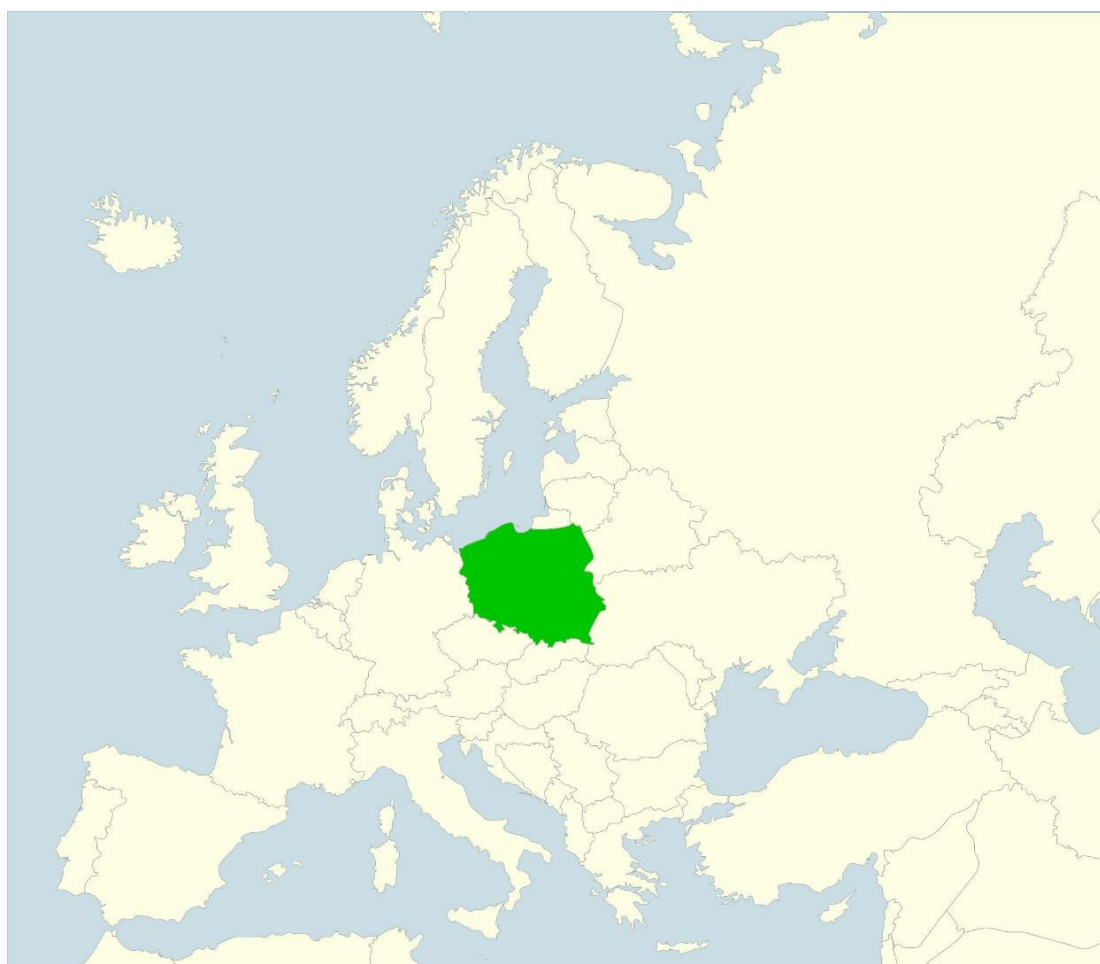


**LOCAL HORIZONS OF GOVERNANCE.  
SOCIAL CONDITIONS FOR GOOD  
GOVERNANCE IN RURAL DEVELOPMENT IN  
POLAND**

Wojciech Kniec<sup>1</sup>, Wojciech Goszczyński<sup>2</sup>



<sup>1</sup> Wojciech Kniec: professor of rural sociology, Institute of Sociology, Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń, Poland. ORCID: 0000-0002-5500-3749, e-mail: kniec@umk.pl

<sup>2</sup> Wojciech Goszczyński: assistant professor, Institute of Sociology, Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń, Poland. ORCID: 0000-0002-3389-1255, e-mail: goszczyński@umk.pl

**Abstract:** The last thirty years have radically changed the nature of local resource management in rural communities throughout Poland (as well as in some other Central and Eastern European countries). New metamorphosis, policy, and funding mechanisms related to Poland's political transformation and accession to the European Union have radically changed the character of institutions and tools available in rural development. Local communities have evolved along with improved education levels, decline in agricultural employment rates, and increased migrations to cities and Western Europe. This article presents the social conditions for the good governance processes in a selected region of Poland. Based on their extended quantitative and qualitative research, the authors discuss a number of phenomena such as the low effectiveness of collective actions, dense networks of informal relations, and the lack of trust in public service institutions despite the deregulation of certain powers. The ethnographic study reveals that while their overall picture may seem quite uniform, local rural communities in Poland tend to differ depending on the economic structure, history, and cultural identity of their inhabitants. Finally, the article analyses difficulties in the implementation of the good governance mechanisms within the country's local rural communities.

**Keywords:** rural development, local development, good governance, social capital

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### Highlights

- Knowledge and power networks at various levels of the social hierarchy are key components of good governance.
  - Implementation of good governance mechanisms are important for the development of rural communities in Central and Eastern Europe.
  - Social conditions for good governance are a somewhat neglected aspects in social science theory.
  - Explicit common conditions for good governance in rural Poland are: strong relations within communities, domination of direct and informal relations, lack of trust and delegation of power.
  - Unique conditions of good governance mechanisms in rural Poland do not favour transparency of power, participation and efficiency at local level.
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## 1. Introduction

As recently as two decades ago, the distinction between governance and local resource management was not so obvious in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) (Pierre 2000). The development model adopted by these states, both within the legal-administrative system and from the perspective of the general public, was to be founded on the solid structures of the centrally controlled administration and local government institutions (Emerson et al. 2018). However, in the face of the systemic, political, and economic changes – and with the diffusion of social innovations to this part of the world – the CEE countries began to shift from their traditional methods towards public governance followed by good governance (Hoen 2001). Negotiating the accession of these countries to the European Union (EU) played a key role here by activating legal and administrative processes that were in line with the paradigm of development management supported by the EU (Gąsior-Niemiec 2007, Furmankiewicz 2012). From the late 1980s, if not before, they were based first on the idea of public governance and then good governance, resulting in new management mechanisms and a considerable shift in the postulated role of citizens. Both processes proved to be particularly important in rural areas. On the one hand, they brought new methodologies of governance through the changing mechanisms of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and the Rural Development Policy (RDP) of the EU; on the other hand, the sociological framework for development management continued to be shaped by the very nature of local rural communities. This

article focuses on the latter. **Our aim is to present the social conditions for the processes of good governance in rural communities in Poland.** How have Poland's unique relations within local communities, contacts with the outside world, attitudes to state institutions, and the development of civil society institutions influenced the shape and effectiveness of the good governance processes?

## 2. Good governance and the development of rural communities

### 2.1 From governance to good governance

In essence, public governance involves identifying instruments capable of the modelling and deepening of deliberative democracy as a tool that enables broader participation of local citizens in exercising power. In general terms, public governance seeks to resolve local problems with the participation of actors who are affected by them. The public governance model highlights the importance of two-way 'collaborative participation' while also extending responsibility for the development policy over all sectors rather than only the public administration.

The New Public Management (NPM) was among the first concepts that highlighted the need to introduce the principles of public governance (Hyndman 2016). By adopting a more business-like approach to public and civic service institutions, the NPM sought to improve their organisational efficiency (also by reducing their operational costs) rather than their (social) effectiveness and ability to meet social needs in the long term (Ferlie 2003, Newman et al. 2004). Using the techniques that had proven to work well in the business sector, the NPM approach ultimately aimed to optimise the delivery of public services; however, it did not take into account a number of sensitive and 'touchy' variables largely non-existent in the business sector, for instance, the importance of relations between the local authorities and representatives of the local organisations (Dunleavy 1991).

The concept of 'local governance' goes one step further by extending the idea of public goods management towards co-governance and co-management (Newman et al. 2004). It entails a deliberate blurring of the traditionally strict boundaries between the public administration and the non-governmental and private sectors, where competences in different areas of public service are not set in stone but depend on a given local situation. The basic problem in this model is ensuring the adequate transparency of actions undertaken by non-public actors in local matters and their competence to manage public goods (Stoker 2011). Neither can be achieved without appropriate social capital (Stoker 1998, Zajda et al. 2017). Therefore, the idea of 'local governance' within Western Europe gained yet another dimension during the second half of the 1980s. The resulting public management solutions proposed by the World Bank became to be known as 'good governance' (Nanda 2006).

The idea of good governance emerged from the conclusions crystallising in the late 1980s from analysis of the permanent economic crisis in developing countries in terms of its causes and the failures to stop it. It was established that the primary obstacle to overcoming the stagnation trap lay in the governance crisis. Detailed studies were conducted that revealed a direct correlation between poor governance and public services and poor economic performance.

