the 2014–2018 term, in which it was noted that the main assumption behind this function was to improve relations and cooperation with residents and business entities, and to care for the quality of public space. Originally, this function was entrusted to an envoy of the Mayor of Gdańsk for the city center, and was delivered by only one person. After this, the position of TCM manager was created as an employee in the Municipal Economy Department in the City Hall. Therefore, this position is akin to other local civil servants. The TCM manager is formally responsible for an open catalogue of tasks, which includes: coordinating activities and supporting the cooperation of organizational units of the city and stakeholder groups; taking actions to improve the flow of information and activating residents and business entities from the city center area; inspiring and coordinating projects to improve safety and public order; identifying social and spatial problems and helping to resolve them; activities aimed at caring for the aesthetics and historic substance of the old town; and negotiating changes in the form of the use of common spaces. In the organizational structure, the office of TCM manager reports directly to the Deputy Mayor for municipal policy, who oversees and at the same time sets a list of priority tasks. In terms of organizational capacity, the TCM manager is supported by one person who is responsible for implementing infrastructural projects financed by the EU. At the moment, there is no specific action plan focused on the city center; however, the TCM manager is a member of the team implementing the Public Space Revitalization Program. The Mayor of Gdansk defines the general goals of the TCM manager during the annual strategy meeting. In this particular case, the person handling city center management pinpointed the necessity of such skills as: facilitating cooperation between different kinds of stakeholders; knowledge about public finance and legal regulations; and the ability to formulate a clear vision and plan for a future that attracts others to cooperate.

The informal entrepreneurial scheme: Bydgoszcz

Bydgoszcz has around 340,000 inhabitants and is situated in the central-north part of Poland. The city center is quite unusual because it is not an integral, central point of the city, but a larger area which was built at different points in history. The Bydgoszcz TCM manager is the shortest-serving of those operating in Polish cities. The person

performing this function was employed in August 2018 based on a private law contract, and this form of cooperation is extended each year. Thus, in Bydgoszcz the position is located outside the structure of the City Hall. The main responsibility of the TCM manager is to act as an intermediary between residents, entrepreneurs, and officials in all matters relating to the city center. In order to pursue this role, the manager is focused on: improving the quality of services (both private and public); amending the aesthetics of public places; and submitting ideas to increase the touristic and economic attractiveness of the city center. Thus, their role can be described as an inspirer and a creator of ideas that are sent directly to the Mayor of the City and, in the event of the Mayor's approval, are implemented by the local administration. The person selected for the position of manager was proposed by the local business community; therefore, it was much easier to gain the confidence of non-public actors. Funding for this role is both public and private, and is organized based on an ad-hoc approach. However, the TCM manager works in the shadow of local administration hierarchy, and it is therefore highly likely that their initiatives are supported by public funding. TCM activities are mostly aimed at promoting local business initiatives as well as cultural events. Therefore, it is understandable that the most important skills for this perspective are: business experience; the ability to cooperate with different kinds of stakeholders; project management; and an understanding of the social context. During the focus group discussion, the TCM manager said that they deliver projects that, very often, City Hall does not have enough time to focus on.

The informal investment scheme: Łódź

Łódź has almost 700,000 inhabitants and is situated in the center of Poland. For a long time, the city was famous for its textile manufacturing industry; however, after the economic transformation in the beginning of 1990s this industry almost disappeared. As a result, the high street of Łódź declined. Despite a long history of TCM management in Łódź, the position has changed entirely since the first manager was appointed. Initially, the President of the City of Łódź created the position of manager of Piotrkowska Street. This was established in 2009 as part of the adoption of the Development Strategy for Piotrkowska Street for the years 2009–2020. Moreover, in order to implement this Strategy, the manager was supported by a Task Force Team and an annual budget. Another advantage that the manager enjoyed was direct contact with the Mayor of the City. The reason for this was the fact that the revitalization of the main city street was a strategic objective for political leaders. However, this concept evolved rapidly in 2014. As a result of the discrepancy between expectations and outcomes, the Mayor of the City cancelled the role of the manager of Piotrkowska Street and disbanded their team, decreasing the level of formality. A new TCM manager was appointed as a representative of local business. Their selection was based on a choice between candidates from the Łódź business community. The TCM manager is responsible for tasks including the coordination of activities provided for in the Piotrkowska Street Development Strategy, as well as maintaining the cultural life and the attractiveness of the area. The person act-

