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Building an Agile Government: Its Possibilities, Challenges, and New Tasks

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Abstract

Although "agility" is a popular term today, an understanding of its meaning and key components is lacking. The term "agile government" has been increasingly used in various studies and reports but remains unclear. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to review agile government studies, overcome the various new challenges against such trends, and identify possibilities of building an effective agile government. First, business agility studies and agile development methods are reviewed, followed by an overview of agile government studies and an evaluation of the present and future uses for agile governments. Finally, this paper identifies various challenges and suggests new tasks toward a more agile government based on the reviews.

Keywords: agility, business agility, government agility, agile government, agile management

Introduction

Much research has been done, and many arguments have been made, to implement an agile government or agile governance in recent years. For example, in the *Government Information Quarterly* (GIQ 2018), a special issue was published in 2018 with the theme "Agile Government and Adaptive Governance in the Public Sector." In early 2019, the World Economic Forum (WEF 2019) discussed the topic of agile governance as one of the global agendas. Although various discussions regarding an agile government or agile governance have occurred, a consensus has not been established on what the core attribute of agility in government is.

Generally speaking, agile management is a new method of managing the design and building of activities for engineering, information, and communication technology (ICT), as well as for new product or service development projects using a highly flexible approach. Its application in the public sector is a widely discussed topic around the world. The term "agile government" is emphasized by many countries' governments and is mainly relevant to Information System (IS) development methodology. Initially, "agile government" referred to the overall transformation of government organizations or practices in an agile manner. Although the term itself may have been mentioned before the 2000s, it is assumed that its use as a term to signify a systematic innovation in methodology began in the 2000s. One of the official documents that proposed an agile government as an important aspect of future governments was a provocative paper published by the State Government of Victoria, Australia (Australian State Services Authority

2007).

The ambiguity surrounding the term "agile government" stems from the multitude of studies on agility itself. Although "agility" is a popular term today, an understanding of its meaning and components is lacking (Wendler 2013). Mergel (2016) introduces a somewhat holistic concept that includes project management and software development processes; adjusted procurement procedures, combined with human resources policies; and organizational and managerial approaches to support innovative digital service delivery in government. This paper defines "agility" as the ability to fulfil the mission and to change the overall process of an organization in an efficient and effective manner utilizing a combination of coordination, strength, balance, and enhanced speed and capacity with the applications of advanced technologies. Many frameworks of agility have been developed, and research trends that are closely related to government agility can be summarized in two ways: business agility studies and agile development studies.

The purpose of this paper is to review agile government studies, overcome various new challenges against such trends, and identify the possibilities of building an agile government. However, this paper does not assert that all tasks in government should be subject to the agility principle as a top priority. There are other tasks that are more important in government work, such as deliberation based on democratic procedures rather than on agility. In fact, this paper emphasizes the need to apply agility in some task areas where the government's response to environmental change is reduced and high social costs are added, where the complexity of the environment is likely to put citizens at risk because of the government's slow response, and where the benefits of citizens can be increased through intelligent and rapid service applied to formal government works. Accordingly, this study primarily aims to derive a technological solution and/or method to substantialize government agility; thus, discussions of related key governance issues are beyond the scope of this study.[1] In the following sections, business agility studies and agile development methods are reviewed, followed by an overview of agile government studies and an evaluation of the present and future for an agile government. Finally, this paper suggests a new direction toward a more agile government.

Research Questions

This study focuses on the core attributes of agility in the government and public sectors that should be pursued, in accordance with private sector agile enterprise or agile management. This study also aims to identify the technical, administrative, and human factors that can implement these core agility attributes in government organizations using different operating principles from private companies.

1 Regarding the discussion of related key governance issues, OECD (2015), for example, emphasizes the following: (1) the ability to make collective commitments including aligning institutions and their behavior and engaging with the public and (2) aligning policies across public administration to share strategic objectives and public interest. Agility cannot be fully realized until governments are more open to, and engage meaningfully with, potential partners. Therefore, partnerships with key stakeholders are important because they increase investment options, double human capital capacity, diminish the risk profile for governments, contribute niche expertise, and can accelerate the execution of change. Moreover, partnerships with the private sector and civil society stakeholders can leverage innovation and response to citizen expectations, as well as delivering services in new ways (PwC 2015). However, such discussions are beyond the scope of this study as this paper focuses on technological solutions or procedural methods.

This study contains the following research questions: First, what are the levels and core attributes of agility within governments that require preparation for the present and foreseeable future? Second, why is it difficult to deploy and effectively operate an agile administration system at the business (organization) level within the government? Third, how can officials realize agile decision-making in order to implement agility at the business (organization) level within the government? Fourth, what policy and academic challenges should be addressed in order to realize agility in government. This study attempts to answer these research questions.

Agility in Business

What are the levels and core attributes of agility in government that require preparation for the present and foreseeable future? To answer this question, it is necessary to identify the level of agility that has already been implemented in the private sector and discover what its core agility is. In addition, when reviewing various previous studies and reports related to agility in government, it is necessary to clarify the level of agility that is being discussed.

In terms of agility in business, many businesses and organizations have experienced considerable volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA) environmental changes, marked with challenges, such as increased competition, globalized markets, and individualized customer requirements, along with numerous changes within every organizational field. For example, such scenarios were described in the 1990s by the Iacocca Institute’s study (Nagel et al. 1991). This report covered a variety of perspectives on business agility from the concept of agile production to enterprise elements, infrastructure, and enabling subsystems. As strategic and operating conditions become increasingly turbulent due to factors such as hyper-competition, increasing demand from customers, regulatory changes, and technological advancements, the ability to sense relevant change and readily respond becomes an important determinant of success (Overby et al. 2006).

With an increase in the need of a business community for business agility, academic research on business agility elements, functions, and required capabilities has also increased. Practical methodology, supporting technology, and IS have been developed to realize agility in the business field: for example in agile manufacturing (Gunasekaran et al. 2019), agile organization (Ambrose and Morello 2004), strategic agility (Sambamurthy et al. 2003; Doz and Kosonen 2008), and enterprise agility (Overby et al. 2006; Dove 2005). The following business agility models and solutions are effective in the real business world:

- *Agile manufacturing*: This can be defined as the capability of surviving and prospering in a competitive environment of continuous and unpredictable change by reacting quickly and effectively to changing markets and being driven by customer-designed products and services (Gunasekaran et al. 2019).
- *Real-time enterprise* (RTE): This is a concept in systems design that helps organizations automate processes across different systems, and the main goal of RTE is to provide real-time information to customers and stakeholders and implement processes to ensure that all related information is up-to-date and consistent throughout all systems.

- *Agile supply chain management*: This essentially is a practical approach to manage supply networks and develop flexible capabilities to satisfy rapidly changing customer demands. Agile supply chains have distinguishing characteristics: they are market-sensitive, virtual, process-integrated, and network-based (Christopher 2000).

- *Smart factory*: Industry 4.0 introduces the concept of a smart factory.[2] Industry 4.0 and smart factory applications include cyber-physical systems (CPS), Internet of Things (IoT), and cloud computing. Within the modular-structured smart factories, CPSs monitor physical processes, create virtual copies of the physical world, and make decentralized decisions.

In the real business world, beyond the agile response in a particular function, an agile response is realized at the level of the corporate management system, which includes several key functions of the company. In addition, when at the agile supply chain or smart factory stages, the collective agile responses of multiple companies operating in the industrial value chain beyond the individual company are promoted. This contrasts with the reality of the government sector, where even the agile responses of core businesses or central organizations within the government cannot be realized properly.

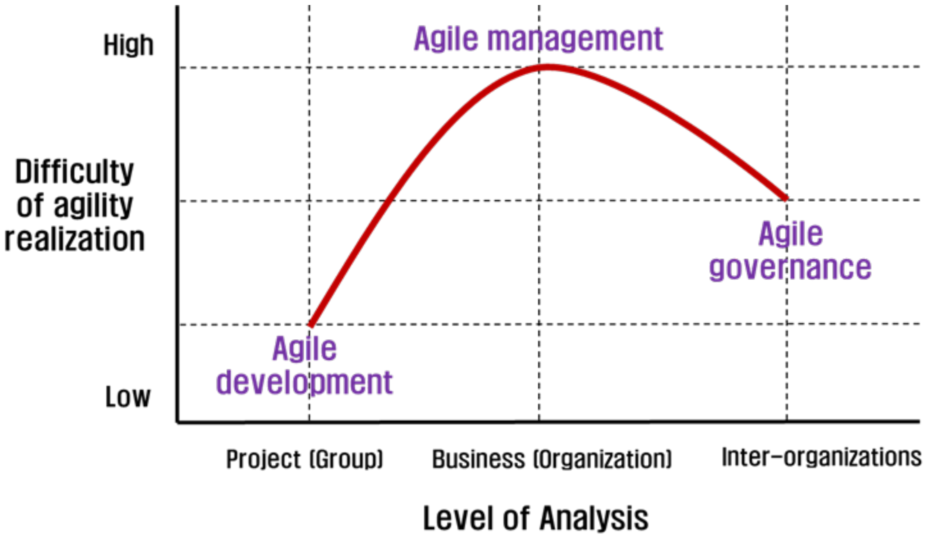
Agility in Government

Studies about agility in government have previously been centered as individual research or addressed as government innovation agendas in some countries; yet recently they have emerged as topics of comprehensive literature review research (Mergel et al. 2018) or collective research (WEF 2019; GIQ 2018). In particular, Mergel et al. (2018) found in the literature review of existing papers that there were flows of four areas of research: (1) software development approaches, (2) project management approaches, (3) application areas, and (4) potential outcomes.