The concept of good governance, first introduced in the World Bank's documents and aid programmes during the early 1990s (The World Bank 1992, The World Bank 1994), was developed in order to improve the effectiveness of the World Bank's support programmes in developing countries. Essentially, good governance was founded on seven principles:

- 1) **Participation** in governance as a two-way process that involves associations of citizens (mutual respect for the knowledge and competences of the respective sectors);
- 2) **Rule of law** – tolerance and equal rights;
- 3) **Transparency and responsiveness** – access to information, transparency of public services;
- 4) **Consensus-oriented** – an attempt to work out common definitions for problems and possible strategies to solve them;

- 5) **Equity and inclusiveness** – elimination of the problem of disadvantaged groups and areas, inclusion of local leaders in co-management processes;
- 6) **Effectiveness and efficiency** – focus on sustainable development: (1) to ensure effective management at the local level, measures that are proportionate to the reported needs should be prioritised (economical resource management); (2) the principle of subsidiarity is implemented according to which society's needs should be attended to at the lowest possible level of the administrative hierarchy, with every higher level serving only as an auxiliary, complementary body that offers support;
- 7) **Responsibility towards society** – defined as a multi-faceted accountability which includes the liability of officials/clerks for their decisions, corporate responsibility for the impact on the local environment, and the responsibility of non-governmental entities with regards to their actions towards citizens.

Therefore, good governance is an approach that extends the processes of governing beyond the sphere of the public administration and political authorities to include broadly defined groups of interest and social and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in decision-making processes (Kooiman 2002). By applying these principles in practice, good governance was expected to ensure high-quality democracy along with political stability, non-violence, the rule of law, a guarantee of civil liberties, and coherent anti-corruption policies (Doornbos 2001). There was also a belief that it would increase the effectiveness of the state's response to (satisfaction of) citizens' needs, e.g., through effective public consultation mechanisms, the inclusion of local leaders in the decision-making processes, and seeking inspiration for further development in the knowledge of actors who thus far had remained outside the political mainstream. Designed to improve the conditions for the functioning of democracy in developing countries, the concept of 'good governance' was also one of the key pre-accession postulates for the transformation of the administrative systems in the CEE countries, including Poland (Drechsler 2004; Hooghe, Quintelier 2014, Furmankiewicz et al. 2016).

With regards to its institutional instruments, the following social elements of good governance can be highlighted: the development of social capital, civil society, and social participation in growth planning and the subsequent implementation of the adopted plans. Indeed, it is argued 'that the direct "command and control" mode of power of the state no longer seems to be effective. Instead, other more indirect technologies of power are used to govern at a distance, with power exercised by the state across space by drawing others in through delegated instruments such as partnerships' (Derkzen et al. 2008).

In light of the above, good governance is said to be an approach which is both heterarchical and decentralised. Its hierarchy manifests itself primarily through networks of knowledge and power developed between actors and organisations representing different levels of social hierarchy, sectors, and areas. Naturally, these are not perfect constructs capable of self-functioning; they typically require administrative and legal support to guarantee their longevity. However, this leads to the proliferation of bureaucratic dysfunctions, excessive growth of the administrative apparatus, and dense regulations, orders, instructions, etc., consequently reducing the flexibility of local partnerships and effectively constraining their activity (Peters 2010). Finally, many researchers have highlighted the educational dimension of good governance (Barnabas 1998; Mungiu-Pippidi 2016). The exchange of knowledge and ideas between local and central technocrats and civil society institutions, with the latter participating in the preparation of expert opinions, is conducive to the dissemination and internalisation of the standards of collaboration and dialogue (Stephenson 2013).

## 2.2 Social and cultural boundaries of good governance

According to Guzal-Dec et al. (2020), 'in operationalising the concept of good governance, it seems advisable to regularly identify the principles of good governance from the perspective of a given public institution's objectives, thus creating unique sets of features, while the principle of civic control, participation and efficient administration should be treated as superior'.

Seeking to construct a coherent definition of good governance, Szumowski (2017) used a variety of concepts to draw an interesting summary of its rules. As a result, the following components of good governance were identified and grouped into main principles:

- The principle of civic control based on transparency and accountability;
- The principle of citizen participation (in governance) based on participation, responsiveness, and the standard of striving for a consensus;
- The principle of public institutions operating with a far-reaching vision and internal coherence;
- The principle of operational administration based on the rules of efficiency and effectiveness;
- The principle of the rule of law based on the rules of justice, corruption prevention, law, and order.

For the purposes of this article, the first two points were of particular interest to us. Good governance is reduced at times to the role of a technical mechanism of power, which ignores its social background. However, the quality of governance and its mechanisms depends on the nature of the local community and its connections, effectiveness and responsiveness. When describing the normative dimension of good governance, P.C. Schmitter (2002) highlighted the following postulates:

- Systematic interaction between public and private institutions;
- Negotiation and achieving a balance of interests;
- A common definition of problems and objectives of local development;
- Social participation using various methods and techniques.

According to Varelidis, good governance at the local level should be defined as a comprehensive and multidimensional system based on partnerships, cooperative networks, institutions, and individual actors who together, through their activities, stand for and associate the public, private and third sectors, frequently exceeding beyond the local level, associating with institutions at the national and regional levels and – mostly indirectly but importantly – with transnational agendas (Varelidis 2011). From this perspective, according to the authors of the textbook *Local Governance and Sustainable Rural Development* (Euracademy Association 2009), the social capital of the local community, or the balance of its components – relations, the ability to cooperate, identity, the quality of communication, and the sense of subjectivity – is of fundamental importance for shaping virtually all elements of good governance at the local level.

At this point, it is worth emphasising that the relationship between the social context and good governance is ambivalent. Strong and homogeneous local communities do not invariably contribute to high-quality local governance. For example, close and multiple connections may produce local cliques, which can significantly reduce the transparency of actions. Gabriel argues that social capital – defined as the Putnam resource at the disposal of individuals – supports the formation of groups unfavourable to good governance, based on clientelism, nepotism, and amoral familism (Gabriel et al. 2002). Conversely, when recognised as a feature of the social structure and, therefore, a public good, it will contribute to the emergence of various civic institutions, particularly norms and values consistent with those represented by civil society.

Social capital, institutions, and the quality of local management are inextricably linked with one another. It would be difficult to imagine a well-governed community without the links between the formal and informal, external and embedded institutions. Given these arguments, it could be postulated that social capital and good governance should form a relationship that strives for:

- Local pluralism: through institutionalised manifestations of competing developmental visions subjected to democratic debate;
- Innovation in development: searching for developmental opportunities to discover the community's hidden resources;
- A sense of community: formation of the social attitude that expresses one's willingness to act together with others;

- Civic culture: the ability to cooperate with other people, recognise the impact of non-local events upon the situation of the community, and become a team player in the social game with representatives of the state, NGOs, and other citizens.

As a result, a local community could be modelled towards the ideal type, which, for the purposes of this publication, was labelled as the ‘community of development opportunities’ – in opposition to the ‘anomic’ or ‘clan-based’ communities whose networks of social relations either were never really established or imploded into thousands of small, individual worlds.

The role of the social context has also been highlighted by researchers of local democracy. In his analysis of the axiological and ethical foundations of participation, Sen (2001) emphasised the importance of (the broadly defined transparency and the free flow of knowledge and information. Informationally disadvantaged groups are also excluded from development opportunities and, therefore, impact on public institutions. As a result, democratic institutions become ‘colonised’ by undemocratically recruited personnel. The effectiveness of such a system is low because it not only prevents the mobilisation of hidden social resources, but even blocks them. Furthermore, Sen argues that local development should be managed in a way that guarantees fairness at each of its stages: from planning to implementation, evaluation and modification. Societies closed to diversity, with low levels of bridging social capital, based predominantly on embedded structures even if those are not derived from the general social order, are characterised (as the empirical part of the article will show) by amoral familism. In such systems, information and, thus, power are concentrated in the hands of the selected few (related by familial or social ties) for generations. This organisation constitutes a significant obstacle in the implementation of the principles of good governance due to low transparency and information injustice. Given its confrontation-oriented networks of interests, it makes it impossible to reach a consensus. Moreover, it diminishes the level and quality of local participation, reduces the sense of agency, and, because of the discretionary powers of the authorities, hinders the transparency of local policies.

The boundaries of good governance that are of interest to us are related to local participation and its limitations. Local participation is a natural defining element of good governance. Nevertheless, it cannot replace the state even if the latter proves to be weak, dysfunctional, or excessively withdrawn from local affairs (frequently in the name of subsidiarity). Civic initiatives must be associated with rather than stand in opposition to adequate, appropriate actions of the state, which is fundamentally represented by local governments and central authority agencies. Grassroots initiatives or self-organised local civic institutions should neither function in the somewhat ‘natural’ opposition to the state (most obviously via the allegedly typical conflict of interest between the state and non-state organisations and businesses) nor be left by the state to their own devices to ‘thrive or perish’ as dictated by the social principles of natural selection (Kardos 2012). The state is obliged to develop a financial and organisational framework to strengthen both state-established and grassroots NGOs at the local level. Only then can the idea of good governance be implemented as a genuine political demand and paradigm of growth.

