

Model for management of strategic changes and its application in municipalities of Lithuania

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Abstract. Authors of the paper propose the hierarchical model for management of strategic changes in municipalities and apply it in their empirical research. The model explains the relations between the goals and volume of strategic changes, designates the type of changes and also indicates the management level of the municipality in which the appropriate decisions have to be made. 25 Lithuania's municipalities were investigated. Heads of municipality administration and their deputies expressed their opinion about implementation of strategic changes in a political and administration level of municipality performance as well as assessed the municipality work quality in the volume of functions delegated by the State.

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1. INTRODUCTION

A publication review carried out by Boyne and Walker (2010) shows that researches on various issues of organizations strategic management remain relevant. Through strategic decisions, organizations try to coordinate their internal possibilities and external challenges of the environment. Speaking of local government and especially the management of governmental work, changing economic, social and political environment is of great importance, especially the public administration reform, commercialization scopes of services provided by municipalities, deconcentration and decentralization of municipality management, changes in information usage, changes in the roles of civil servants and other. Most of the mentioned conditions change very intensively and essentially. Due to this reason, in order to adapt to a changing environment, self-government institutions must change constantly and systematically. Hence, strategic changes in municipalities must not be random, but rather well planned following the hierarchy of changes. Systematically organized

strategic changes in all hierarchical levels allow eliminating the negative consequences of organization environment challenges and using their advantages. Although the research field of change management problem is very wide, the methods for indicating and managing changes published in the scientific literature are in most cases of empirical nature and inappropriate for the analysis of specific situations, while municipalities are a quite specific object of research. In addition, the majority of scientists interpret the substance and content of strategic changes rather differently. All of this is evidence that methodological guidelines of strategic change research are not fully formed for particular situations; therefore, further questions of strategic change analysis are very relevant considering the particularity of local municipality.

The goal of the article is to reveal the necessity of Local Government strategic changes in Lithuanian municipalities of average economic capabilities. The assignments of the research are: i) to describe the specifics of strategic changes in Local Government in a theoretical aspect; ii) to propose an original hierarchical structural model for management of strategic changes in municipalities based on theoretical analysis; iii) to carry out a research on the necessity of strategic changes in municipalities of average economic capabilities.

Systematic analysis and surveying were invoked to carry out the research.

2. MANAGEMENT OF STRATEGIC CHANGES IN THE CONTEXT OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Relation between challenges in external environment and potential of the organization forms a perspective to organization performance (Boyne, Walker, 2010). Management of organization performance is a process when goals are set and accomplished and the desired results are obtained. In this context, strategic management is comprehended as managerial work on a strategic level. Huge organizations, especially those distinguishing in a variety of target groups and services have many goals, systems for their management and measurement, directed to implementation of different programs and activities. Hence, strategic management of organization performance pierces and connects all levels of organizational management and all management systems. (Poister, 2010).

As Poister, Pitts and Edwards (2010) notice, the forming of an organization strategy is an assignment of strategic planning, whereas strategic planning is an element of strategic management, which includes management of resources, implementation of goals, and control and evaluation of organization performance. Figure 1 presents a conceptual model of strategic planning and strategic performance management, which illustrates the logic and connections between both objects. However, as Hatry (2002) argues, public organizations, compared to business organizations, use minimal means of strategic planning. This is due to the peculiarities of public organizations' purpose. For example, target groups and services provided by local government are so diverse that it becomes extremely difficult to unambiguously define the desired results, conclude and follow a plan of actions to achieve them. Poister (2010) notices that political crest of public organizations have difficulties with setting goals oriented at concrete results, involving annual plans into long-term plans by relating the required budget, human and other resources. However, opposite observations have been made, which are discussed in the publications of Hendrich (2003) and Wheeland (2004). In addition, earlier researches carried out by Poister and Streib (2005) also show that strategic planning helps to connect the organization's abilities and performance improvements.