Although quantitative literature classification methodologies are not used, qualitative literature reviews in this study show that different research flows exist. In summarizing the various previous studies related to agility in government, three different research flows can be classified according to the difficulty of agility realization and level of analysis, as shown in Figure 1: an agile project development at the group level; an agile management system at the organizational level; and an agile governance at the inter-organizational level. The difficulty of agility realization is a conceptual dimension based on various cases in the field. Many success stories have been reported in agile development at the project level, and agile governance at the inter-organizational level has been introduced recently (Schaake and Witter 2019). However, the issue reflects the fact that a successful case of agile management at a business level in government has yet to be reported.

2 The term "*Industrie 4.0*" was introduced by the German government. More details are available at http://www.plattform-i40.de/I40/Navigation/DE/Home/home.html (last accessed 5 August 2019).

Figure 1. Trends of Agility in Government



Source: drawn by the authors.

Many studies argue that an agile government should be realized. However, a few studies question why agile management is not realized in a government organization, unlike in a private business organization. Figure 1 shows that agile government is possible, as a result of a comprehensive review of various previous studies that included actual implementation cases related to agile management in the private and public sectors. Agile software development is mainly applied to a group-level project, while agile management is mainly applied to the business or factory (organization) level.

Agile Development at the Project (Group) Level

In the e-government or ICT sector, the implementation methodology of an agile government began in IS development or in software development fields. In 2012, the US Government Accountability Office (GAO 2012) identified 10 practices for applying agile software development methods to IT projects. The practices generally align with five key software development project management activities: strategic planning; organizational commitment and collaboration; preparation; execution; and evaluation. Officials that used agile methods in federal projects generally agreed that these practices were effective (GAO 2012).

The agile approach has been implemented within the private sector software industry since the early 1990s. Currently, it is the standard for software development and management in the private sector (Measey 2013). The agile approach is compared to the traditional waterfall approach that captures all requirements and specifications beforehand, distinguishing design and analysis from development. Therefore, the waterfall approach fails to adequately respond to change. Agile development adopts an iterative and incremental approach to software development and is performed in a highly collaborative manner (Lapham et al. 2010). It recognizes that a future system owner may be unable to gather all requirements beforehand.

Thus, the project is broken down into several smaller components, and plans are continuously inspected and adapted using rapid prototyping (Balter 2011).

The agile approach in IS development provides some important methodological implications for establishing an agile government. The GAO (2012) highlighted agility characteristics in the timing and scope of project planning, project evaluation, and collaboration. The US Office of Management and Budget (OMB) has recognized the value of a modular development methodology (Kundra 2010) as not a one-size-fits-all strategy. However, although a modular approach addresses many risks, it also creates certain predictable challenges that should be considered when evaluating its applicability in a given investment (OMB 2012).

Agile Management at the Organizational Level

AT Kearney (2013) refers to agile government as a methodology for enhancing government performance. They suggested four government agility features: (1) short-term frontline responsiveness, (2) strategic adaptation, (3) outcome focus, and (4) preventing or reducing issues before they arise. However, the first official document that presented agile government as being an important aspect of future governments was a paper published by the State Government of Victoria, Australia, as mentioned earlier (Australian State Services Authority 2007). Moreover, a 2008 report by the same authority proposed a more advanced agile government model (Australian State Services Authority 2008). To become more agile, governments must develop four types of capacity and management cycles: (1) scanning emerging trends and issues, (2) sensing opportunities to translate information into actionable solutions, (3) responding to opportunities and risks, and (4) shaping future environments. Mergel et al. (2018) insisted that governments must create systems that allow them to scan trends, identify developments, predict the potential impact on the organization, and quickly learn how to implement changes to their standard operating procedures.

Agile Governance at the Inter-Organizational Level

In recent years, there has been a growing number of research studies on agile governance. In January 2019, the World Economic Forum (WEF 2019) discussed the topic of agile governance as one of the global agendas. In a WEF presentation, Bason and Broekaert (2019) stated that “The Fourth Industrial Revolution and its advances in technology are transforming the ways in which individuals and groups live, work, and interact. Governments, companies, and civil society organizations that have traditionally had the responsibility of governing the societal impacts of these technologies are struggling to respond to the rapid change and exponential impact, and are trying to become more agile” (Bason and Broekaert 2019, 17-19). They stress that agile governance cannot be realized through discussion alone, but there are some political risks, and these should be put into action (i.e., talk less, act more).

The implementation of agile governance has been reported in many successful instances. Schaake and Witter (2019) pointed out that there are more than 100 places worldwide where governments are using technology to crowdsource policy. The authors considered government-private partnerships (PPPs) to be a key and viewed them at an inter-organizational level. For example, in Iceland and South Africa, the constitutions were crowdsourced by citizens. In Europe, open data and open budgets give citizens access to information and empower their decisions on the spending of public resources. Studies are being trialed to identify the nature of agile governance through such successful cases; yet they have not developed a general theory.

Focusing on the Agile Management in Government Organizations

This paper argues that among the three research flows (agile development at the project or group level, agile management at the business or organization level, and agile governance at the inter-organizational level), implementing agile management in government organizations should be the core of agile government. It is in line with a study by PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC 2011, 2015), which highlighted agility in government, and studies by Doz and Kosonen (2008) and OECD (2015), which presented the strategic agility model.

One of the leading global consulting firms, PwC (2011, 2015), has identified the following key elements that define agility in government: (1) adaptability (the ability to adjust and meet changing requirements); (2) innovation (the ability to generate and use new ideas, methodologies, and technologies); (3) collaboration (the ability to leverage internal and external knowledge and resources to enhance the mission); (4) visibility (the ability to create and maintain transparency to enhance fact-based decision-making); and (5) velocity (the ability to recognize and respond with the requisite speed to new circumstances and events).

According to a recently published report on public sector agility by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD 2015), these three dimensions of strategic agility (Doz and Kosonen 2008) can be applied to the public sector: (1) strategic sensitivity, or the ability to understand and balance government values, societal preferences, current and future costs and benefits, and expert knowledge and analysis, using this understanding to plan, set objectives, make decisions, and prioritize; (2) collective commitment, or the adherence and commitment to a common vision and set of overall objectives that can be used to guide public actors’ individual work, co-ordination, and collaboration with other actors (both within and outside of government) to achieve goals collectively; and (3) resource flexibility, or the ability to mobilize resources (both personnel and financial) in response to changing priorities in order to identify and promote innovative ways to maximize the results of resources used, and to increase efficiency and productivity for both fiscal consolidation and re-investment within more effective public policies and services. Both the OECD (2015) and Doz and Kosonen’s (2008) studies fall under the theme of strategic agility and ask for an agility within the government that is at the level of private companies. However, the conceptual level may be assessed as having proposed an appropriate agility model for the government; yet the practicability of this model through actual application has not been high.

Building an Agile Government: Rhetoric or Reality?

Since the mid-2000s, an increasing number of innovative trials have focused on government agility. After 2010, the Fourth Industrial Revolution became more visible, and policy uncertainty became even more evident. Thus, innovation attempts that incorporate the business agility model into the public sector are expected to increase. For example, Mergel (2016) extends the conceptual model from an agile approach as a software development methodology to the level of agile management, or, as she called it, "agile innovation management", which applies to government innovation based on the US federal experience. Despite these attempts to build an agile government, it is not practically feasible to achieve adequate government agility, unlike business agility.