Mansuri (2004) shows that local participation may carry different types of risk, in particular for traditionally disadvantaged groups whose access to socially important goods – primarily power and prestige – is limited. On the one hand, there is the political risk of unknown and thus unpredictable new actors emerging on the local political scene; the local activity of people thus far not involved in social affairs, which results from their secondarily internalised will to be empowered, may send a dangerous signal to the local political status quo. On the other hand, the risk may be more practical in nature: social activity requires free time, forcing people to change their priorities. In practice, it often leads to family conflicts and the inability to reconcile family matters with civic activity. Last but not least is the issue of ‘political co-optation’, where new individuals or groups engaging with local communities are co-opted by the existing clientelistic systems to both eliminate the potential threat and absorb the leaders of the new social movements into the pre-existing structures of the dominant group (Blakeley 2005).

In summary, the implementation of the idea of good governance in the day-to-day functioning of local communities may encounter a number of cultural and social problems due to the processes and structures that are specific to a given culture or community. For this reason, it may be put in opposition to other models of management and governing which have been practised and approved for generations or it may

face unfavourable social conditions and eventually be rejected. Therefore, it is by no means a foregone conclusion that this approach is the best option with regards to ensuring effective and equitable local development in this part of Europe. More importantly, however, from the perspective of this article, its effective and authentic application will never be possible if good governance continues to be contradicted by the current axio-normative systems of the local rule.

### **2.3 Good governance and the rural community development paradigm**

For nearly three decades, the official policy of rural development in the EU has in fact been founded on the idea of good governance embodied, axiologically, by the main values of local participation and sustainable-development-oriented effectiveness and, institutionally, by multi-sector local partnerships (Furmankiewicz 2014). Formally, basing the rural development on the principles of good governance dates as far back as 1988. This is when the 'The Future of Rural Society' report was published as a pan-European interpretation of strategic solutions for rural areas and agriculture. This document laid the foundations for the new Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), which has been in place since 1991 (the so-called MacSharry Reform). Among other assumptions and desiderata, one demand was brought to the fore – to revitalise rural areas by encouraging the decision-makers to be more open to inspirations and the human potential in the thus far dormant structures of grassroots democracy. The resulting idea was to develop instruments that would stimulate grassroots civic activity and the inclusion of local leaders and social organisations in the decision-making processes (Levitas 2018), and ultimately support rural communities in recognising the value of sustainable development.

To this day, one of the EU's most important documents promoting its policy of rural development based on the idea of good governance is the 1996 Cork Declaration. Point 9 of the document states: 'The administrative capacity and effectiveness of regional and local governments and community-based groups must be enhanced, where necessary, through the provision of technical assistance, training, better communications, partnership and the sharing of research, information and exchange of experience through networking between regions and between rural communities throughout Europe.' (Cork Declaration 1996) This shows that, according to the signatories of the Declaration, the process of institutional networking at various administrative levels and of different administrative models was recognised as one of the most crucial pillars of institutional governance in rural areas. This intention was repeated in Point 8 (Enhancing Rural Governance) of the Cork 2.0 Declaration of 2016: 'The administrative capacity and effectiveness of regional and local governments and community-based groups must be enhanced, where necessary, through the provision of technical assistance, training, cooperation and networking.' (Cork 2.0 Declaration 2016).

To implement these assumptions, it was necessary to create entirely new institutional forms that were partially based on the principles of good governance (Cejudo, Navarro 2020; High, Nemes 2007; Schucksmith 2000; Brown, Schucksmith 2018). To this end, the European Commission (EC) prepared a range of CAP instruments offering local rural communities the financial and intellectual support for the development of territorial multi-sector partnerships under a comprehensive programme entitled LEADER (followed by LEADER II, LEADER+, and now Community-Led Local Development or CLLD). From the 1980s onwards (and even earlier in Austria and Germany), local partnerships essentially became an experimental instrument for the implementation of bottom-up rural development strategies in many EU Member States (Moseley 2003). Nevertheless, they were only recognised as a mainstream solution after they were included in the second pillar of the CAP (Thuessen 2010). They have also been implemented in Poland.

The development of rural communities in Poland is founded on the local government reforms of 1990 and 1999. Extremely forward in their assumptions, the reforms envisaged a complete shift from the central to the top-down approach supporting the development of entirely autonomous, authentic local government corporations with broad competences. Reform relied on self-governed local communes or municipalities (in Polish: *gmina*) that were put in charge of a variety of public services such as social welfare, pre-school and school education, communal infrastructure, and public transport. Acts of law were passed to ensure that local policies are developed and implemented at the local level in accordance with the requirements

of good governance, which include common and obligatory social consultations regarding decisions that are vital for the local community, the participation of citizens in creating and approving communal strategies, and an open and responsible attitude towards citizens within local government structures.

The local system of governing in rural Poland differs from that in urban areas. The main difference is the presence of the auxiliary administrative unit, *sołectwo*, an autonomous village association which formally operates under the authority of the municipality (commune) yet remains deeply embedded in the local systems of power, kinship, and social circles. In practice, this is where the post-1989 rural Poland 'exercises' the principles of local democracy and elements of good governance. Unfortunately, due to this connection with local informal networks of power and family relations, the actions of these associations are frequently clientelistic and familial in nature and therefore fail to reflect the principles of good governance. Consequently, instead of transparency and inclusiveness, we see elitism and isolation (discussed below in the empirical part of the study).

The first initiatives to form local partnerships were undertaken in the rural areas of southern Poland in the mid-1990s as a response to the bureaucratic ossification of municipalities and their resistance to grassroots ideas. These projects can be divided into two groups: (1) initiatives seeking to implement the idea of multifunctional, partnership-based rural development (e.g., rural renewal movements); and (2) the mobilisation of local resources to prevent local communities being ignored in important decisions regarding investments at the local level (Cejudo, Navarro 2020). The interest of local actors in management innovations at the municipal level increased with the implementation of the LEADER Pilot Programme in Poland (2004–2007). The resulting Local Action Groups (LAGs), i.e., territorial, multi-sector local partnerships, essentially constituted the first serious attempt at implementing the principles of good governance in rural Poland. Unsurprisingly, for the first few years, they were established and operated with genuine enthusiasm. Nonetheless, several studies (Thuessen, Nielsen 2014) have shown that the LEADER partnerships have gradually succumbed to the processes of top-down formalisation and bureaucracy, penetrating their deepest structures and consequently leading to the partial departure from the principles of good governance (inclusiveness and openness) in favour of the progressive 'colonisation' by local governments (Goszczyński, Knieć, Czachowski 2015; Furmankiewicz 2014, Zajda, Pasikowski 2020).

Naturally, the idea of good governance has been implemented not merely through bottom-up multi-sector initiatives. Since the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, Polish local governments (at the level of *gminy* and *powiaty*) designing local and subregional development programmes have been more eager to reach out for administrative solutions in building new models of governance. In their research on the implementation of the principles of good governance in the processes of building a community development strategy in rural areas of eastern Poland, Guzal-Dec et al. (2020) concluded that 'the good governance approach was shown to be applied to varying degrees in the planning of local development by local governments', which included various forms of participation and active communication. At the same time, they revealed that local strategies' implementation stage was rather dominated by the public sector, while the instruments of good governance were missing.

With over 15 years of experience in rural governance in Poland, we can conclude that rural areas have become an arena for learning and practising the principles of local participation, openness, and co-responsibility for the village affairs. However, they continue to reproduce the clientelistic dysfunctions, lack of trust and low level of participation so inherent in the Polish countryside.

### **3. Methodology**

#### **3.1 Social conditions for good governance in rural Poland: The conceptual matrix**

The primary question asked in this study concerns the relationship between local social conditions and a community's ability to co-manage itself. Our main interest is identifying the elements that may determine the extent to which a local community is capable of engaging itself in its own development by implementing the idea of good governance. The resulting research matrix of our original focuses on social aspects of good governance, examining the purposively selected local rural communities and their ability



to adapt to this management model. In the proposed analysis model, the heavily modified matrix of social capital/local community effectiveness used by the World Bank researchers such as Michael Woolcock or Depa Narayna has been applied and accordingly modified (Woolcock 1998; Grootaert, van Bastelar 2002; Dudwick, Woolcock et al. 2006). During construction, the focus was on elements such as social relations and networks, cultural patterns responsible for collaboration, models of collective action, communication, and social cohesion with regards to the inclusion/exclusion mechanisms, and finally policy agency. This approach required a functional model of correlations that had an effect on how a given community co-managed its growth. The research matrix was developed based on four main categories:

- **Relations within the community (micro-embeddedness)** – internal integration mechanisms regarding groups, networks of relations, norms, and the dominant communication channels within a given community;
- **The community’s ability to act together (micro-autonomy)** – the community’s ability to self-organise and conduct formal and informal activities, declarative readiness for collective actions, institutionalisation of actions for the community;
- **The community’s relations with public service institutions (macro-embeddedness)** – political subjectivity, relations, and standards of collaboration between the local community and political institutions (state institutions, local government, EU institutions);
- **The community’s relations with actors representing a similar power potential (macro-autonomy)** – relations, networks, levels of integration, collaboration between the community and groups with a similar potential of power such as NGOs and neighbouring communities.

These four primary indices (higher-order indices) seem to comprise the most important social determinants for the processes of good governance, allowing us to define the endogenous and exogenous dynamics of a given local community. They were further divided into secondary indices (lower-order indices) to provide for the thematic classification of social determinants responsible for the effectiveness and mechanisms of good governance.