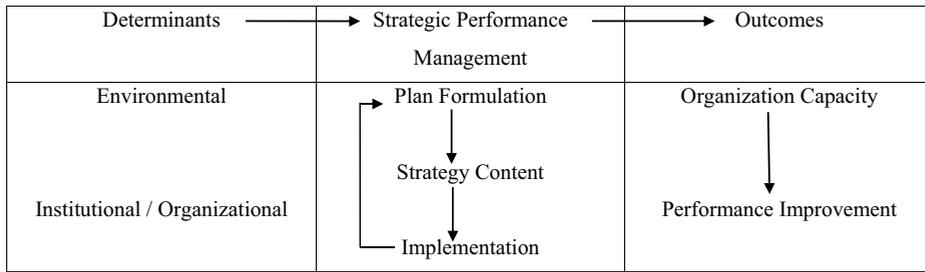


Figure 1. Conceptual model of Strategic Performance Management and Strategic Planning

Source: adapted from Poister, Pitts, Edwards, 2010.

Transition from strategic planning to strategic performance management is a difficult challenge, as is re-orientation from performance measurement to performance management. Such step would enable a more effective connection of strategic and performance management (Poister, 2010, p. s249).

It is important to notice that issues of organization's strategic management and performance management are connected in reciprocal relations. Performance management enriches strategic planning (Moynihan, 2008) because it allows to evaluate the tangibility of strategic decision makers' expectations and the limitations of their realization during the implementation of a set strategy (Poister, 2010, p. s253). Thus, organization's strategic management is an iterative process, because implementation of strategy leads to the review of the strategy itself (Poister, Pitts, Edwards, 2010; Raišienė et al., 2015).

When analysing the peculiarities of strategic performance management in local government, it is important to evaluate the limitations of municipalities when making strategic decisions. For example, in Lithuania, the country has delegated municipalities to carry out a part of its functions. This in itself influences some strategic decisions made by municipalities. On the other hand, the politicians in the strategic peak of municipalities follow the values supported by their represented parties. Hence, the changes of governing party influence essential transformations of the strategic plans in municipalities. These observations highlight the necessity of change management skills and understanding of processes and systems in the pursuit for efficiency of local government institutions.

The issues of public organization change management have been discussed for decades and remain relevant nowadays. According to Quinn (1980), Magnuson (1977) and Carnall (1990), changes are alterations that are made in order to improve or even essentially change one or another element of organizational subculture. Fiss and Zajac (2006) note that organizational changes are necessary in order to adapt the requirements of external environment. Meanwhile Bold (2011) states that the main goal of any change initiation in organization is an aim to augment the organization. As can be seen, in general, two attitudes to essential changes exist in a scientific discourse. The first attitude states that change is a response to an experienced influence. In addition, it is difficult to determine whether the influence experienced is primary (direct) or secondary. Due to this reason, changes are fundamentally uncontrollable. Organizations are only able to react to them. Hurst (1995) claims that changes are alterations in organizational environment and interior, which take place objectively and are completely independent of its work nature, results, management and other aspects. They cannot be changed, deflected or influenced in any other way. However, the majority of the authors support an opposite attitude and state that organizations can indeed control changes. Unplanned changes are in most cases related to a loss and come in unexpectedly. Such situations require reaction. On the other hand, organizations do not experience such situations often and are able to plan essential changes and

control change processes. McGuinness and Morgan (2003) note that attitude to changes, attention to them influence not only the realization of changes, but also the safeguard of planned quality.

The planning and organizing of strategic changes are one of the most important fields of organization management which is related to the implementation of new courses of the performance and change the common and usual order of organization to a quite wide extent. Strategic changes motivate the major part of organization's personnel to change their action templates and even scale of beliefs (Farson, 2004). Alterations change the organization's existence from „being“ to „becoming“ and affect all social structures, which is why it induces resistance even in the case of changes being implemented successfully and distinguishing in sustainability (McGuinness, Morgan, 2003).

Organization's openness and tolerance to changes is strongly dependent on the alignment of organization's structure and management systems, as well as on the affinity of organization's vision and goal levels between the members of the organization. Therefore, no matter the level of organization in which the changes take place, they are influenced by the structure of the whole organization, system and work processes, work groups and individual employees (McGuinness, Morgan, 2003). However, it is purposeful to differently evaluate strategic and partial changes.