This paper questions the feasibility of government agility as follows: Is the agile government concept a rhetoric or reality? Although many researchers have recognized the importance of an agile government, its implementation plan remains rhetorical because they have not proposed solutions for several fundamental issues in government agility. Moreover, strategic agility requires increasing integration without deceleration (Doz and Kosonen 2008). If the speed of the government decision-making is increased, there is a risk that the decision quality will deteriorate. Therefore, to increase government agility, the dilemmas of decision-making speed and quality in the government and public sectors must be resolved. In the private sector, businesses and organizations have various methods and solutions for business agility, such as RTE, agile supply chain management, and more recently, CPS-based smart logistics and factories.[3] However, governmental and public organizations do not have feasible and effective methods and solutions for government agility. This phenomenon is a result of the intrinsic differences between the public and private sectors. The reasons that the previously implemented business agility models are difficult to apply to the government and public sectors are as follows:

First, the scope of coverage differs. Private companies target markets with many customers and competitors; governments target a smaller scope, such as civil society or the national economy. Both are very indeterminate; thus, their scope determinability level cannot be compared. Second, there are many differences in the complexity of the issues that decisions target. The complexity of the issues causes uncertain causalities and degrades the decision quality. In the private sector, businesses have clear problem-solving targets, such as customer dissatisfaction and delivery time, and can discover the causality model through marketing or consumer behavior studies. However, due to the complexity of the government sector, it is difficult to elucidate causality. Moreover, it is relatively easy to enter into a state of forecast and result uncertainty in which governments are unaware of the effects of the intervention. Third, the process of taking an action and monitoring its response outcome differs. This is distinguished

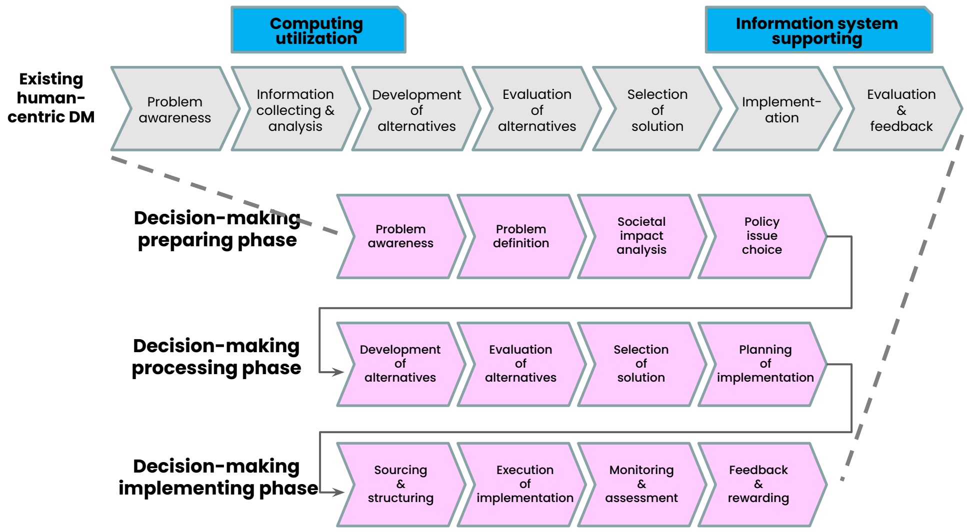
3 Industry 4.0, Real-Time Enterprise (RTE) and Cyber-Physical System (CPS) are addressed in the paper because the level of agile management in the private sector increases with the actual adoption of these new innovative concepts or techniques. For example, with Industry 4.0 spreading, innovative techniques, such as smart factory and digital twin city, are evolving together. If they are actually implemented, real-time sensing and response speeds are increased, which in turn increases the level of agility. Real-Time Enterprise (RTE) is a private enterprise innovation technique that implements agile management. CPS is a mechanism controlled by computer-based algorithms and, for example, smartphone platforms make possible mobile CPSs. This paper does not argue that the government should apply private sector innovation techniques as they are. This study is intended to confirm that these innovative concepts or techniques are methodologies with empirical evidence that is already realized in the private sector. If these techniques are modified and applied to the government sector, it is expected to contribute to the improvement of government agility.

from the situation of the private sector, which has clear and measurable performance and performance indicators, such as profits. In the private sector, the differentiation strategy as based on agility has a clear primary performance goal linked to market performance, and businesses utilize their immediate feedback as related to response and performance through the activation of the sense and respond function. By contrast, the government and public sectors lack clear and measurable performance indicators. In addition, they are unaware of how an agile government action affects a primary outcome goal, and at the same time, they do not have the effective means and methods to obtain immediate feedback information. It is one of the systematic weaknesses that increases the bureaucratic risks due to government agility. Fourth, the motivation of decision-making participants and actors differs. In the private sector, the differentiation strategy as based on agility is apt to appear as a result of market performance, which is linked to various rewards for those who have led business agility. In contrast, the government sector focuses on negative rather than positive results and emphasizes punishment by its failures or negative effects rather than rewards for its agility-based performance.

Agile Decision-Making

The government's comparative issues result in a lack of agile decision-making capabilities within it. Figure 2 presents an existing human-centric decision-making process in the government and public agencies. The first difference in the scope of coverage is mainly applied to the preparation phase. The second set of differences in the complexity of the issues are mainly applied to the preparation and processing phase. The third difference in the process of taking action and monitoring its response outcome is mainly applied to the implementation phase. Finally, the fourth difference in motivation is applied to the implementation phase, but it affects the entire decision-making process.

Figure 2. Basic Decision-Making Processes and Real Decision-Making Activities



Source: drawn by the authors.

As the Fourth Industrial Revolution has recently become more visible, newly developed technologies and solutions are emerging that are expected to enhance the agile decision-making capabilities of the government. For example, Chatfield and Reddick (2018), limited to Houston 311 services in the USA, show that agile customer response services that use big data and analytics can be implemented in practice. Such development will increase the possibility of business agility models and solutions being modified for the government and public sectors.

With the development of IoT, big data, and cloud computing technology, the sensing ability of government and public bodies is likely to expand greatly. With the expansion of government cloud adoption, information exchange and sharing among government departments are expanding. With the proliferation of CPS, information exchange and sharing between the private and public sectors have greatly increased. The expansion of IoT and cloud computing will greatly increase the possibility of collecting and utilizing measurable goal-related data in the public sector. Improving the sensing and monitoring capabilities of government and public bodies can contribute greatly toward reducing the gap between the private and public sectors.

The enhancement of big-data-analyzing capabilities and the use of artificial intelligence (AI) can be a breakthrough solution for the complexities of the government and public sectors. Zuazua and Lohmeyer (2019) pointed out the importance of the ability to use new technologies to secure necessary data in a timely manner, in order to create an agile governmental system, and to utilize them through artificial intelligence-based analysis. In particular, AI combined with deep learning, or machine learning, can greatly enhance problem-solving abilities, thus overcoming the complexities that humans cannot understand as evinced by the success of AlphaGo.[4] By strengthening the capabilities of scenario planning and complex event processing (CEP) as developed in the private sector, it is possible to enhance the ability to predict the occurrence of social issues, strengthen the initial response capacities in the event of issues, and improve problem-solving capacities based on scenarios. Improving the government’s and public bodies’ utilization of big data and their forecasting capabilities can contribute greatly to reducing the gap between the private and public sectors, particularly the second set of differences in the complexity of the issues.

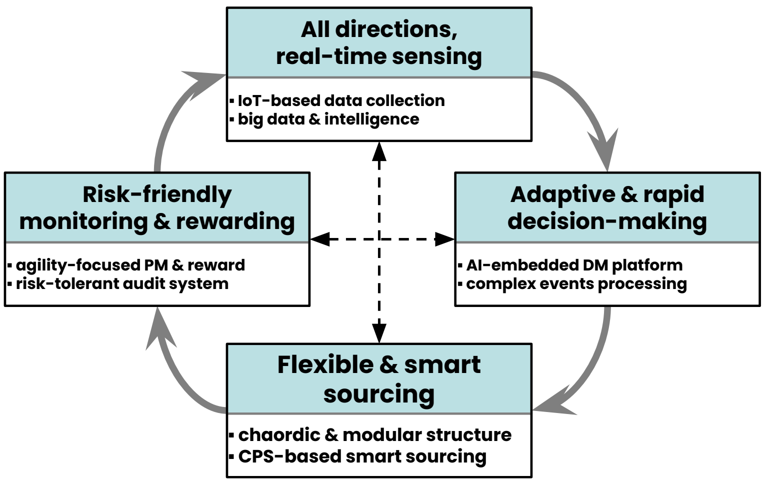
On the other hand, the proliferation of social networking services (SNSs) and smart mobile devices is increasing the possibilities of the early detection of social issues and the identification of new solutions by collective intelligence. The development of the public sector platform, along with the expansion of the shared economy, has increased the possibilities of co-creation by combining various resources owned by the private sector, individuals, and the state (Hong and Lee 2016). If governmental innovations, such as systematic risk management and tolerance for failure due to innovation, are achieved, the gap between the private and public sectors can be reduced.

4 AlphaGo is an AI computer program that played the board game Go and was developed by Alphabet Inc.’s Google DeepMind in 2015.

New Challenges and Tasks for Building an Agile Government

To achieve an agile government, it is necessary to enhance the feasibility of agile decision-making. Agile decision-making is at the core of an agile government. For a more effective government agility response to the Fourth Industrial Revolution, it is necessary to develop the following functions: (1) real-time sensing in all directions; (2) adaptive and rapid decision-making; (3) flexible and smart sourcing; and (4) risk-friendly monitoring and rewarding, as seen in Figure 3.