Tab 1. Conceptual matrix. Source: Own study

Primary indices	Secondary indices	Relations with good governance theory
Relations within the community (micro-embeddedness)	Generalised trust	Indices defining the internal framework of the local community’s participation, shaping its homo- or heterogeneous character, as well as the strength and quality of internal bonds which convert into transparency, commitment and inclusiveness.
	Relations with communities	
	Communication within the community	
	Identification with the community	
The potential to act together (micro-autonomy)	Activity of the local community	Indices defining the community’s ability to take collective action for the community, including the level of institutionalisation of joint activities.
	Readiness for joint actions	
	Institutionalisation of the local community’s activities	
Relations between the community and the state or the local government (macro-embeddedness)	Relations with local authorities	Indices analysing the quality and density of the community’s connections with public and local government institutions: the level of trust, the willingness to act together, mechanisms of communication, a sense of empowerment translated into the strength of the relationship and the transparency of relations between the local community and the state/local government.
	Relations with state institutions	
	Community agency	
	Development optimism	
Relations with actors representing a similar power potential (macro-autonomy)	Relations with neighbouring communities	Indices defining the community’s potential to exceed beyond its framework of operation, e.g., by establishing contacts with trans-local organisations.
	Supra-local relations	
	Relations with new residents	

The primary and secondary indices describe the social cohesion, effectiveness and efficiency, and hetero/homogeneity of the community in question. Alongside their descriptive power, they also offer an analytical potential. Depending on the balance of these factors, a given community can be identified as developmentally effective, anomic, ineffective, or closed, which determines the quality of those processes responsible for the social construction of the local specificity. The empirical part of the study considers relations within the community as well as the community's capability and model of collective actions, contacts with state institutions, local government, and other communities (i.e., the elements that shape the community's ability to participate, level of deliberation, transparency, and finally, the effectiveness of its management processes).

### 3.2 About the research

The empirical section (presented below) is based on a research project conducted prior to 2015 in conjunction with the Polish Rural Forum and financed by the National Rural Network. The research consisted of two parts. First, our original matrix of the social capital forms and balances and their impact on the development of local communities was further refined and tested. As part of this phase, 500 standardised survey interviews were conducted with randomly selected residents of 10 purposively selected villages. A random route sampling method was applied with the household selection algorithm depending on the village size. Non-proportional sampling was used, which means that smaller communities had a stronger representation in the sample than the general population proportions would otherwise indicate. In practice, each community was represented by a minimum of 50 respondents. On the one hand, this has a negative effect in terms of producing generalisations for the entire sample; on the other hand, it increases the tool's sensitivity to processes characteristic of a given community. A systematic tool consisting of 66 matrix questions was developed for the purposes of the study. It was based on standardised five-point scales defining the intensity of individual attitudes. This approach provided for the use of strong measurement methods and an array of analytical techniques (K-means segmentation, parametric and non-parametric significance tests, custom tables) to organise the data. Each question was assigned to one of the secondary indices. The unfolding analysis presents the average index values.

The ethnographic part was based on in-depth, multi-day field studies during which the researchers lived in seven communities. During this process, in-depth interviews (n = 42), observations, and a photographic analysis were conducted to facilitate the exploration of the phenomena and processes otherwise hidden from standardised tools, thus complementing the well-structured matrices with interpretations. This combination of procedures and techniques allowed us to better reflect the complexity of the studied communities, which often appear to be similar in statistical terms, yet upon closer inspection turn out to differ dramatically. The design of the qualitative research assumed the use of an array of research techniques (in-depth interviews, observations, video interviews), and a focus on the analysis of areas such as: standards and mechanisms of control and regulation of residents' everyday lives; the cultural definition of the community's boundaries; the effectiveness and activity of informal and formal institutions regulating residents' everyday lives; the local dynamics of the community; the strength and dimensions of identification with the community; and the methods, intensity and limits of information exchange within the community. These areas were to supplement the schematic statistical input with the qualitative research on factors affecting the social conditions of processes of good governance.

The empirical part of this article focuses on a specific region – the rural areas of the Kujawsko-Pomorskie (Kuyavian-Pomeranian) Voivodeship in the north of Poland. This region has been chosen due to its specificity. Its countryside represents a mixture of *longue durée* (long-term) structures largely constructed by contemporary administrative divisions. Additionally, the Kuyavian-Pomeranian region is diversified and has both large urban centres and rural areas. The latter are also varied – alongside the typically agricultural villages, there are also multifunctional, typically tourist, and suburban areas. In this sense, the Kuyavian-Pomeranian countryside has a relatively universal character and the processes observed here can, to a certain extent, be representative of the country as a whole. The principle of selecting rural communities for the qualitative research was similar: the aim was to cover as many village types as possible to reflect

the entire ethnographic spectrum of the region. In the first stage, seven historical ethnographic subregions were distinguished (Kociewie, Ziemia Chełmińska, Pałuki, Krajna, Ziemia Dobrzyńska, Kujawy, Bory Tucholskie). Thereafter, their villages were classified based on the dominant socioeconomic function (agricultural, suburban, peripheral, multifunctional, isolated-agricultural, former state-owned farms) and location (central vs. peripheral). A total of 10 village communities representing different subregions, functional characters, and locations were purposively selected for the quantitative analysis.

Tab 2. Community sampling. Source: Own study

Village name	Short description
Lubicz Dolny	suburban integrated
Chrząstowo	suburban, semi-agricultural
Gąsawa	multifunctional, developed
Papowo Biskupie	multifunctional, peripheral
Sadłowo	agricultural, integrated
Lubiewo	agricultural, developed
Boniewo	agricultural, peripheral
Tleń	agricultural, extremely peripheral
Lipie	former state-owned farm, developed
Mątaawy	former state-owned farm, peripheral

A similar sampling procedure was applied in the qualitative analysis. Following the division into subregions, villages were purposively selected depending on their dominant socioeconomic function. In addition, communities recognised as being unique due to certain social determinants and their importance in local governance, were also included. For the assessment of the latter, the observed social activity was taken into account. Ultimately, seven villages were admitted to the qualitative analysis. Labels (see below) were proposed in order to ensure the anonymity of the villages admitted to the ethnographic study. Otherwise, our respondents could easily be identified.

- **Collective Misery Community** – a peripheral village and a former state-owned farm (in Polish: *Państwowe Gospodarstwo Rolne, PGR*) in Kociewie;
- **Uprooted Community** – a developed, agricultural, multifunctional village without its own history, searching for a platform for social integration;
- **Strong Mayor's Community**, a suburban, semi-agricultural village in which the village mayor (in Polish: *sołtys*) plays a significant role as a catalyst for social activity;
- **Peasant Melancholy Community** – a peripheral, depopulating, and ageing peasant village;
- **High Fences Community** – a suburban, socially disintegrated village;
- **Divided Peasant Community** – a peasant agricultural-isolated village divided by a multi-generational conflict;
- **Institutionalised Enthusiasm Community** – a well-organised community with a bottom-up management and traditions of association.

The quantitative tools included the standardised indices deductively developed around the matrix of social conditions for good governance. Rather than individual questions, the results of the quantitative procedures were based on thematic groups which constituted the higher-order indices. The data from the statistical analysis is presented in a two-fold manner, broken down by village and overall for the entire sample, in order to reveal differences between the communities while allowing for generalisation.

## 4. Results

### 4.1 Social relations in the studied communities (micro-embeddedness)

The first of the analysed areas concerns the nature of relations, social networks, and identities within the local community itself. Using a standardised index of community relations consisting of four lower-order indices, i.e., relations with the community, generalised trust, communication within the community, and identification with the community, and by analysing the results of the ethnographic research, we attempted to extrapolate the nature, strength, and functionality of the relations that keep the studied villages together.