Partial (local) changes, taking place in only one or several elements of organization's system may be both strategic and non-strategic. Systematic changes which affect all elements of the organization in one or another aspect and changing the main parameters of the organization as a system are always strategic. The scientific literature often approaches systemic changes as organizations' systemic alternation of organization's development. Systemic change connects three ways of organization transformation: restructuring, reorganization and reconceptualization (Zakarevičius, 2003). Systematic nature of strategic changes is emphasized very strongly in this case. Strategic changes in Lithuania's local government were analysed by Vanagas (2007) quite in detail. According to the author, the model of learning organization could not be applied in Lithuanian municipalities, therefore, it is necessary to invoke the established methodology. The established methodology enables the administration of change management process with the help of bureaucratic means of management. Nevertheless, the author does not analyse the structure of strategic change, based on which separate subdivisions of municipalities, various work groups and commissions could initiate and coordinate some or another strategic changes.

Typically, scientific literature distinguishes strategic changes to technological, cultural and political (Lynch, 1997). This classification of strategic changes is too general and conceptual. It does not allow analysing the changes in municipalities systematically and according to hierarchical levels, which is extremely relevant in a bureaucratic structure. Considering the authors' proposal to analyse the strategic changes based on a hierarchical structural model, which includes strategic political, structural and performance changes in relation with the goals and volume of changes (Figure 2).

In the first level, the hierarchical top of changes, *strategic political changes* are initiated. Their direction is mostly dependent on the main values of the ruling party or coalition. Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith (1993) argue that the system of values and beliefs is the template following which the change of politics content is measured. Strategic political changes are related to solving economic and social problems and execution of assignments in separate fields of politics, formation of a new political attitude or improvement of the existing one, increase of electorate activity. The changes of political level in municipalities are initiated by the municipality councils.

Hierarchy of decision making	Type of changes	Goal of changes	Volume of changes
<i>First level</i> Political decision making	Strategic political changes	Economic and social decision making	Shift of values
<i>Second level</i> Work priority management decision making	Strategic work changes	Reorganization of municipality's goals and work priorities	Reconceptualization
<i>Third level</i> Administrational decision making	Strategic administrative changes	Development of organization's potential by invoking the changes of structures, management systems and processes	Restructuration
<i>Fourth level</i> Decision making in functional fields	Strategic functional changes	Optimization of municipality service realization (personnel strategy, public relations strategy, finance distribution and other means)	Reorganization

Figure 2. Hierarchical structural model for management of strategic changes in municipalities

Source: author's compilation.

The second level of strategic changes includes essential *work priority changes* of the municipality. When analysing the work of municipality from a strategic point of view, it is not enough to examine the changes of services and processes, which are limited to institutional level. Strategic changes in municipality's work are related with alternation which may affect social and economic environment in the municipality's territory to a certain extent. The municipality's work strategy indicates, which activity is important and what are its priorities. Without strategy, all actions of change may bring some sort of economic benefit at best due to reduction of costs, but would hardly allow increasing the synergetic effect of work. The prerogative of municipality councils is to ratify and change the priorities of municipality's work which are defined following certain norm documents (in Lithuania – Strategic planning methodology certified by the government). The municipality council also ratifies essential decisions related to redistribution of assignments between programs or program goals. In general, improvement of work in local government emerges from the necessity to improve the efficiency of providing services in the aspect of expenditure. As Heiskanen and Jokinen (2014) state, usually the goal of reforms is to solve fiscal problems and satisfy the citizens' expectations to receive high level services from the accountable municipality. Andrews and Boyne (2012) also agree that strategic work changes are essentially dedicated to help municipalities save resources. Indeed, this is natural, because the realization of municipalities' work is often delegated to be executed by external organizations, various economic subjects. Usually, the personnel of local government institutions only initiate strategic initiatives, while business organizations or public institutions existing in the territory of local government as an administrative unit are responsible for their realization.

The third level of strategic changes includes *administrational changes*, which provide municipalities with internal opportunities to effectively manage the processes of service rendering through structures and management systems. In other words, strategic administrative changes help to develop organizational potential. Administrative changes in municipalities require no less attention than political or work priority changes. For example, the researchers have determined that structural changes infringe the managerial routine and ordinary processes in the organization (Zajac, Kraatz, 1993), destroy the organization's memory and reduces the cumulative management professionalism (Chisholm, 2002), and in turn bring negative effect on the results in a short-term perspective. Exactly due to the consequences of restructuring being firstly negative, changes must be well weighed and planned. It is the only way to compensate the loss in long-run and medium-term perspective (Andrews, Boyne, 2012).