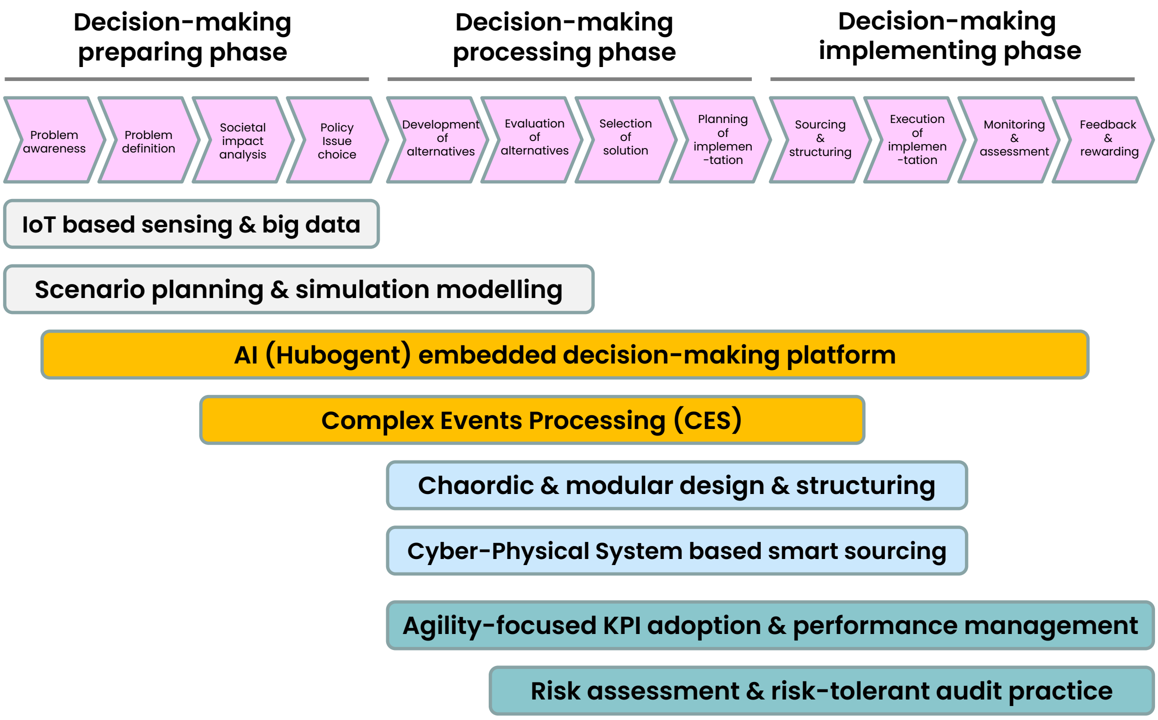
Figure 3. New Challenges for a More Effective Government Agility Response to the Fourth Industrial Revolution



Source: drawn by the authors.

To activate these four agility functions and this cycle, it is necessary to develop various supporting tools and solutions and apply them to the public sector. For example, Hugos and Hulitzky (2010) suggested Business Process Management (BPM), Complex Event Processing (CEP), Business Intelligence (BI), and Simulation Modeling (SM) as technologies to support the agile business process, as seen in Figure 4. This paper argues that the agile management system at a business or organization level should be applied to government organizations beyond agile development at the project level. To this end, the authors present an agile decision-making and practical solutions model for government that reflects the characteristics of government organizations as a comprehensive framework. To implement agile decision-making, big-data analytics and AI technologies are proposed. Moreover, to implement an agile management system, various ICTs, such as the Complex Event Processing (CEP), and new management techniques, such as risk management, will also be required to apply for further development of agile government.

Figure 4. Emergent Tools and Solutions for More Effective Agile Decision-Making



Source: drawn by the authors.

This study suggests the following agile decision-making support tools and solutions according to decision-making processes and phases:

· *IoT-based sensing and big data analytics*: IoT is the inter-networking of physical devices, vehicles, buildings, electronics, and other network connectivity that enables these objects to collect and exchange data.[5] IoT is achieved through seamless large-scale sensing, data analytics, and information representation, using cutting-edge ubiquitous sensing and cloud computing (Gubbi et al. 2013).

- *Scenario planning and simulation modeling*: The scenario planning methodology is suggested to systematically incorporate future uncertainties into the planning stage, and simulation modeling is required to predict the impact of uncertain future variables. A more effective application of simulation requires both big data and AI support.
- *The AI-embedded decision-making platform ("Hubogent"[6])*: AI can help overcome the limitations of human-driven decision-making. The Zuazua and Lohmeyer (2019) study highlights the human and AI collaborative decisions.[7] By increasing the agility of

5 For example, the US Air Force takes an agile approach to its newest management system aimed at giving troops real-time awareness through multiple interconnected systems (Maucione 2020).

6 "Hubogent" is a newly created term by the authors Hong and Kim (2016; Kim and Hong 2017) and is a compound of the words "Hubo" and "Agent." It refers to an intelligent program or robotic agent that has been endowed with an intelligence system to performs administrative work for human beings.

7 They pointed out that "The solution is to distribute decision making further from the traditional centers of control, while rapidly building requisite new skills and behaviors and guiding and augmenting human decision making with new technologies, processes, rules, and analytics."

decision-making, AI can particularly contribute to improving accuracy and speed as well as analytical abilities (Hong and Kim 2016).

- *Complex Event Processing (CEP)*: Event processing is a method of analyzing streams of information about events and deriving a conclusion from them (Luckham 2012). Complex event processing (CEP) is event processing that combines data from multiple sources to infer patterns that suggest more complicated circumstances, consisting of a set of techniques for processing real-time events and extracting information from event streams as they arrive.
- *Chaordic and modular design and structuring*: Agile organization and personnel should be mobilized using the chaordic[8] and modular principles. Chaordic and modular design and structuring can increase system agility (Dove 2005).
- *Cyber-Physical System (CPS) based smart sourcing*: Smart sourcing implies intelligent outsourcing. It increases innovation across a range of processes from core to non-core, allowing organizations to focus on their most critical areas of differentiation and customer value (Bajec 2009). Currently, CPS can enhance smart-sourcing capabilities.
- *Agility-focused key performance indicator (KPI) adoption and performance management*: To measure governmental and public performances, various KPIs have already been developed and utilized. However, the development of detailed KPIs that are directly linked to agility is insufficient, and the performance management that takes advantage of its characteristics is ineffective. Rdiouat et al. (2015) suggest various performance indicators for an agile government and agile decision-making.
- *Risk assessment and risk-tolerant auditing practices*: Risk management is a critical part of any change process and will be necessary to make the public service more agile (PwC 2015). Governmental auditing systems, both internal and external, have the potential to enhance strategic agility and public administrative reform (OECD 2015). To enhance agile decision-making and action, governmental auditing institutions should vitalize a risk assessment service function and develop risk-tolerant auditing practices.

Concluding Remarks

This paper reviewed more diverse previous studies, including Mergel and her associates’ (2018) paper, as well as cases and studies on the agile management in the private business sector (Christopher 2000; Sambamurthy et al. 2003; Overby et al. 2006; Luckham 2012; Gunasekaran et al. 2019). This paper intends to present an agile decision-making and practical solutions model for government as a key basis for transitioning beyond the research phase and into the execution phase.

There are various new challenges and tasks for building an effective agile government. First, it is effective to implement an agile decision-making or agile administration system at the core of the agile government, together with a digital transformation of the work of the government. To become more agile, the government needs to constantly transform itself into an effective

8 Dove (2005) suggested three types of organizing principles: Ordered, chaotic, and chaordic. The term “chaordic” means governed by, or combining elements of, both chaos and order, such as Lego combination blocks.

digital government. Coleman and Forman (2016) suggested seven pillars for becoming a digital government organization: hybrid IT environments, security, advanced data analytics, IT service management, application services, mobility services, and user-centered designs. For digital government transformation, governmental process automation can be a particularly critical success factor. Therefore, agile governments require the following: (1) fast decision-making, (2) flexible resource allocation, (3) access and analysis of a constant stream of high-quality data to understand the changing environment, (4) appropriate risk-taking, (5) flexible policy-making approaches that allow for rapid changes to plans and decision reversal when needed, (6) balancing of short-term responsiveness with long-term management of uncertainty, (7) active shaping of the operating environment, and (8) a shared values base (Australian State Services Authority 2007; PwC 2011, 2015; Doz and Kosonen 2008; OECD 2015).[9]

While governmental innovation has so far been driven by a physical environment, future government innovation or transformation should make use of the cyber-physical environment as its new administrative space. In this respect, it will be necessary to create a mid- to long-term roadmap for establishing relationships and prioritizing between future digital transformation tasks and agile government tasks.

Second, the government should make an effort to balance the basic initiatives presented in this study in order to implement an agility model within the government. In this study, the authors sought possible solutions with an emphasis on sensing and decision-making, which is likely to be the most difficult of the functions when realizing an agile government. However, since resource sourcing, risk-monitoring, performance evaluation, and reporting measures are also important for implementing government agility, they require in-depth research, alongside specific solutions. This is in line with the three principles as laid out by the OECD (2015) and Doz and Kosonen (2008), namely, the balanced implementation of the three principles of strategic sensitivities, collectivity, and resource flexibility.

Third, further research on how AI-embedded decision-making can be implemented is required in order to execute agile decision-making. It is necessary to utilize the concepts and principles of the Hubogent (Kim and Hong 2017). "Hubogent" is used to refer to an intelligent program or robotic agent that has been endowed with an intelligence system that performs administrative work for human beings (Hong and Kim 2016; Kim and Hong 2017). Agile decision-making, which is at the core of an agile government, must be transformed into Hubogent-embedded decision-making (Hong and Kim 2016). Henceforth, it is necessary to study the effective ways by which to realize Hubogent-embedded decision-making in the government.