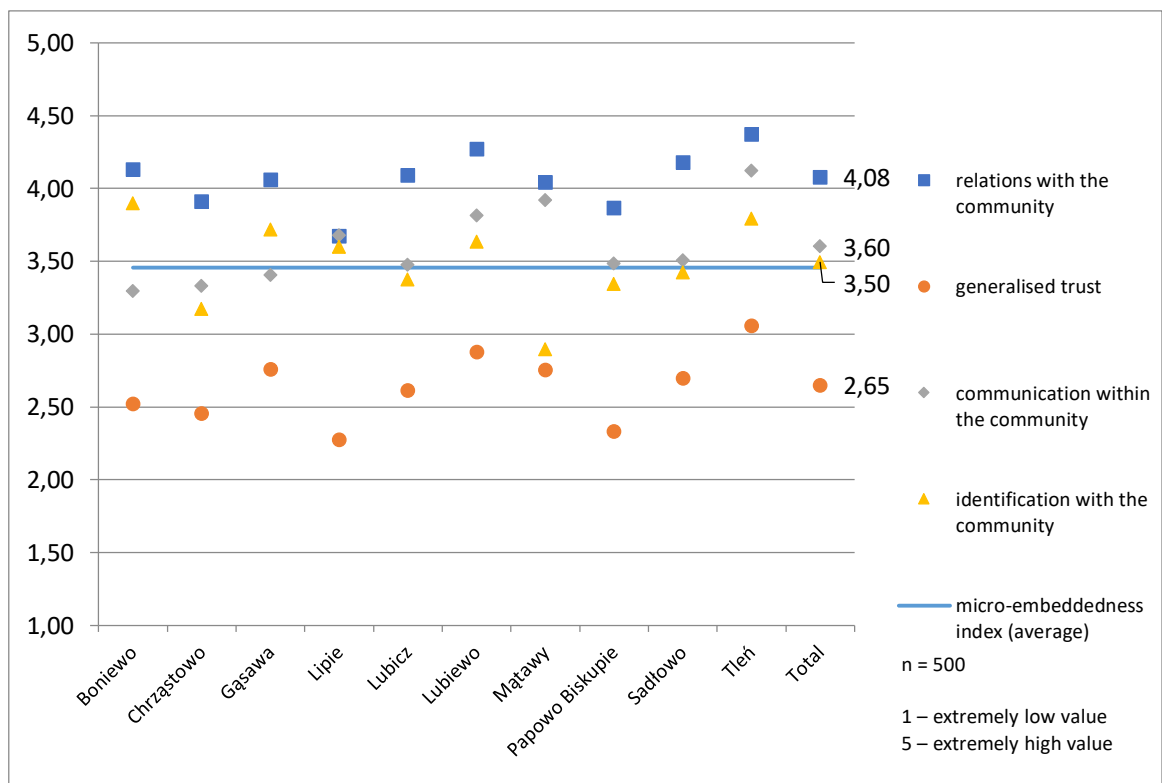


Fig 1. Relations within the studied communities (micro-embeddedness). Source: Own study

It seems disturbing that given so much time has passed since Poland's political transformation, there is still a considerable gap between the dense network of relations within the communities themselves and the lack of relations with the outside world. The social world of the studied villages was essentially limited to direct contacts among the closest family and neighbours. Although they appeared fairly homogeneous in this respect, the analysis of variance allowed us to highlight those villages that were different. Interestingly, the differences were more pronounced with regards to the villages' peripherality as opposed to their functions or ethnographic type. Inhabitants of small communities located in the peripheries proved to be the most closed to relations with others.

The correlation analysis of the individual indices confirmed the hypothesis of exclusion that assumed the interdependence between the components of internal relations. In other words, there is a correlation between the network of connections within the community, the identification with what is local, the assessment of communication effectiveness, and the index of generalised trust. Atomised societies break up into small family sub-units that perceive what is local as a cage or framework of little importance. More accomplished localities are better organised and have networks of internal relations, which are significantly denser.

This situation is clearly evident in the village labelled as the **Strong Mayor's Community**, recently populated by new residents from urban environments and younger people who grew up here and have now returned from migration to settle down. As a result, the village is divided into the 'old' part, inhabited

mostly by farmers advanced in age and retired, and the 'new' part, inhabited by new, wealthier rural settlers who work abroad or in nearby towns. Both parts differ visually (old farmyards versus modern houses). Therefore, spatial divides overlap with the class divides. The village is governed, both formally and informally, by the mayor; she is an enterprising woman deeply embedded in the local clan systems, representing one of the strongest family clans that competes with the other two. These are closed groups of interest, related by blood and fighting for power over multiple generations. Throughout its recent history, the village has represented a bottom-up but exclusive (anti-inclusive), not particularly transparent and anti-participatory form of governance that resembles a classic closed cluster based on amoral familism (Woolcock 1998).

According to the respondents, this system has worked perfectly for years and there is no need to replace it with elements of good governance. The knowledge of the latter among the local elite is poor and dominated by stereotypes; for example, the idea of local participation is perceived as something borrowed from a foreign culture that does not suit the local conditions. There are practically no NGOs in the village, and the institutions of the village mayor and the village council (in Polish: *rada sołecka*) are practically 'sacred'. The mayor is the actual leader who 'fixes things' (e.g., investments in infrastructure) for the community at the municipality office. It must be clearly stated that the implementation of good governance in such cultural conditions is practically impossible, primarily due to the clan-based community's inherent reluctance to 'experiment' with social innovations in governing and the local authorities' in-built mechanisms to suppress such innovations.

Similar processes are partially illustrated by our case study of a large suburban village labelled **High Fences Community**. Located in the vicinity of the city of Bydgoszcz, which has a population of 400,000 people, it presents characteristics typical of rural suburbia: a mixture of the indigenous population, still working in agriculture and horticulture and committed to post-peasant values, and the newcomers who lead a typical urban lifestyle based on the values of a post-industrial society. This community is divided not only culturally but also spatially. Both groups perceive each other as highly exotic, if not alien. Houses are surrounded by high fences, dividing the space into atomised fragments not only physically but also symbolically. The social life in the 'old part of the village' (inhabited by farming families) revolves around traditional village organisations (along with the institutions of the mayor and the village council), almost entirely dominated by farmers. In contrast, the social life in the 'new part' (inhabited by the city people) is limited to relations within nuclear families and neighbour or peer group activities are practically non-existent.

When confronted with such a radical case of social disintegration, how can one govern it, let alone manage through inclusiveness and partnership? In simple terms, the 'old, peasant village' runs itself in its own way while the 'new, suburban village' is laboriously developing the instruments of good governance. Both systems interfere with each other, which frequently leads to conflicts. The farmers have taken over the institutions of the mayor and village council, as well as the local community centre. The Volunteer Fire Brigade (VFB) and Rural Housewives' Club (RHC) are particularly active institutions where positions are 'inherited' by representatives of the clientelistic social circles and family members. This model is said to work perfectly according to the local leaders. It is addressed to the inner circles of local patrons (owners of the largest farms or service facilities) and their clients (poorer members of their families and economically connected friends). They form anti-democratic, exclusive, non-transparent groups. However, they are extremely effective in governing as evidenced for example by the undeniably excellent infrastructure in the village (exemplary public transport and a very modern school).

The new inhabitants of the village have been developing the fledgling institutions of local management for the past few years. Born out of an informal sports club, their association now constitutes a viable opposition to the village council. It is currently campaigning for greater transparency in the distribution of the village council funds and is also involved in local elections. It seems to have capitalised on the official line of support for the idea of good governance, placing it in opposition to, as they call it, 'anti-development' cliques. The studied community is an interesting case demonstrating a clash between the paradigms of ruling and local resources management within one space. Both are embedded in the mindsets of the local people in different ways (tradition versus post-modern forms of community life),

and the conflicts between them seem natural and inevitable. At the same time, this case shows that the state (through the local institutions) does not play a significant role in organising the social life of the analysed village and is replaced by family clans and clientelist groups of interest on the one hand and by grassroots civic associations on the other.

#### 4.2 The community's ability to act together (micro-autonomy)

Another dimension of the studied social conditions concerns the community's activity and potential to engage in formal and informal initiatives undertaken for the benefit of the village. The quantitative analysis was based on an index covering three main areas: the assessment of the activity of local residents, readiness for joint actions, and the institutionalisation of activities undertaken by the local community.

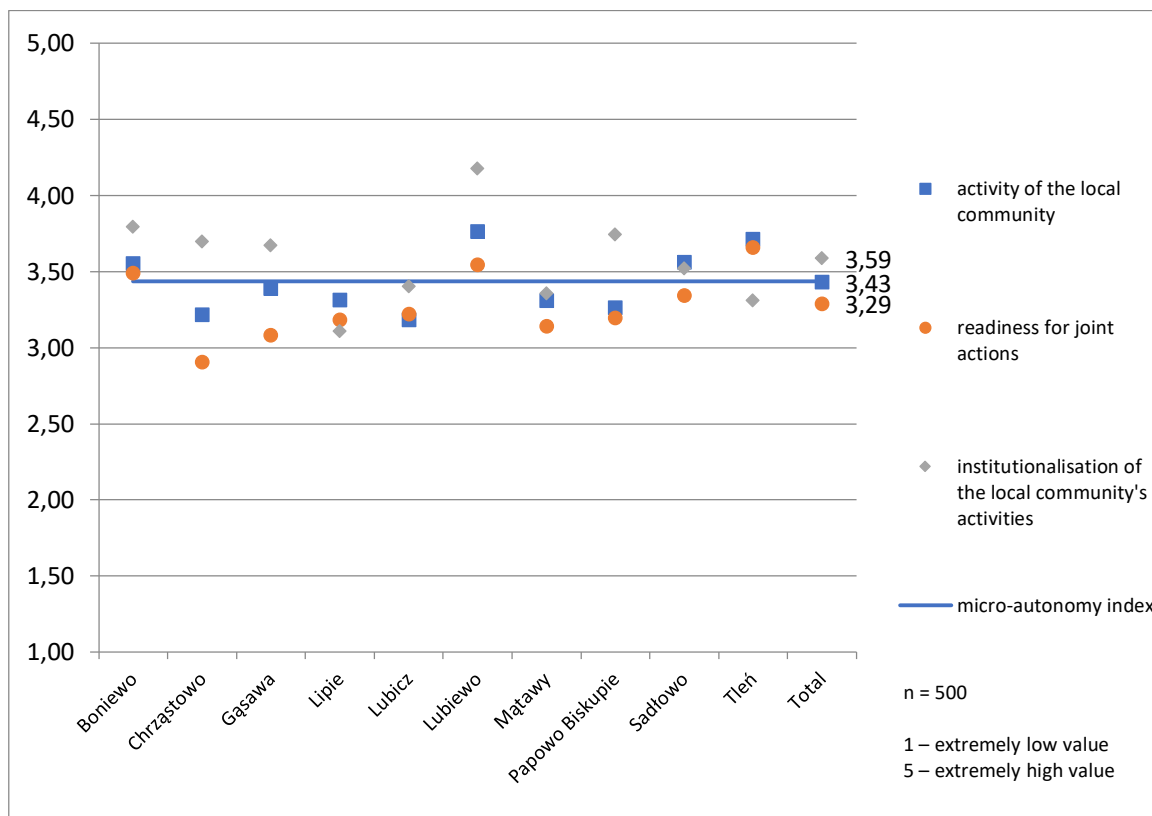


Fig 2. The potential to act together in the studied communities (micro-autonomy). Source: Own study