ing as manager does not have direct support from local civil servants, nor funds reserved in the local budget. In order to pursue their tasks, the manager directly cooperates with departments and units in Łódź City Hall, and also provides information directly to the Mayor of the City. The person performing this role is employed according to a contract based on private law. During the first round of questionnaires, this TCM manager indicated that the most important skills in their work are: the ability to cooperate with different kinds of stakeholders, and the ability to cooperate generally. However, as a person who represents the business community, the TCM manager has to show the ability to exert influence on local civil servants and support their actions with convincing arguments; thus, negotiation skills are crucial.

The attitudes of TCM managers towards delivering public services

It is important to underline the fact that despite the huge variety of formal TCM schemes the tasks mentioned in internal documents are very similar. This means that in each case there is a great deal of importance placed in the way that the TCM manager defines their priorities. Presumably, it is fair to say that there are many factors that exert an influence on how they define their role. These factors might include such things as: the means that they have at their disposal, trust between public and private actors, the willingness of civil society to cooperate, or the urban-geographical characteristics of the area that they manage. Table 1 shows which tasks are more or less important from the perspective of each TCM manager.

Table 1. The priorities of the TCM managers of each city

	Bydgoszcz	Lublin	Gdańsk	Toruń	
Coordinating public security and public order	1	4	3	4	INVESTMENT SERVICES AND IMPROVING QUALITY OF PUBLIC PLACES (TWARDE)
Taking care of the quality of public space	4	4	4	3	
Increasing the investment attractiveness of the public city center	4	4	1	2	
Revitalization in accordance with The Revitalization Act 2015	3	2	1	3	
Delivering initiatives in accordance with the TCM position of the TCM area	4	2	3	3	
Coordination of local government services in the TCM area	4	3	4	3	
Inter-sectoral co-ordination	4	3	4	3	

	Bydgoszcz	Lublin	Gdańsk	Toruń	
Tourism promotion	4	4	2	1	SOCIAL INTEGRATION/ PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNER- SHIP (MIEKKE)
Civic animation	3	2	4	2	
Solving social problems	3	2	3	3	
Transferring initiatives set up by the TCM inside the City Hall	3	2	3	3	
Stimulating and initiating new activities on both sides	4	3	3	4	
Activation and integration of residents of TCM area	3	3	3	2	
Altogether	Soft-20; Strong-arm-24 44 equals Strong arm +4	Soft-16; Strong arm-22 38 equals Strong arm +6	Soft-18; Strong arm-20 38 equals Strong arm +2	Soft-15; Strong arm-21 36 equals Strong arm +6	

Classification of answers: 4 – very important; 3 – important; 2 – not important; 1– irrelevant.

According to the data gathered, we are able to present the relationship between the formality of TCM schemes in Poland and the types of task delivery (Figure 1).