Fourth, it is necessary to coordinate various institutional, administrative, and human arrangements for the actual operation of the agile government, and further research on the technical implementation methods of applying the requested new technology is required.

9 A local public health center plays an important role in providing public health care for local citizens, but it does not provide speedy and high-quality medical services due to the lack of specialized medical personnel. For example, one of its problems was missing the golden time for early detection of lung diseases. In order to solve this problem, one of the district governments in Seoul, Eunpyeong, assisted by the Korea Information Society Agency and an IT company (LG-CNS), established an AI and Cloud-based Health Center in 2019 for the first time in the nation's public health center. Prior to the introduction of such a system, a public health doctor's reading of a tuberculosis-oriented X-ray images was slow. It usually takes over a day for a health center to request a medical specialist outside a district health center to read X-ray images and receive results. After applying this service, a local health center can get the result in 20 seconds. Moreover, its accuracy level exceeded the average accuracy rate of university hospital specialists. At present, the AI-assisted analysis system analyzes all four major lung diseases (lung cancer, tuberculosis, pneumonia, and pneumothorax) within 20 seconds, and collaboration between a doctor and AI really improves the accuracy rate of medical diagnosis (Kim 2019).

For example, a technical solution for Hubogent-embedded decision-making, agile decision-making platforms, and so on should be presented (Hong and Kim 2016; Kim and Hong 2017). In addition, the agile management system architecture as a complete blueprint that encompasses institutional, administrative, and human elements, in addition to technical elements, should also be designed in detail. Another interesting suggestion would be that an agile development approach, rather than a conventional waterfall development approach, would be more effective as a development methodology for this purpose.

Finally, there is a need to establish a relationship with an adaptive governance, which is discussed in conjunction with the study of an agile governance or agile government. For example, Soe and Drechsler (2018) view adaptive governance as encompassing an agile governance, on the basis of previous studies (Wang et al. 2018; Janssen and van der Voort 2016). However, the core concept of agile governance is limited to the agile development approach that is applied to software development. If we extend the concept of an agile governance that includes inter-organizational relationships, or technical solutions such as the agile management system as discussed in this study, it is not easy to interpret bilateral relationships as one side encompassing the other. With regard to the most comprehensive digital governance, agile governance can provide a sustainable governance framework that keeps innovative digital service delivery within the government, while adaptive governance can be a type of comprehensive innovative governance. Therefore, it is necessary to remember that the agile management system within the private sector did not occur overnight; it has evolved over a period of more than a decade through trial and error processes. It should also be considered that the environmental factors of competition among private companies have contributed to enhancing the completeness of the agile management system. It is also necessary to consider the other external pressures that could replace the external pressure of competition, such as the vision and leadership of political leaders, the level of technological development of private companies, the level of academic development within academia, the attempts to innovate an agile government in advanced or neighboring countries, and the discipline of adaptive governance.

As a matter of fact, the content of the new challenges in this paper is based on various private sector experiences because of limited systematic studies on agile government at this point. Accordingly, it is unavoidable for this paper to utilize corporate experiences that could provide practical lessons for the development of agile government. Having such limitations and difficulties, this paper aims to propose new possibilities of agile government. If experimental challenges and empirical applications in this field are accumulated in the future, they should be developed into more rigorous research papers based on systematic research methods.

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Quality of Governance at the Communal Level in Poland: An Exploratory Study of the Worst Performer Case from the Opolskie Province

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Abstract

The objective of this paper is an attempt to explain the determinants of the lowest governance quality level in one of the communes of the Opolskie Province, Poland. The first stage of the research consisted in developing a commune-level governance quality index in order to measure the quality of governance in the 60 communes of the Opolskie Province. Subsequently, the commune with the lowest score in the index was qualified for the second stage of the research, which was based on the extreme case method. The major conclusion from the research is that the commune leader's governance style, which allowed him to hold on to power for many terms of office, was responsible for generating low governance quality. Furthermore, the low quality of governance was not only the effect of the governance style but also the strategy aimed at remaining in the commune leader office for many terms.

Keywords: quality of governance, commune, local government, low performance, Poland

1. Introduction

Nowadays the problem of governance quality is one of the key issues raised by international organizations, which, by establishing and promoting so-called good governance principles, provide standards for evaluating governance quality levels. Among the organizations that have formulated such principles, the World Bank (Kaufmann et al. 2007, 3), the European Commission (European Commission 2001, 10), or Transparency International (Transparency International 2009) are worth mentioning. The principles of good governance were also formulated with respect to local policy in the Strategy for Innovation and Good Governance at the Local Level, as adopted by the Council of Europe in 2007 (Council of Europe 2007, 9).

Simultaneously to the development of good governance standards more and more research projects are initiated with the aim of measuring the quality of governance and identifying factors responsible for this quality. Such research focuses primarily on the national level (Kaufmann 2004; Diamond and Morlino 2004; Fukuyama 2013; Mungiu-Pippidi 2016; Khan 2016), but it also targets the quality of governance at the regional level (Putnam 1993; Knack 2002; Charron et al. 2014; Hryniewicz et al. 2018) or the local level (Cusack 1999; Blair 2000; Coffe and Geys 2005; Wilde et al. 2009, Taylor 2016). There are also some case studies trying to address especially the problem of bad governance in particular communities. The classic example, however not rooted in the conceptual framework of good governance, would be the study conducted by Edward Banfield in one of the Southern Italian villages in 1954/1955. However, if one used such conceptual framework it could be argued that Banfield's research was in fact focused on the participatory dimension of the quality of local governance. The main conclusion of his research was that the poverty and backwardness of the studied village were determined by the inability of the local population to act together for their common good caused by an ethos he called "amoral familism". This ethos was based on the fundamental principle according to which one should maximize the material, short-run interests of one's own nuclear family, assuming that all other villagers do exactly the same – this generally held belief was a crucial obstacle to creating and implementing village-wide solutions to the local problems (Banfield 1967).[1] More recent case studies of local governance are focused rather on harnessing different good governance mechanisms to improve quality of governance. For example, a study of the Brazilian city of Porto Alegre, with special focus on one of its impoverished districts, proved that the introduction of participatory budgeting by local authorities significantly facilitated civic participation based on emerging neighbourhood associations, at the same time leading to the erosion of existing clientelistic networks (Abers 1998). Another study, in which the participation of Tanzanian villagers in decision-making over community development projects was examined, showed that while local consultations can be an effective tool of inclusion, there is a risk of local elites misusing them, trying to further their particular interests by using a rhetoric of democracy (Snyder 2008). The democratic potential of the informal, traditional local councils in Indian villages was also under scrutiny, leading to the conclusion that these "informal local governance institutions" might improve democratic governance, despite media and urban middle class depicting them as oppressive and backward (Ananth Pur 2007).

However, as far as Poland is concerned, there are very few studies dealing comprehensively with issues related to the quality of governance at the local level (see more in the further part of the paper). This is to a considerable degree due to the lack of relevant statistical data, which makes it difficult to measure the quality of governance in Poland already at the regional level (Podgórniak-Krzykacz 2013, 173). It is also not insignificant that, as Polish researchers emphasize, the existing concepts of good governance usually apply to the national level, and the important aspects of good governance are connected with the very structure of the state, its political system, and tradition (Kula 2013, 284; Borys 2014, 61).

This article aims to bridge the aforementioned research gap. The author carries out an assessment of the quality of governance in the 60 communes of the Opolskie Province and attempts to identify and examine the conditions determining the low government quality level in the commune with the lowest score based on the proposed index. It should be noted that measuring the quality of governance is only a preliminary stage whose goal is selecting a case for a further study. Thus, this paper's main research objective is an attempt to identify and examine the conditions determining the lowest governance quality level in the selected commune. The major research question of the paper is as follows: Which factors are responsible for the low quality of governance in the commune? The research methodology combines in itself quantitative analysis and qualitative analysis. The first stage of the research consisted in developing a commune-level governance quality index which constituted a basis for a quantitative analysis aimed at measuring the quality of governance in communes of the Opolskie Province. The analysis was based first of all on the secondary data concerning, depending on an indicator, the years 2015-2017 (see more about the index in the Appendix). In order to assess those governance quality aspects for which it was difficult to find the secondary

1 It is interesting to point out that exactly in the same period of 1954/1955 another study was conducted in a small Greek village. In this study a similar syndrome was found; however, it was also concluded that the notion of the "service to the community" existed among villagers but both as a devotion to the common good and a method of building a given family's honourable reputation. The study also showed the importance of the patron-client relationships as a basic governance mechanisms, with the village president being in the centre of patronage networks (Campbell 1978).

data, the author used also the CAWI method (see questionnaire in the Appendix), sending an Internet survey questionnaire to all communes.[2] Subsequently, the commune with the lowest score in the index was qualified for the second stage of the research, which was based on the extreme case method. This method is of an exploratory character, and its objective is to establish possible reasons influencing the value of a selected variable (Seawright and Gerring 2008, 302). The case study presented here is based on the secondary data, observations, and four non-structured interviews with key informants conducted during a one-week stay in the commune under examination in June 2018.