The quantitative analysis shows that the social potential of the analysed villages is minor. Following our eponymous metaphor, they represent a frozen horizon where not much is going on, at least not at first sight. The readiness for joint actions and the activity of the local community were assessed as low by the respondents; indeed, individualistic or escapist trajectories seemed to prevail in this population. Interestingly, further analyses allowed us to divide the studied sample into sub-groups. Low activity index values were observed in atomised communities; this category featured peripheral and crisis-ridden locations (Chrzęstkowo) as well as typically suburban villages (Lubicz). Much higher index ratings were recorded for the tourist (Tleń) and traditionally agricultural (Lubiewo) communities. Therefore, it is once again clear that a community's potential is not determined simply by its economic development or other single variables but by a combination of factors.

Another interesting process observed in the studied communities is the shifting of responsibility for actions to formal institutions.

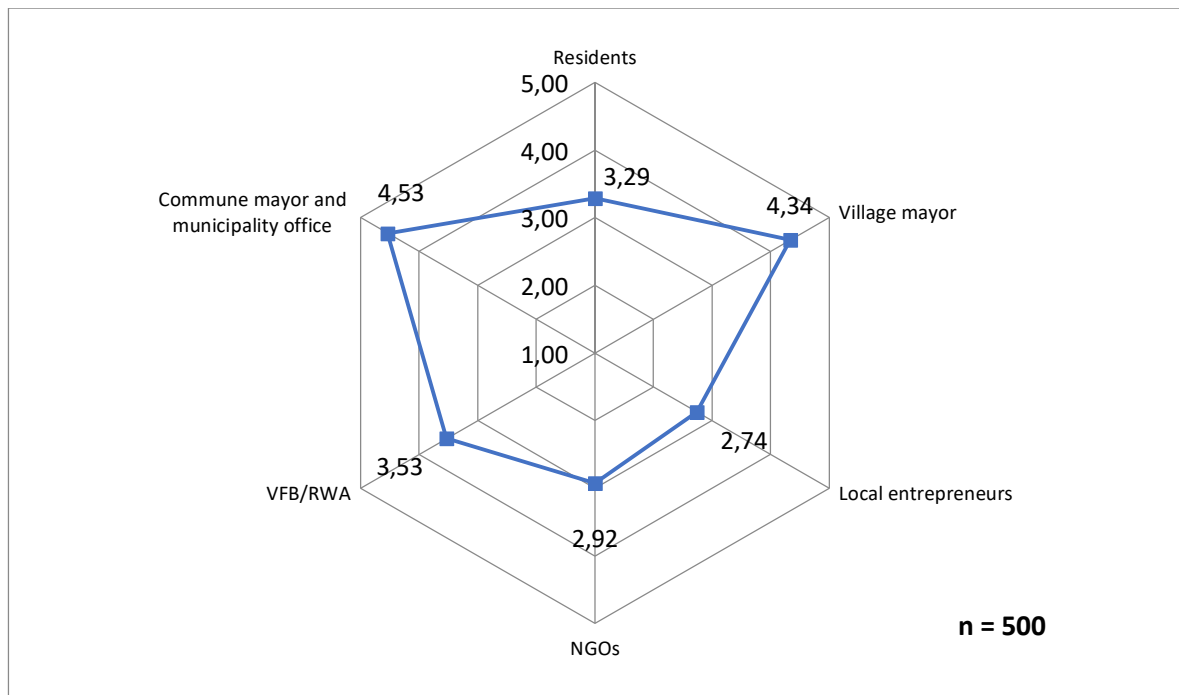


Fig 3. Assessment of each group's impact on the community. Scale 1–5 (1 – extremely low value, 5 – extremely high value). Source: Own study

The impact of the commune mayor (in Polish: *wójt*), local governments, and village mayors was assessed as high, whereas the corresponding impact of the inhabitants themselves and NGOs was much lower. These results prompt questions regarding the real subjectivity or agency of residents of rural areas. In addition, the model of grassroots activities itself should be analysed given that the forms of activity transferred from other civic cultures, such as formal NGOs, have still not taken root, as demonstrated by the fact that most of the respondents neither knew (53%) nor belonged to (84%) any organisation (agency) of the third sector.

The qualitative research shows that the micro-autonomy does not necessarily have to be connected with a high level of development. For example, the population of the **Collective Misery Community**, the former state-owned farming village, is essentially not diversified in terms of social status: the vast majority of its residents are economically inactive (either unemployed or retired/annuitants). As a result, their material situation is generally poor. Despite this collective misery, the local initiatives of development and social integration – albeit naturally modest in nature – are implemented quite efficiently. The main pillar of the local social institution comes in the form of allotment gardens – places of integration where residents spend most of their time. The gardens are a remnant of the social privileges of the farm workers once employed on the state-owned farms (PGR). Currently privatised, they have become a local arena of competition for social prestige while inadvertently serving the needs of local democracy. This is where all communal deliberations take place, with the participation of the village mayor and the local councillor. As a result of the joint effort of the entire village, one of the sheds has been turned into a makeshift community centre that serves also as a local activity centre alongside its purely ludic functions. The participation in rural meetings is remarkably high with representatives of all ages and professional groups present.

Although the studied village is poor, it is neat and tidy. Once a week, the residents clean the public spaces (pavements, the bus stop, squares) under the leadership of the mayor. Interestingly, the new owner of the farm is also engaged in the bottom-up processes of the planning and implementation of small social initiatives (planting decorative shrubs, playground renovation, etc.), acting for the local community despite the considerable discrepancy in terms of social and economic status. This appears to be a specific case of 'reverse inclusion' where the less educated and less wealthy involve the representatives of the upper and middle classes in the local resource management. Consequently, low social status, poverty, and collective unemployment do not necessarily have to result in social crisis and management failure.

The studied community has developed informal mechanisms of social participation and applies them in practice, although its dialogue with external institutions (municipality, powiat, external NGOs) remains limited.

Another interesting case is the **Peasant Melancholy Community**, a small, spatially scattered village populated almost exclusively by farmers partially representing the lifestyle and system of values typical of peasants: strong attachment to the traditions of farming, reluctance with regards to production innovations, and the secondary role of financial motivation in comparison with the primary significance of prestige and local connections. The vast majority of the residents are elderly people with no successors to take over their farms, leading a melancholic life as the final witnesses of the peasant Poland and farms cultivated from generation to generation. It is indeed a sad picture; their splendid, well-equipped, and well-managed farms are a true testimony to the resourcefulness of generations of farmers.

Throughout the years of prosperity, the village established excellent infrastructure and institutional facilities. It features an impressive community centre, a football pitch, and a firehouse, as well as the VFB, RWA, and the Catholic Parishes Association. In the past few years, however, all of these institutions have been losing members, predominantly due to natural causes (emigration, population ageing), leaving these grand community-owned buildings largely empty. Nevertheless, the village boasts a strong social capital epitomised primarily by informal forms of neighbourhood help. Although social activity is still present within this community, it no longer revolves around peasant and Catholic organisations; rather, the local government and formal leaders are held responsible (and therefore also blamed) for whatever happens in the village. Unlike in another case discussed, here these individuals are deeply, organically connected with their community, which legitimises their ideas and facilitates their implementation. As the leading actors, they have constructed anchors (festivities, events) that appeal to the local population. Nonetheless, such an approach also carries a significant risk of responsibility transfer. A strong, active local government may leave no room for alternative initiatives and thus could be counterproductive in terms of promoting a greater level of involvement from the inhabitants.

#### **4.3 The community's relations with public service and local government institutions (macro embeddedness)**

The third element of the matrix of local conditions for good governance is based on relations between the community and institutions representing a greater power potential. For the purposes of this study, these organisations have been operationalised as public and local government institutions. The index for the quantitative analysis was developed on the basis of four areas: relations with local authorities, relations with state institutions, a sense of agency, and development optimism (assessment of the local community's development prospects). The patterns found in the community's relations with formal institutions are presented in Figure 4.

