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Introduction

Urban management encompasses many problem areas that shape residents' quality of life. A focus on the quality of life is gaining importance alongside the growing awareness of public administration employees, managers, as well as residents of urban agglomerations in the field of sustainable development and social responsibility. Government institutions, local authorities, and enterprises increasingly recognise the benefits associated with societal well-being. A well-managed city provides its residents with opportunities for comfortable living, rest, and personal development, while these factors enhance employee productivity and attract investors and tourists, too. At the same time, residents' expectations are rising with regard to access to housing, adequate transport infrastructure, educational opportunities, cultural offerings, leisure and recreational services, and many other aspects. The voices of residents, voters, and stakeholders – all of whom may shape the tone of the debate on urban management strategies – are becoming increasingly significant.

This issue of the *Journal of Public Governance* addresses three areas of urban management, covering topics related to social services in the field of child welfare, the perception of key socioeconomic challenges by the political authorities of district towns in the Silesian Province, and the determinants of regional economic growth in Poland, with particular emphasis on the role of residential property prices.

The first article – authored by Ulviyya Mirzayeva and entitled “Social Services in the Field of Child Welfare: International and Local Practices, and the Necessity of Establishing a Social Work Institution for Child Welfare in Azerbaijan” – addresses the important issue of how central and local government authorities fulfil their obligation to provide education and care for the youngest members of society. The author conducted a broad review of secondary sources and, based on content analysis, synthesised the state of governance in this area in Azerbaijan. We encourage readers to engage with this paper, which offers both methodological value through its approach to content analysis as well as empirical value, providing a diagnosis of the quality of child welfare. Particularly interesting is the comparison of the situation in Azerbaijan with solutions adopted in the Western world (with Canada selected as a reference case), which allowed for a more comprehensive diagnosis and the formulation of applicable conclusions.

The next article – prepared by Monika Cukier-Syguła and entitled “The City Under Pressure: How Do Local Elites Perceive the Challenges of Public Management?” – addresses the issue of how key historical, social, and economic challenges are perceived by the political elites of district towns in the Silesian Province. The author focuses on assessing and comparing

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the opinions of representatives of local authorities on issues such as unemployment, housing shortages, the financial difficulties of local governments, the state of the natural environment, the consequences of the decline of heavy industry, and challenges related to public management. The study is based on survey data collected from representatives of local government units and subsequently subjected to statistical analysis, which made it possible to identify significant differences in the perception of these problems between individual cities. The results indicate that this diversity stems from differing historical, social, and economic conditions. Cities more severely affected by restructuring processes – such as Bytom, Świętochłowice, and Zabrze – experience problems of unemployment and social exclusion much more acutely, while entities with more stable organisational structures, such as Tychy and Bielsko-Biała, identify management-related difficulties to a lesser extent. At the same time, an increasing importance of environmental issues can be observed in some cities, reflecting changes in local political priorities. We encourage readers to consult this article, which makes a significant empirical contribution to research on public management and local development, emphasising the importance of the perspective of political elites in designing individualised urban development strategies and flexible support instruments tailored to the diverse needs and capacities of local government units.

The final article – authored by Victor Shevchuk and entitled “House Prices and Regional Output Growth in Poland” – provides the characterisation and assessment of the determinants of regional economic growth in Poland, with particular emphasis on the role of residential property prices. Drawing on the neoclassical growth paradigm, the author conducted an empirical analysis of the short-term impact of changes in house prices in regional capital cities on the dynamics of regional gross domestic product per capita. The empirical analysis was carried out using the GMM estimator on the basis of quarterly data covering the period from 2010 to 2023. The results indicate a clear heterogeneity in the impact of house prices on regional growth, revealing both expansionary and contractionary effects across individual voivodeships, as well as confirm the existence of income convergence processes at the regional level. We encourage readers to engage with this article, which offers a significant methodological value through the application of advanced estimation techniques as well as empirical value in the form of an in-depth diagnosis of the diversified sources of regional growth in Poland. The paper also constitutes an important contribution to the discussion on the relationship between regions and the specific characteristics of housing policies, as well as the potential use of fiscal instruments, including property taxation, at the regional level.