2. The Quality of Governance – Meaning and Measurement

If the issue of the quality of governance is considered from a global point of view, one can notice an increasing interest in it particularly from the 1990s on, simultaneously with the development of a new governance paradigm emphasizing the role of the quality of institutions as a condition for social and economic development (North 1987; Jessop 1998; Rothstein and Teorell 2008; Rothstein and Holmberg 2012; Robinson and Acemoglu 2012). The literature on this subject is quite extensive, and the very notion of governance is complex and multidimensional, which is proven by the fact that it was already in the 1990s that Robert Rhodes distinguished six different uses of the term (Rhodes 1996, 653-658). This conceptual ambiguity also became a basis for the criticism of governance as an empty signifier whose growing popularity contrasted with its factual informative value (Offe 2009, 550-554). Therefore, at this point, the author intends to focus on defining what he understands under the notion of governance and when, in his opinion, governance is good. In the next part, the author will present a brief description of Poland's local government system and a review of the most important research on the quality of governance in Polish local government institutions. Such a presentation seems to be indispensable for establishing a proper context for a further description of relevant studies and an attempt to provide an answer to the formulated research questions.

As Claus Offe writes, the notion of governance is used "to grasp, on the one hand, institutions (a 'structure of rules'), and on the other hand, a process (that of steering), which is taking place in the framework of these institutions" (Offe 2009, 550). In this paper, the way of understanding governance is consistent with the concept proposed in the handbook on measuring the quality of governance at the local level. In the light of this concept, governance is the "processes by which public policy decisions are made and implemented"; additionally, governance is the result of "interactions, relationships and networks between the different sectors (government, public sector, private sector and civil society) and involves decisions, negotiation, and different power relations between stakeholders to determine who gets what, when and how" (Wilde et al. 2009, 5). Governance understood in this way means that the objects of governance quality assessments in this study are not only formalized governing bodies but also other entities which could play the co-governing role in the setting of a local commune.

Measuring the quality of governance requires an answer to the question about when governance can be referred to as good. Just as in the case of the notion of governance, there is no general consensus about a definition of good governance. The existing definitions can be assigned to

2 Altogether, fifty-five communes returned the questionnaire, while data for the remaining five were acquired by means of in-depth Internet searches. It should be added that responding to the questionnaire by the set deadline was used as one of the indicators of openness, so the CAWI method was not only applied to gather some additional data, but in itself it was a method of assessing readiness to provide data to external actors.

one of the following three general perspectives: a) focus on processes in which what counts is the quality of decision-making and decision implementation, b) focus on outputs, where emphasis is put on the quality of legislated laws, regulations, or programmes, c) focus on outcomes, where the main measure is the quality of life or economic development (Taylor 2016, 3-5). Defining good governance can be facilitated to some extent by considering the quality of governance from the angle of the syndrome of the principles constituting the criteria for the assessment of this quality. This is the track followed by the author of this paper, who has developed a good governance index based to a considerable degree on international (World Bank, European Union, Council of Europe) and Polish (Ministerstwo Rozwoju Regionalnego 2008) sources of criteria for good governance. A comparison of these sources reveals a high level of similarity among the principles of good governance – the principles of accountability, efficiency, participation or openness are among the most frequently appearing rules in the repertoire of good governance.[3] Simultaneously, the practice of research on the quality of governance at the local level shows that the existing measurement tools, such as Local Governance Barometer, Good Governance for Local Development, or UN-Habitat Urban Governance Index, also take into consideration the principle of equity, which does not feature so prominently in the aforementioned international sources. A more thorough analysis of such tools makes one conclude that the dimension of "equity" is understood to a large extent as the existence of institutional solutions preventing social exclusion or ensuring a state of relative equality within a local community (Wilde et al. 2009, 56-75). On the basis of the above-mentioned sources the author decided to distinguish the following five principles of good governance: equity, efficiency, accountability, openness, and participation. These principles constitute a basis of a governance quality index at the communal level. The index will be characterized in more detail in the section dedicated to a description of the conducted research.

Since 1999 Poland has had a three-level territorial division system within which two self-government segments have been shaped: the local system covering communes and districts and the regional system based on provinces (Wojciechowski 2014, 19-20). According to the typology of local government systems in Eastern Europe proposed by Paweł Swianiewicz, among the five types of local government, the Polish system was classified as "champions of decentralization", representing the highest level of decentralization. It means that local government assumes responsibility for a wide range of tasks; is characterized by a directly elected mayor (since 2002), a majority voting system for decision-making bodies (in communes with up to 20,000 inhabitants), and a considerable scope of financial autonomy (Swianiewicz 2014, 303-307).

Polish communes are highly diversified; they are divided into rural, urban-rural, and urban. According to the data for 2016, there were 2478 communes, including 1559 rural ones, 616 urban-rural ones, and 303 urban ones. The average number of inhabitants in one commune was 15,500 (Kaczmarek 2016, 72-74). In comparison to the average size of communes in the other EU Member States, which was 5,600 people in 2010, communes in Poland are medium-sized units (Kachniarz and Babczuk 2014, 2). It should be noted, however, that more than 600 of them are small rural communes with fewer than 5,000 inhabitants (Swianiewicz 2014a, 10). The size of communes does influence the quality of local democracy. On the basis of data for 2015, it was found that in contrast to large communes, people living in small communes show more interest in local politics, declare a stronger sense of influence on local government authorities, and manifest stronger citizen activity (Gendźwiłł and Swianiewicz 2016, 776-777).

3 In order to become familiar with a more in-depth and critical review of these principles see Rothstein and Teorell (2008); Agnafors (2013); Taylor (2016).

Both international comparative studies and more in-depth analyses conducted in this country indicate that Poland is an extreme case in terms of a high level of non-partisan local politics, with the strongest non-partyism in small communes (with up to 10,000 and between 10,000 and 20,000 inhabitants; Gendźwiłł and Żółtak 2014, 1132).

The development of research on the quality of governance in Poland was parallel to the country's integration with the European Union and was stimulated by this process. The first works dealing with the quality of governance in Poland were focused on the whole country, which was connected with the necessity to assess Poland's institutional preparedness for joining the EU in 2004 (Hausner and Marody 2000; Wilkin 2013). After Poland's accession to the EU, the Ministry of Regional Development commissioned another research project, whose results indicated that Poland was a country of low governance quality standards. Within the scope of the project, a regional component appeared in which, based on eighteen indicators, the authors tried to assess the quality of governance. It was the first attempt to apply comprehensively the concept of the good governance principles to the level of Polish regions (Wilkin et al. 2008, 100-116). It also needs to be noted that Poland's accession to the EU was accompanied by the appearance of strategic documents whose content included reference to the concept of good governance. The principles of good governance were to become criteria for the assessment of the regional policy (Drejerska 2010, 49-53). Supported strongly by considerable EU funds, the new regional development policy was accompanied by the financial and competency-based strengthening of regional government institutions responsible for the spending of structural funds. This made researchers pose questions about the ability of the regional administrative apparatus to absorb EU funds and relations between the efficiency of regional institutions responsible for such absorption and social capital (Lackowska-Madurowicz and Swianiewicz 2013, 1396-1398). They also examined relations between the quality of governance at the regional level and innovativeness in particular regions, concluding that there were no clear connections between that quality and the level of innovation (Miłaszewicz and Jabłońska 2016, 106).

As far as research on the quality of governance at the local level is concerned, researchers tend to focus on selected governance quality dimensions, particularly on social participation and social capital, which happen to be overlapping phenomena.[4] Studies on social capital in small towns in Poland allowed researchers to distinguish three governance models based on the criterion of relations between local political elites and a social environment, i.e. the models of isolation, a closed system, and cooperation animated by a leader (Trutkowski and Mandes 2005, 215-218). On the other hand, research conducted in the communes of the Podlaskie Province, where local social participation was assessed, showed that among the good governance principles of efficiency, openness, accountability and cohesion, participation was regarded as an element of relatively little importance for the improvement of the quality of governance (Kargol-Wasiluk et al. 2013, 340). In the same province, researchers conducted in-depth case studies, which allowed them to identify an impact of the local social capital on the effectiveness and responsiveness of commune authorities (Sadowski 2011, 304-306). There were also research projects aimed at providing an answer to the question about the optimal size of local population from the point of view of the quality of governance. For this purpose, an index of the local government performance was developed. It was based on the three components of capacity for economic development, ability to provide cheap services, and functioning of local democracy. The index became a basis for assessing the quality of governance in about 1900

4 In this paper, in accordance with the adopted governance concept, it is assumed that citizen participation constitutes an integral part of the quality of governance at the local level. About the separate treatment of citizen participation and good governance, see Roy (2008).

communes in Poland. After a thorough analysis, researchers concluded that communes with the highest scores in the index (in the variant where each of the three components was assigned the same weight) had a number of inhabitants in the range of 25,000-32,000 (Swianiewicz and Herbst 2002, 279-285). Another research that is worth mentioning was conducted in small (up to 20,000 inhabitants) communes in the Dolnośląskie Province. The research, aimed at answering the question about inhabitants' and local government officials' understanding of good governance, showed that it was understood first of all in terms of the effectiveness of authorities and the competences of officials (Kobielska and Lisowska 2014, 187-188).