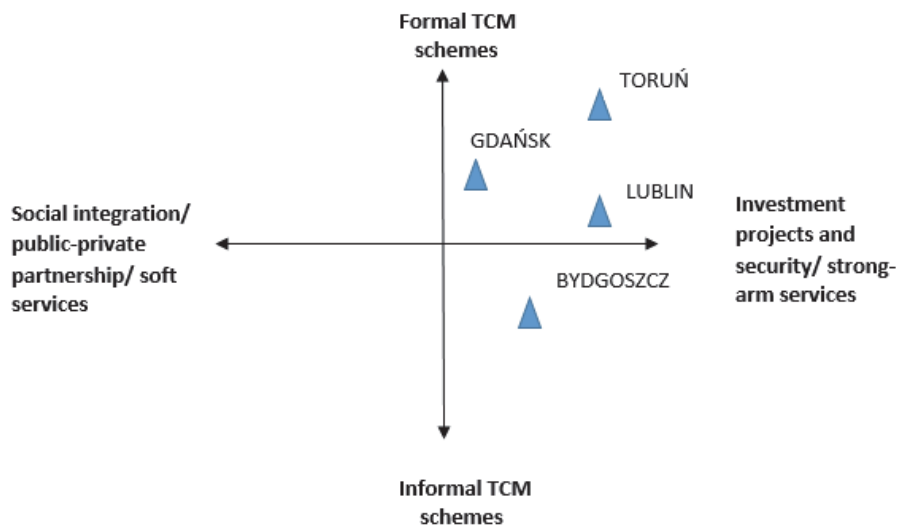


Figure 1. The classification of Polish TCM schemes according to formality and type of task delivery

Toruń, as a city in which the TCM manager is part of City Hall, has the highest level of formality in this position. According to the analysis of internal documents, answers to the questionnaires, and discussion during the focus group, we placed this approach in the middle between investment projects and social integration tasks. Taking into consideration the context in which the TCM manager operates, there is no difference between the kinds of public services that are delivered. Some prioritization could be introduced in terms of the current agenda, the involvement of business partners, or the strategic decisions made by the Mayor of the City. At the far end is the example of the TCM manager in the city of Bydgoszcz. In this case, the most important focus is on social integration and business promotion, along with bridging the gap between the public and private sectors. As a result, the position of manager demands different types of skills in Toruń and Bydgoszcz. The cases of Lublin and Gdańsk are something in between the previous examples. Despite very similar levels of formality, there are differences between the means allocated to the manager and the prioritization of tasks being delivered in the town center.

More insight into the work of TCM managers can be gleaned from their answers to questions concerning their weekly timetables (Table 2).

Table 2. The weekly timetables of TCM managers

How many hours do you spend on the following activities?	Total number of hours
Meetings with NGOs and inhabitants of town center	15
Meetings with local civil servants	40
Meetings with business communities	31.5
Preparation and/or realization of your own projects	50
Internal duties (filling out documents, reporting)	32.5
Meetings with the local councilors	5.2
Other duties	8

A note on the answers: TCM managers were asked to count the number of hours spent on each activity per week. They could choose from 1 to 10 hours.

Despite differences between the formality of schemes implemented in each city, two tasks seem to be the most important: the preparation and realization of TCM managers' own projects, and meetings with local civil servants. According to these answers, we are able to observe that TCM managers are quite independent in planning and implementing their own initiatives. Putting aside the different priorities that each of them have, they spend the largest portion of their weekly time budget on their own projects. However, the second most time-consuming activity shows that in each case TCM managers work in the shadow of a hierarchy; it is hard to imagine that they could work without the involvement or support of public administration.

Interesting conclusions are able to be drawn via the cross-analysis of two answers provided by TCM managers in their questionnaires: (1) the number of hours spent on each task and (2) its importance.

