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Editorial Local Public Policies

“All politics is local” goes a common phrase describing US politics attributed to a long-serving former Speaker of the United States House of Representatives Tip O’Neill. It is meant to describe nuts and bolts of what makes a successful politician: keeping a close relationship with constituents who eventually are concerned most about issues touching their individual lives and communities and they vote accordingly. It is even more true about public policy but in a paradoxical and surprisingly uncharted way.

Public policy analysts focus on one aspect of the local dimension of public policies – implementation and especially its pervasive effects to centrally master-minded plans. “How great expectations in Washington are dashed in Oakland,” as Pressman and Wildavsky entitled their classic on implementation, is a permanent puzzle of policy sciences. However, we know astonishingly little about local constituents systematically (?) influencing national policies, a topic researched from the interest group perspective at best. We often play down public policies of local governments as merely partial solutions of some small-scale local problems. However, if we accept that implementation is an unavoidable stage of policy creation we have to admit that we lack the systematic knowledge of interactions between local politics and centrally designed public policies.

These deficiencies amount to a banal conclusion that it is still the state that is in the focus of public policy research even if we would agree with Daniel Bell’s 1987 forecast that “the state has become too big to solve the small problems in life and too small to solve the big

problems.” Attempts to understand and cure the limitations of the state became a challenge to numerous political scientists, sociologists and philosophers and our knowledge about those who on a daily basis solve instead of the state small citizens’ problems is still very restricted. The state is still the primary frame of reference in the public policy analysis even though any scholar in the field would admit that majority of policies are at least implemented on a local level.

This English-language issue of “Horyzonty Polityki” focuses on those too often overlooked dilemmas of local public policy and local politics research. All authors apparently found case study approach most appropriate at this stage which made their findings impossible to generalise but they supplied the reader with a sound empirical knowledge and hopefully a satisfying food for thought.

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theme issue editor