3. The Quality of Governance at the Local Level in the Opolskie Province – Selecting and Profiling the Worst Performer Case

The research described in this part of the paper was conducted in the communes of the Opolskie Province in the years 2017-2018. The Opolskie Province is located in the South-West of Poland. It is the smallest Polish province in terms of both territory (9,412 km^2) and demography (996,000 inhabitants). It is also characterized by the smallest number of territorial division units at the district and commune levels: 11 districts and 71 communes (Główny Urząd Statystyczny 2017a). In order to explain reasons behind selecting the Opolskie province as a region to be studied it must be noted that the research presented in this article is part of the wider research project aimed at a diagnosis of potential relations between the ethnic diversity of the Opolskie province and the quality of governance in particular communes of this region. Thus, the primary reason behind the selection was the fact that the Opolskie province is Poland's most diversified region in terms of ethnicity (Barwiński 2006). The Eastern part of the province has a considerable percentage of German and Silesian minorities, and the Western part practically does not have any larger groups representing ethnic minorities.[5] However, this article presents only a fragment of the project, with particular focus on the ethnically homogenous commune selected as the worst performer case out of 60 communes of the province.[6]

Before describing the most important aspects of the applied methodology it is worth mentioning that the quality of governance in the communes of the Opolskie province was rarely under systematic scrutiny. Those who studied regional and local politics usually focused on the functioning of German and Silesian minorities and their influence on the social, economic and political dynamics of the region. However, some of these studies, despite a lack of clear reference to the concept of quality of governance, cover phenomena relevant for the study of the quality of governance. For example, Danuta Berlińska emphasized the evolution of inter-ethnic relations (Polish-German) from strong antagonism in the first years after World War II towards peaceful cooperation in the 1990s. Especially, the period of the fight for retaining the separate Opolskie province in 1998 was a catalyst for province-wide integration crossing the national barriers and a strengthening of inhabitants' identification with the region. This process was accompanied by the increasing awareness of the regional elites that the region's national diversity required a system aimed at reconciling opposing interests and dialogue-

5 According to the data from the national census carried out in 2011, the Opolskie province was inhabited by 895,000 people declaring Polish nationality, 106,000 people declaring Silesian nationality, and 78,000 declaring German nationality (Struktura … 2015).

6 The main hypotheses verified in the project mentioned was that the quality of governance is higher in the communes with ethnic diversity in comparison to the quality of governance in the ethnically homogeneous communes. However, this hypothesis has been rejected as a result of the quantitative analysis – governance quality in ethnically diversified communes is not higher than in the other communes. For more about the results of the project see Czepil and Opioła (2020).

oriented attitudes (Berlińska 1999). The research conducted in that period showed that both the elites and ordinary inhabitants created an image of the Opolskie province in opposition to the Katowickie province, to which the Opole Region was to be joined within the scope of Poland’s administrative division into 12 provinces.[7] According to the stereotype developed at that time the Opolskie province was perceived as a thrifty and law-abiding region with a road network of good quality, efficient work organization, better looking towns and villages, and a political culture characterized by dialogue and readiness for compromise. The excellent example of the last quality was to be the peaceful coexistence of representatives of various cultures, not only the German one but also that of the former Eastern borderlands (Berlińska and Nijakowski 2001). The research conducted by Romuald Jończy and Katarzyna Łukaniszyn-Domaniewska showed that the high percentage of the population emigrating, the region’s distinctive feature against the background of the other parts of Poland before 2004, had a positive impact on the economic situation of the inhabitants of the region because of the transfer of funds and the stimulation of demand for local goods and services. This positive impact was visible especially in the 1990s, during the period of the transformational shock, which was being neutralized in the region by means of earnings coming from definitive or circular migration. But the authors also indicate the negative fiscal effects of migration, with respect to both income tax (especially affecting communal budgets) and VAT. The researchers draw attention to the negative influence of emigration on local social capital and institutions – it caused, among other things, the weakening of local ties and initiatives, the dismantling of the institutional and transport infrastructure (e.g. the liquidation of crèches, kindergartens, schools, and public transport connections; Jończy and Łukaniszyn-Domaszewska 2014).[8]

The only study in which a concept very similiar to the quality of governance – institutional efficiency – was applied to the communes of the Opolskie province was conducted in the year 2000 as part of a countrywide research project aiming at comparing and explaining regional differences regarding institutional efficiency. In this project seven different dimensions of institutional efficiency were examined at the communal level, but the results were aggregated at the provincial one in order to make inter-provincial comparisons possible. Interestingly the Opolskie province achieved the best score out of 16 provinces, with the other provinces located in Western Poland also having better results. Thereby the researchers’ intuition, grounded in already existing literature, has been empirically confirmed showing an institutional quality gap

7 In the year 1998 the reform of territorial division in Poland was under preparation, part of it being a reduction of the number of provinces from 49 to 12 (in the end, 16 provinces were established). The Opolskie province has managed to remain a separate administrative region, partly thanks to strong mobilization and protests from the regional civil society.

8 It is estimated that in 2011 around 200 thousand out of 1 million inhabitants of the Opolskie province worked abroad on a permanent basis, at the same time being registered as residents of the communes of the Opolskie province. Before accession to the European Union in 2004 the majority of those emigrating were people with a German background (having German citizenship) living in the Central-Eastern communes of the province (the majority of them emigrated to Germany), while ethnically homogenous communes of the Western part of the province were relatively free from the phenomenon of emigration (suffering high unemployment). This pattern of unregistered emigration provokes a question about the possibility to compare communes affected by emigration and not affected by this phenomenon, by using public statistics which do not cover unregistered emigration despite its influence on, for example, communal budgets. Being aware of this problem the author decided to use some statistical data (like the commune’s own revenue per 1 inhabitant) because after 2004 we can observe a significant transformation of emigration patterns in the province. This transformation depends on the substantial increase of emigration from the Western communes of the province, while at the same time one can observe fewer people with German citizenship emigrating and many of them going back to their communes on the local labour market. According to estimates for 2011 we could distinguish two main groups of emigrants from the Opolskie province: 100 thousand of those who left Poland for good, with the majority of them already before 2004 (70-80% of them being people with German citizenship from the Central-Eastern communes, while the rest emigrated from the Western communes); 106 thousand of those who worked permanently abroad maintaining some bonds with the communes of the province (30% of them being people with German citizenship from the Central-Eastern communes, while the rest emigrated from the Western communes). Thus, the author assumed that the problem of reliability of statistical data for 2015-2017 is no longer limited to the Central-Eastern communes, but nowadays includes almost all communes of the Opolskie province, thereby making comparisons more legitimate. However, one still needs to remember that the statistics used in this study are not perfect, but their usage seems to be justified considering the general shortage of the systematic data covering governance at the local level in Poland (Jończy and Łukaniszyn-Domaszewska 2014, 21-22)

between the local governments located in the Western and Eastern regions. Further analysis has led to the conclusion that this disproportions can be explained mainly by different levels of civic society’s development, while social and economic modernization is of secondary importance (Swianiewicz et al. 2000). The good position of the Opolskie province has been confirmed in the European Governance Quality Index, which is the European ranking of regions prepared by the Quality of Government Institute in Gothenburg, Sweden. So far, the research has been carried out three times. Consequently, we have access to data for the province from different periods. In 2010 and 2013 the Opolskie province scored the most points among the 16 Polish provinces, and in the latest edition of the research in 2017 it was in the second place, behind the Pomorskie province (Charron et al. 2014, 2015, 2019). In 2017 the region was compared to 15 other European regions (out of 202 participating in the ranking) with a similar GDP per capita. The conclusion was that the assessment of the quality of governance in the Opolskie province was higher than those in other regions with a similar level of wealth.[9] Nevertheless, these studies were focused on comparisons between regions, while the author of this article was interested in research on differences between communes within the Opolskie province.

As has been mentioned in the introduction, the research was divided into two stages. Its first stage comprised the development of a commune-level governance quality index which was applied subsequently to sixty communes (without the eleven communes being simultaneously district cities) to assess their governance quality. The index is based on the five principles of good governance, i.e. participation, equity, efficiency, accountability, and openness. Each of the principles was assigned 5 objective indicators allowing an assessment of the quality of governance with respect to compliance with a given principle. The value of the selected indicators ranged from 0 to 1, therefore the maximum number of points to be scored by a commune was 25. Thus, the applied index was based on 5 sub-indexes, each of which had the same weight. Table 1 presents the operationalization of the index.