The fourth level of strategic changes distinguishes functional changes in various fields of activity, e.g. personnel, finances, public relations etc. Personnel management changes are applied by choosing personnel, creating systems of personnel evaluation and motivation, planning the development of employees' qualification and so on and so forth. Changes in the field of finances are related to the search for alternative sources of financing, novelties in providing services as per contract, introducing or changing the order of country-controlled object privatization etc. With the help of public relations, social behaviour of community members may be formed. Public relations may help to achieve the set informational goals as well as to increase the number of consumers of services provided by the municipality. In addition, strategic public relation changes may improve the reputation of the institution and help to form a positive public opinion.

Summing the levels of hierarchical structural changes in municipalities up, it may be stated that changes in political (first) and work priority (second) levels are always strategic, because they work systematically, whereas administrative (third level) and functional (fourth level) changes may be strategic or operative. If changes of the third or fourth level do not serve strategic goals, they are operative. In any case, as discussed before, any changes affect a much wider field than that affected directly. Therefore, these changes must be rationally planned and professionally implemented.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Questionnaire survey was carried out in May, 2014. The elements of sample – municipalities – were chosen according to their economical capability indexes. The examined municipalities fall into four regions (Kaunas, Panevėžys, Šiauliai, Telšiai), where gross domestic product (GDP) created constitutes from 70 to 100 per cent of Lithuania's average. Through e-mail, all *leaders of municipality administration and their deputies* were questioned in the following 25 average economical capability municipalities: Birštonas region, Jonava region, Kaišiadoriai region, Kaunas city, Kaunas region, Kėdainiai region, Prienai region, Raseiniai region, Panevėžys city, Panevėžys region, Kupiškis region, Pasvalys region, Rokiškis region, Biržai region, Akmenė region, Joniškis region, Kelmė region, Pakruojis region, Radviliškis region, Šiauliai city, Šiauliai region, Mažeikiai region, Plungė region, Rietavas region, Telšiai region. Answers were obtained from all the mentioned municipalities. A total of 48 correctly filled questionnaires were received.

Limitations of research. The data from all municipalities which were requested to fill out the questionnaire was received. Nevertheless the representation of research data is average, because the population of the research consists of 78 people.

The research questionnaire consists of four blocks of questions: 1. Questions on the strategic changes in municipality and their necessity on a political level. 2. Questions on the strategic changes and their necessity on an administrative level. 3. Questions on the municipality work quality in the volume of functions delegated by the country. 4. Questions on the strategic changes in local government institutions and their necessity on a level of functional activities. In addition, the respondents were asked to express their opinion and offer suggestions in the end of every question block. In processing the data of the research, the results of the survey were generalized and presented in a percent style.

4. RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH

4.1. The necessity of strategic political changes

During the research, the majority (94 per cent) of the respondents stressed out the necessity of political changes in the field of citizen life quality improvement. Two problems were mentioned most often in the lines of open questions: insufficient accessibility and social services and restructuring of healthcare institution network that does not satisfy the citizens' needs, initiated by the state government.

The results of the research also show that municipalities especially lack political initiatives in recruiting and activating the local communities and developing inter-organizational partnership. Only 13 per cent of the respondents claimed that this field received political attention in their municipalities. However, 61 per cent of the respondents agreed that it is an important question.

83 per cent of the respondents see a fair necessity of strategic political changes in the field of municipality economic development. It may be assumed that municipalities do not create favourable conditions for the development of a competitive industry, attraction of local and foreign investment. Attention from the politicians is also required by the development of small and medium enterprise in municipalities, formation and development of business clusters.

According to the respondents (72 per cent), questions of countryside modernization lack political attention. The state of agriculture infrastructure and stimulation of marketable unconventional agriculture production branches is dependent on the political decisions in municipalities.

More than half of the respondents (57 per cent) expressed an opinion that political changes are also required in the pursuit for concord between human and environment. In this field, municipalities should initiate projects for formation and realization of modern waste management systems, modernization of water management, renovation of thermal economy, reduction of air pollution. On the other hand, environment sustainability receives more attention from the municipalities on a political level than other mentioned fields (Table 1).