First of all, there is evidently a clear discrepancy between the relatively high assessment of local governments and the approach to state institutions. Institutions closer to people and officials with whom they have direct contact are hugely influential in constructing local communities and keeping them going. However, the latter may be hindered by extremely low levels of agency and development optimism. While the local government fulfils its basic functions, the lack of a network of relations leaves residents without a clear sense of influence over local institutions. Another problem relating to governance processes is the immense gap that divides the citizens and the state. Interestingly, the assessment of these relations did not depend on respondent characteristics such as education, status, age, occupation, or region; in other words, people living in rural areas seem to be unified in their distrust of state institutions.



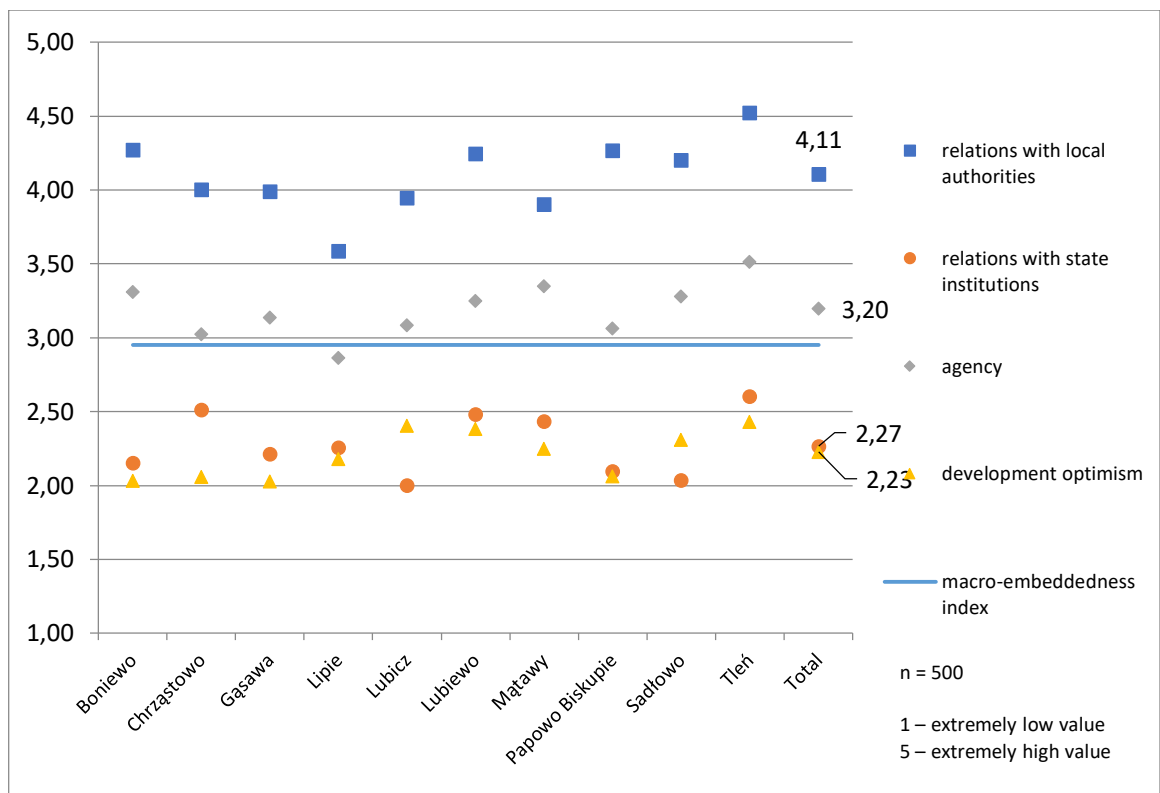


Fig 4. Relations between the community and the state or the local government (macro-embeddedness). Source: Own study

A good example of this lack of trust is the case study of the **Divided Peasant Community**, a medium-sized farming village located in the periphery of the region whose activity has been stimulated by a conflict with the local authorities. Here, the local government (municipality office, commune mayor, and councillors) has found itself in a rather specific predicament. The majority of the residents believe its past activity to have been extremely detrimental and characterised by corruption, low effectiveness, and non-inclusiveness. The most significant indiscretion came when the local government – in the name of economic rationality – closed down a local school, which had been built by the ancestors of the local farmers and which had become the social hub for the village.

Even though the village has a community centre (small but renovated and better equipped), the school was traditionally the location where most of the events, both religious and secular, were organised. For generations the school was the pride of the local population, serving both as a host to and a pretext for joint activities. Its liquidation was a symbolic blow to the community inflicted in accordance with the traditional rules of governing. The entire process was conducted in line with the administrative procedures; however, the objections from the community were never taken into account. In response, the local community founded an association which, following various different iterations, established a non-public school in place of the old school. The formation of the new facility mobilised the community and resulted in a grassroots and partnership-based campaign including multiple sectors (a local councillor, entrepreneurs, a priest and a parish organisation, fire-fighters). It also prompted criticism of how the municipality was governed along with formal proposals for change addressed to the local authorities. Thus, a modest rural association made up of individuals from lower classes has essentially become an advocate for the principles of good governance.

Taking all circumstances into account, this conflict has proven to be highly functional for the community: firstly, the inhabitants have been integrated around their actual needs and interests; secondly, they have gained a platform to express their demands formally through the establishment of the association; and thirdly, they have been able to define their local identity via the new school and its purpose. The social capital of the studied community carries features indicative of a 'closed solidarity,' where certain

principles of good governance (participation, transparency, effectiveness) are welcome while others (inclusiveness) might be questioned.

Yet another picture is painted by the case study of the **Institutionalised Enthusiasm Community**. This medium-sized agricultural village is located in the north of the Kuyavian-Pomeranian region and represents features typical of high-quality social capital, with internal solidarity and openness to the world. Its social life is intense; the otherwise omnipresent statement that 'there is nothing to do here' certainly does not apply. The central axis of the community's social activity is the dyad composed of the VFB and the Local Association for Rural Development (LARD). Both organisations are intertwined and interact with each other. An interesting division can be observed in their membership structure: the ARD is principally feminine (with one exception), whereas the VFB is masculine. Both naturally collaborate with each other as many men belong to the fire brigade while their wives, partners, fiancées, sisters, and daughters work in the association. Their social activity is aligned with the actions of the local government, which has been described by the respondents as 'exceptionally open to dialogue and partnership'.

As an example of the local governance in this village, one can highlight the local community centre. It was built by the local authorities, who adhered strictly to the suggestions of local organisation leaders. Moreover, together with the local government, all organisations within the community took part in saving the local church from dilapidation and convincing the church authorities to maintain the parish. The latter from several years ago redefined the relations between the local government and active residents, which gradually resulted in a regular application of the good governance methods in practice. This case is an example of a community that has built its potential on institutionalised associations, which interact with each other, thus ensuring greater synergy. The resulting community is more durable and naturally more open. Given the generally progressing formalisation of the social reality, it is also more effective as it is compatible with the wider social system (e.g., in terms of access to EU funds). Openness and solidarity have been conducive to good governance in this village. However, as is often the case, with the disappearance of the charismatic leaders from the local social map (due to death, illness, emigration, or discouragement) this vibrant social space may develop a vacuum with the potential for dramatic changes such as the abandoning of the good governance principles and a return to the traditional forms of governing. The example described above demonstrates that this risk can be significantly reduced through the formalisation and official linking between local grassroots activities and the activities of the local government.

#### **4.4 The community's relations with actors representing a similar power potential (macro-autonomy)**

The last of the higher-order indices concerns the relations between the inhabitants of the studied villages and actors representing a similar power potential. In practice, it is composed of three elements: assessment of relations with neighbouring communities, assessment of supra-local relations, and relations with new residents. The results suggest that this area is the most neutral.

The values of the individual indices are similar and slightly positive. On the one hand, this may partially be explained by the lower sensitivity of the research tools in this area; on the other hand, it is possible that the respondents adopted a more global perspective, highlighting the connections (relations) between the communities forming a larger, socially constructed region. A certain potential was revealed in the development of supra-local connections and networks for the purposes of negotiations at the higher (regional) level. However, more detailed analysis of the individual indices and their components indicates that the overall picture is not so uniform. The generally high assessment of the significance of supra-local relations was primarily related to the need to attract new economic investments, whereas larger interests, e.g., the supra-regional activity of NGOs, were ranked much lower. Therefore, supra-local relations should not be perceived as a value as such; rather, they are a dimension, which the respondents turn to when looking for resources outside their community.