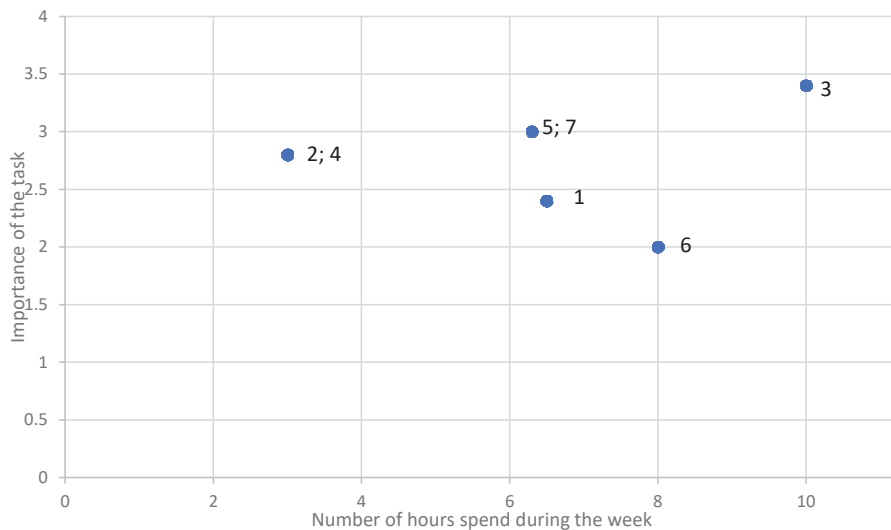


Chart. 1. The relationship between the importance of tasks and the number of hours spent on their delivery

Source: Own study based on questionnaires.

Legend:

No.	Type of task	Partners involved in delivery
1	Coordinating public security and public order	Internal duties (filling out documents, reporting)
2	Civic animation	Meetings with NGO and inhabitants of town center
3	Taking care of the quality of public space	Preparation and/or realization of own projects
4	Solving social problems	Meetings with NGO and inhabitants of town center
5	Increasing the investment attractiveness of the public city center	Meetings with business communities
6	Revitalization in accordance with the Revitalization Act 2015	Meetings with local civil servants
7	Tourism promotion	Meetings with business communities

Source: Own study based on questionnaires.

Discussion and conclusions

The aim of this paper is to occupy a niche within TCM research: the relationship between the level of formality and the type of services that are delivered by managers. According to the results gathered, it is certain that the level of formality exerts an influence, mostly on the priorities of TCM managers in their daily work. Put simply, more formal schemes of TCM cause a more balanced list of priorities to be implemented. Managers in cities such as Torun or Lublin (a more formal scheme) pay much more attention to delivering both soft and investment-related tasks. Furthermore, different kinds of formalities are important in terms of the skills that a TCM manager needs in their daily work. This research outcome should play a crucial role for mayors in the process of appointing a TCM manager. Different levels of formality need either negotiation or project management skills. Lastly, despite differences in the implemented schemes, TCM managers concentrate on very similar things. Thus, we can say that the Polish TCM scheme is very dependent on the structure of local public administration, which determines the daily routine of managers.

Finally, it is worth noting that TCMs are undoubtedly administrative structures, regardless of their degree of formality (though they are greatly influenced by the personalities of their managers). There is a clear tendency to popularize and dominate connections with other public administration institutions. On the other hand, the novelty of this solution in Polish administration means that it is subject to careful consideration by executive bodies (Mayors). Taking into account the specificity of the circumstances in which TCM operates (i.e., the variety of stakeholders from the socio-economic sphere), it would undoubtedly be beneficial to develop the social impact of the work of TCM managers by strengthening their contacts with the local community and with councilors.

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Miesto centro valdymas Lenkijoje europinės perspektyvos kontekste

Anotacija

Miesto centro valdymas tapo populiariu viešojo valdymo įrankiu Europos šalyse. Mokslininkai daugiausia dėmesio skiria Vakarų Europos šalims, o Vidurio Europos regiono miestų centrų valdymui – mažai dėmesio. Šio darbo tikslas – išnagrinėti esamų miestų centrų valdymo svarbą Lenkijos vietos savivaldos sistemoje. Tyrimui buvo pasitelktas atvejo analizės metodas beiir konceptualizuota esama miesto centro valdymo sistema. Tyreėjai siekė suklasifikuoti miesto centro valdymo schemas pagal teikiamų paslaugų tipus. Apibendrinami tyrimą, straipsnio autoriai teigia, kad lenkiški miestų centrų valdymo modeliai yra labiau orientuoti į viešųjų paslaugų teikimą, o jų veikimas yra glaudžiai susijęs su konkrečiomis paslaugų rūšimis. Rekomenduojama, daugiau, plėtoti socialinį miestų centrų valdymo aspektą, o teikiant šios rūšies paslaugas sustiprinti ryšius tarp vietos bendruomenės ir miesto tarybos narių.

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