Table 1

The necessity of strategic political changes in the investigated municipalities

Field of change	Distribution of respondents' answers to the questions (per cent)					
	Strategic changes are...					
	Executed	Partly executed	Not executed	Required	Partially required	Not required
Economic development	4	44	32	83	15	
Countryside modernization	31	47	22	72	23	5
Improvement of citizens' life quality	13	29	58	94	6	-
Harmony between human activity and environment	53	34	13	57	40	3
Recruitment of communities and intersectorial or interorganizational collaboration	13	22	65	61	32	7

Source: own calculation.

4.2. The necessity of strategic work priority changes in municipalities

A considerable part in the work of municipalities consists of functions delegated by the country, which are obligatory to carry out. In the survey, we asked whether strategic changes oriented to new fields of municipality work relevant in the level of local government are required. 71 per cent of the respondents stated that such changes are required; however, their initiation is difficult due to the inertia of local government institutions or other reasons. Then, we asked the respondents to evaluate the municipalities' work in work fields delegated by the country in a scale of 1 to 10. The distribution of answers is presented in Table 3.

Table 2

Evaluation of implementation of functions delegated by the country in the investigated municipalities

Field of change	Distribution of respondents' evaluations (N=48)									
	Point meanings: from 1-very poor to 10-excellent									
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Improvement of public education accessibility and quality	-	-	2	5	7	8	15	7	2	-
Reduction of poverty and social exclusion	-	3	7	12	10	6	7	1	2	-
Improvement of health security	-	-	4	7	6	13	15	3	-	-
Creation of work places, improvement of business conditions	-	1	3	14	9	8	6	5	2	-
Preservation of territory originality	-	1	3	4	6	10	8	12	4	1
Improvement of environment quality	-	1	2	3	6	6	11	13	4	2
Improvement of engineer and communication infrastructure	-	-	2	8	3	14	10	6	5	-

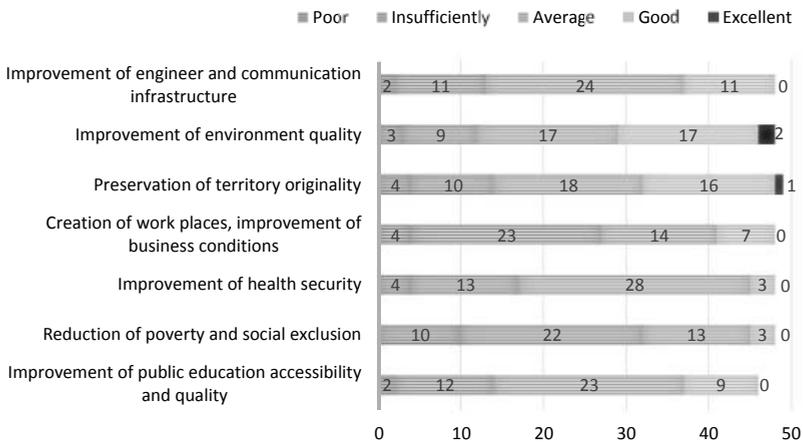


Figure 3. Evaluation of implementation of strategic work field in researched municipalities by the viewpoint of respondents
Source: own calculation.

Figure 3 illustrates the generalized results. It may be seen that natural environment quality improvement and security of territory originality are the fields in which municipalities are the most successful. The fields municipalities have most difficulties taking care of are reduction of poverty and social exclusion, creation of workplaces and improvement of business conditions. In addition, improvement of health protection, public education accessibility and quality improvement may also be evaluated as poor or average.

Looking into the consequences why municipalities execute functions delegated by the country averagely or poorly, it became clear that the strongest constraints are posed by insufficient funding for the execution of these functions and lack of managerial competences of people responsible for the development of mentioned activities (Raišienė, 2014). Concluding the situation of municipality work field realization, it may be noticed that the necessity of strategic changes is obvious.

4.3. The necessity of strategic administrative changes

The research has shown that on a level of administrative changes, the municipalities are mostly concerned about the improvement of communication systems (marked by 69 per cent of the respondents) and update of accounting systems (41 per cent). The most attention is required by adaptation of organizational structures and processes to the modern challenges (51 per cent), development of quality management systems (61 per cent) and implementation of business planning and control systems (53 per cent) (Table 2).