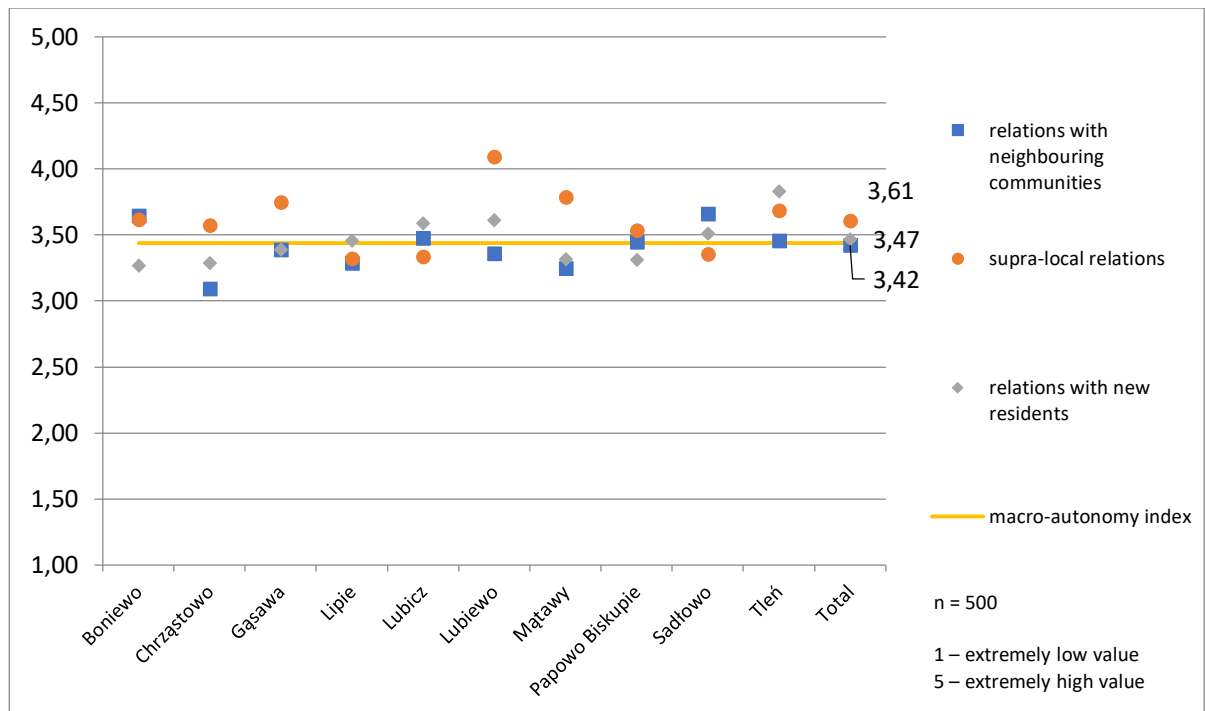


Fig 5. Relations with actors representing similar power potential (macro-autonomy). Source: Own study

Taking this analysis one step further, the low macro-autonomy index values seem to be indicative of a serious identity crisis of local rural communities in Poland. With their social life largely reduced to familial and clientelistic microstructures, these communities find it difficult to celebrate their local diversity. Furthermore, they appear to be losing touch with their historically shaped ethnic roots from a cultural perspective. This problem has been recognised in the rural development paradigm, where it is perceived as one of the key issues in the revitalisation of rural communities (Kaleta 1996, Lee et al. 2005, Commins 2018).

An interesting case of the said social vacuum at the supra-local level is a large village classified in our typology as the **Uprooted Community**, with a population of approximately 2,000 people. For many years, it has been the seat of the municipal office and of a few well-known industrial plants, e.g., a furniture factory, as well as a lot of service facilities. An agritourism farm, one of the oldest in the region, stands in the centre of this village. According to the locals, it is no coincidence that the municipality office is located here. They feel superior compared to the neighbouring villages, in particular the former state-owned farms. Nonetheless, despite this strong sense of pride, the classic symptoms of the breakdown of social bonds and social degradation are evident. Local social organisations (RWAs, VFB, sports clubs) are disappearing due to declining membership, and relations among neighbours are superficial and marked by distrust.

As indicated by many respondents, the local social relations are a consequence of the village's history. It was merely a small hamlet until the 1970s, when the population started to grow rapidly after it became the seat of the municipality office, an agricultural cooperative, and a large furniture factory. Particularly in the 1980s, it attracted a lot of migrants from the neighbouring, mostly small, poor, and backward peasant settlements. Consequently, the village became diversified in terms of social class and strata. Currently, it constitutes a conglomerate of social (family and friends) micro-systems or an 'atomised community'. Its relations with neighbouring communities are difficult. For example, our study has revealed that a nearby city has had a substantial brain-drain effect. The local contacts are not free of conflicts, which are often historical and involving the communities in the vicinity.

Certain elements of the development policy identified in this village are characteristic of all the studied localities. The most crucial and interesting for our analysis is the issue of an active search for the foundations of a new local identity (stimulated by the local administration). The 'old' identities, based

on the ethnic milieu of the region's culture, have essentially ceased to play a role not only in everyday life but also in special occasions. The self-identification narrative of the people living in this area is either incoherent and eclectic or simply non-existent. Meanwhile, for the past few years, the local authorities have been laboriously striving to stimulate initiatives that contribute to building the community's new identity based on the 'cultural anchor' and contacts with the outside world. The original formula envisaged it as a typical theme village. Over time, the approach has evolved towards comprehensive revitalisation efforts and establishing a local identity based on the sense of community in culture. The actions undertaken thus far have typically been trivial and banal; they focus on the simplest universal symbols and integration activities (festivals, games, the coat of arms, a promotional tagline). Their symbolism originates from the village name, derived from the production of honey. While these actions seem to be effective, they are addressed solely to this community and have failed to develop functional connections with the neighbouring settlements or supra-local actors (e.g., NGOs). Such an approach seems to be typical of most of the studied communities as their development efforts, while effective, tend to concentrate on their own populations and resources only, ultimately closing them within their own local 'towers'.

## **5. Summary of the research results**

The research shows that relatively strong relations within the community, with the domination of direct and informal relations, a low level of organised civic activity, and delegation of powers to the state and the local government (with a simultaneous low level of trust in their institutions and representatives), have built specific but common local conditions for good governance in the studied communities. They do not contribute to citizen participation, transparency of activities undertaken by public authorities, orientation towards consensus, and finally, the effectiveness of governance processes. The balance of the individual good governance components (relations, the ability to act together, relations with the state, autonomy) does not indicate high hermeticity within the local communities or a risk of community disintegration. However, it does demonstrate that the effectiveness of activities undertaken by and for local rural communities is essentially low.

Another problem is the lack of consensus at the local level. In formal terms, it is quite common that the activities implemented by the local government do not go hand in hand with the direction adopted by the grassroots civic initiatives. In addition, the actions of the local administration are largely designed without sufficient consideration of public opinion, often a consequence of the lack of interest in using the institutions of local democracy (referenda, elections, village meetings, elections of village mayors). Therefore, due to the low participation of residents, the lack of deliberation mechanisms, and the closing of public services, the specific 'towers' established by the local government sector, may lead to the dissipation of all development impulses regardless of the scale of investments, funds transferred, and policies implemented.

At the same time, our ethnographic research shows that even within this generally uniform framework, one can find a unique level of diversity across communities and their internal management processes. On the one hand, the activity of the former state-owned farms (the maximised use of the otherwise scarce resources through social mobilisation), their cultural embeddedness in agricultural traditions, and the activity of rural leaders have made it possible to initiate and maintain mechanisms of good governance even within an objectively unfavourable framework. Interestingly, processes facilitating good governance seem to have appeared in the least expected contexts. Therefore, our research shows that, rather than depending on the community's location, economic status or demographic structure, the effectiveness of governance is embedded in its history (both distant and recent), cultural identity, tradition, leadership activity, and the system of social relations. In summary, although the social conditions for the processes of good governance were found to be generally unfavourable, this does not mean that the approach cannot be effectively implemented in Polish rural communities.

## 6. Discussion: Social conditions for good governance in rural communities in Poland

At this point, one must ask to what extent the theoretical model of good governance – as promoted for example, through the EU's rural development policies – corresponds to the local conditions of Polish rural communities. Despite the undoubted successes of many European and domestic initiatives to activate local communities towards the 'good governance' model<sup>3</sup>, numerous studies have highlighted their limited effectiveness due to the contextual conditions and limitations examined throughout this article (Furmankiewicz et al. 2013, Knieć 2012, Furmankiewicz et al. 2016, Zajda & Pasikowski 2019). The implementation of the good governance principles is clearly not a simple process, not only because of the reticence towards this paradigm at the state and local government levels. In particular, it is extremely difficult to implement the principles of this approach in areas where relatively effective mechanisms distant from local democracy (such as the clan system or clientelism) have been in place for generations or where no tradition of self-governance has ever existed due to anomie and social atomisation.

Nevertheless, this does not mean that some basic principles of the good governance model cannot be adopted. It seems that the implementation of this paradigm at the level of local rural communities in Poland must be embedded in their local specificity, balance of power, and social relations. Consequently, it is uncertain whether it requires formal frameworks typical of Western democracies (local governments, state agencies) to be successfully introduced. Perhaps it should instead be promoted through semi-formal civic initiatives (participatory budgets, village funds) and local institutions that have already proven effective in our reality of modern democracy and which originate from the tradition of the Polish countryside (village mayors, village councils).

When implementing the good governance principles under EU, national or regional development programmes, it is necessary to take into account social conditions such as the domination of informal networks, low participation in formal and externally stimulated initiatives, low transparency with regards to actions undertaken by the state and local governments, general distrust in the public sector, the lack of extensive civic organisation networks, and the demographic specificity (population ageing, human capital flight, outflow of women). Another key factor to keep in mind is the extremely high capacity of local communities with regards to non-institutionalised activities due to the influence of individual leaders.

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<sup>3</sup> The 'local Poland' has for example succeeded in establishing a network of over 300 well-functioning Local Action Groups – multi-sector territorial partnerships that promote local activity and economic initiatives in rural areas.

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