Table 3

The necessity of strategic administrative changes in the investigated municipalities

Field of change	Distribution of respondents' answers to questions (per cent)					
	Strategic changes are...					
	Applied	Partly applied	Not applied	Required	Partially required	Not required
Coordination of organizational structures and systems with modern challenges	13	15	72	51	17	22
Implementation of work planning and control systems	5	14	81	53	25	22
Improvement of accounting systems	41	22	37	29	26	45
Improvement of communication systems	69	17	14	10	15	75
Development of quality management systems	-	11	89	61	20	19

Source: own calculation.

4.4. Necessity of functional changes in municipalities

Answers to the questions about municipalities' work on a functional level have shown that the quality of municipality routine work is insufficient. The necessity of changes in this field is clear.

According to the respondents, the following assignments are poorly accomplished in the municipalities: personnel career planning (92 per cent), development of employee motivation systems (89 per cent),

formation of personnel work evaluation system (91 per cent), development of public relations (71 per cent), changes in state object privatization order (90 per cent), personnel selection (83 per cent), increase of volume and security of quality of services provided as per contract (82 per cent). It is paradoxical that even though the respondents admit the functional assignments of the municipality being accomplished poorly, the necessity of changes is not emphasized. The reasons of this situation were not ascertained during the researched and could be examined in the future.

The respondents see the highest necessity of changes on a functional level of municipalities' work in two fields: search for sponsorship sources (92 per cent) and development of public relations (62 per cent) (Table 4).

Table 4

The necessity of functional changes in the investigated municipalities

Field of change	Distribution of the respondents' answers to the questions (per cent)					
	Quality of work execution			Changes are...		
	Good	Average	Poor	Required	Partially required	Not required
Personnel management: Personnel selection	3	15	83	38	21	41
Formation of personnel work evaluation system	3	6	91	36	20	43
Development of employee motivation system	4	7	89	25	33	42
Planning of personnel career	4	4	92	43	27	30
Search for new sources of sponsorship	45	9	46	92	8	-
Improvement of volume of services provided as per contract and supervision of quality	3	16	82	29	15	56
Improvement of state object privatization order	3	7	90	54	32	14
Development of public relations	9	20	71	62	23	15

Source: own calculation.

CONCLUSIONS

The complexity of local government goal and management structure requires the ability to systematically comprehend the characteristics of the entirety and at the same time to evaluate the progress in separate fields of work and management, *Hierarchical structural model for management of strategic change in municipalities* may serve for this purpose. The model allows to analyse and to evaluate the fields of municipality work improvement and strategic change planning regarding the levels of strategic performance management. In other words, the model not only explains the relations between the goals and volume of strategic changes and designates the type of changes, but also indicates the hierarchy level of the municipality in which the appropriate decisions have to be made.

The proposed model clarifies nature of changes in areas of political decisions, municipality performance, administration work, and implementation of municipal functions. As it may be seen, political, performance and administrative changes are always strategic, whereas changes in functional work field may be both strategic and operational.

The research on the necessity of strategic changes presented in the article carried out in 25 municipalities of average economic capability in Lithuania shows that the hierarchical structural model for management of strategic change in municipalities can be applied in practice and is beneficial in ascertaining relevant fields of change necessity.

Having carried out the analysis of strategic change necessity in municipalities, it became clear that i) *on a level of political decisions*, changes are required in such fields as economic development, country modernization, improvement of citizens' life quality, increase of harmony between human activity and environment, recruitment of communities and inter-sectorial / inter-organizational collaboration; ii) *on a level of municipality performance decisions*, solutions are necessary that would allow to reduce problems in the following fields: reduction of poverty and social exclusion, creation of workplaces, improvement of business conditions, improvement of health protection, accessibility of public education and security of education quality; iii) *on a level of administrative decisions*, the most relevant decisions are those which would allow to coordinate the local government's organizational structures and systems with the modern challenges, implement more effective work planning and control as well as quality management systems.

The survey has shown that the quality of municipalities' work on a functional level is insufficient. Therefore, the necessity of changes in this field is clear. However, the respondents themselves did not emphasize the necessity of changes. The reasons for this situation were not ascertained during the research and could be examined in the future. It is possible that the research on limitations of functional level could allow to better grasp the reasons due to which the investigated municipalities are less economically capable than others.

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