9 See European Quality of Government Index 2017: Scorecards – Interactive Web Tool, European Commission: https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/information/maps/quality_of_governance/#2

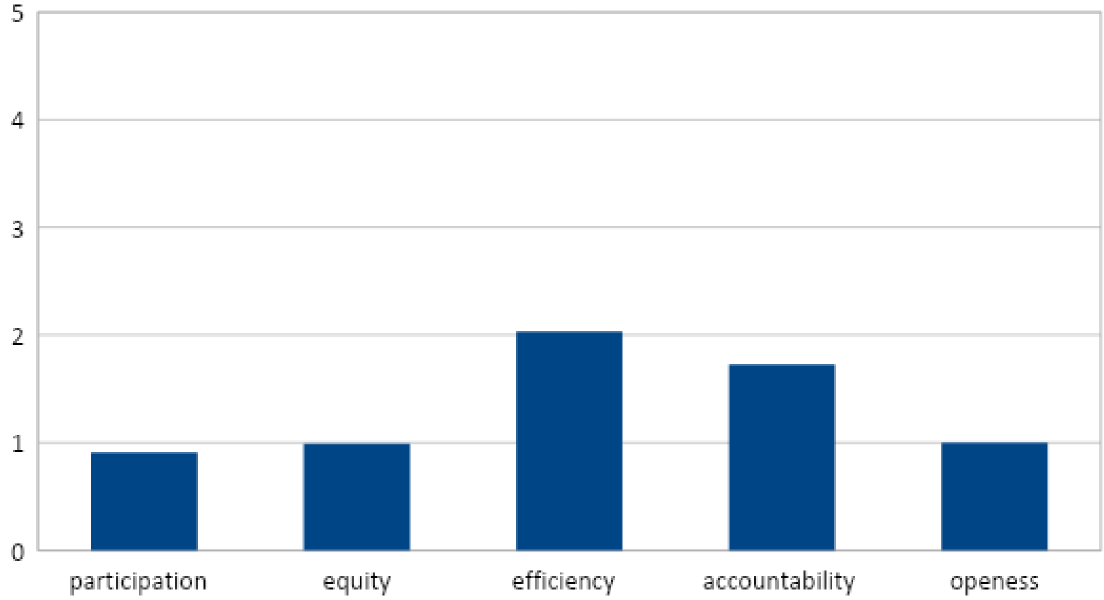
Table 1: The commune-level governance quality index (operationalization)

Participation sub-index **5 (points)**	**Equity sub-index** **5 (points)**	**Efficiency sub-index** **5 (points)**	**Accountability sub-index** **5 (points)**	**Openness sub-index** **5 (points)**
To what degree is the local community involved in local public life?	To what degree are the groups typically exposed to social exclusion represented in local public life?	To what degree do the local authorities perform their obligations to the self-governing community with respect to the fulfilment of their needs and reasonable management of the commune's property?	To what degree are the mechanism and competences allowing the enforcement of the local political decision makers' liability for their decisions functional and effective?	To what degree is information on the actions of the local authorities made publicly available? To what degree do the local authorities cooperate with the local social environment?
1. The number of non-governmental organizations in the commune per 10,000 inhabitants. 2. The number of library users per 1000 inhabitants. 3. The average mark in the junior secondary school examination in the knowledge of society and history. 4. Funds from the 1% mechanism acquired by the commune's public benefit organizations per 1 inhabitant. 5. The percentage of votes cast for voters' election committees in relation to the total number of votes cast in the commune council elections.	1. The percentage of women in the commune council. 2. The percentage of women holding key positions in the commune office. 3. The activities of the youth council. 4. The activities of the senior citizens council. 5. The degree of poverty risk.	1. Investment expenditures from the commune budget per 1 inhabitant. 2. The commune's own revenues per 1 inhabitant. 3. The percentage of people using social assistance services on a long-term basis in relation to all people receiving social benefits. 4. Expenditures on the public administration per 1 inhabitant. 5. The commune's usage of one of the three quality management systems.	1. The existence of a local media organization that is not controlled by the commune authorities. 2. The publication of internal inspection reports in the Public Information Bulletin. 3. The number of candidates for the position of commune leader in the 2014 local government elections. 4. The publication of the councillors' and the commune leader's property statements in the Public Information Bulletin before 2 June 2017. 5. The percentage of councillors with higher education.	1. The commune's response to the questionnaire by the set deadline. 2. Easy access to and availability of a valid annual programme of cooperation with non-governmental organization in the Public Information Bulletin or on the commune office's website. 3. The passing of a resolution determining the rules and procedures of social consultations. 4. The number of non-governmental organizations which have submitted comments on the programme of cooperation with non-governmental organizations. 5. The publication of commune council session minutes in the Public Information Bulletin.

On the basis of the collected and synthesized data, the commune with the lowest index score was selected. It was the commune of Domaszowice with a score of 6.66.[10] Graph 1 presents the commune's scores obtained in the particular sub-indexes.

10 The distribution of the scores for all 60 communes is presented in the Appendix.

Graph 1: The Quality of Governance score for Domaszowice commune according to 5 subindexes (total value being 6.66)



The second stage of the research was an exploratory study of the commune of Domaszowice whose objective was to answer the question about possible factors responsible for the lowest score in the index. The starting point for the study was a description of the commune based on the secondary data. Thanks to this description, the author was able to define the most important problems of the commune and to prepare for a week’s field research (in June 2018). The analysis of secondary data allowed to identify the commune’s local leaders and select them as respondents for non-structured interviews. The term *local leaders* is to be understood as people involved in public affairs of their communes for many years. The author conducted four non-structured interviews with the local leaders trying to maintain a balance between those strongly connected with the local administration and those who are less connected.[11] In the subsequent paragraphs, the author will present the major features of the studied commune. This will be followed by a discussion of the factors which may have contributed to the low governance quality assessment.

The studied commune is located in the Namysłowski District, in the Northern part of the Opolskie Province. Domaszowice is a rural commune; it consists of 11 hamlets and 13 villages (Morga and Bak 2012, 2). In 2015 the commune was inhabited by 3647 people, which made it one of the least populous communes in the Opolskie Province (Urząd Statystyczny w Opolu 2016). According to the data for 2013, Poland had 618 small communes with fewer than 5000 inhabitants and the average rural commune comprised between 11 and 20 villages (Swianiewicz 2014a, 6-10). Thus, with respect to demographic and settlement characteristics, Domaszowice is an example of a small rural commune.

11 There are some problems with selecting respondents in a small rural community. The first one is that the majority of them are somehow connected with the local authorities, so they are not perfectly reliable sources of information about local governance. Secondly, one must take into account that in a commune with poor quality of governance it is more difficult to find respondents willing to speak. Such a commune is less open and transparent to outsiders and can be characterized by scarcity of local leaders interested in public affairs (for example NGO activists). The author of this study had many problems with arranging interviews with representatives of the local authorities (which is itself an interesting material for an anthropologist studying bureaucracy), being also dismissed by a few potential respondents.

Its character is typically agricultural; arable land constitutes 60% of its area, and forests, 30% (Morga and Bak 2012, 2-4). According to the Local Development Plan for the Years 2007-2013 (the commune does not have an updated development strategy)[12], the four major employers in the commune were the Commune Office, the Primary and Junior Secondary Schools, a state-owned company dealing with pig husbandry, and an enterprise selling fuels (Plan Rozwoju Lokalnego … 2007). The commune is also characterized by natural environment values, e.g. the protected area of the Stobrawsko-Turawskie Forest (Morga and Bak 2012, 2-4). Nevertheless, despite these values, no tourist activity or infrastructure has been developed. There is also no possibility of overnight accommodation.[13]

From the perspective of the conducted research, the most important issue is the commune’s political life. In this respect, one of the major features is the long-lasting domination of one party governing the commune, namely the Democratic Left Alliance (DLA).[14] The statements made by the former commune leader (in the years 1990-1994) and the councillor in the years 2014-2018 indicate that during the period of the People’s Republic of Poland the structures of the communist Polish United Workers’ Party enjoyed considerable support in the commune (Staśkiewicz 2015). The data included in Table 2 show that since 2002 the majority of seats in the commune council were held by DLA councillors, and in the years 2010-2014 it was the decisive majority of 11 out of 15 councillors. Simultaneously, the council was undergoing the process of political polarization because in the years 2002-2014 non-DLA councillors represented first two, and subsequently three different organizations, while in the years 2014-2018 the council was dominated by just two political groupings: DLA and Law and Justice (LAJ).[15] From the times of the People’s Republic of Poland to 2018, with an interval in the years 1990-1994, the office of the commune leader was held by the same person belonging to DLA (Staśkiewicz 2015). Thus, we deal with the case of one commune leader remaining in power for many terms of office[16], which is characteristic of rural communes, where power is held in the hands of the same person most often for four terms of office (Bartnicki 2015, 67).[17] At the same time it should be noted that the commune diverges from the standard of non-partyism, which, as it has been mentioned above, is typical of small communes.

12 The fact that the commune did not have such a strategy also testifies to the quality of governance in the commune, especially if one takes into account a study conducted in 2014 that found the majority of communes having such a strategic document. Only Domaszowice and two other communes did not have an up-to-date development strategy (Heffner et al. 2014).

13 Using an Internet search engine, the author failed to find any overnight accommodation in the commune of Domaszowice. There was only one offer of accommodation on an agrotourism farm in a neighbouring commune.

14 The DLA is a party of communist origin, an heir of the Polish United Workers’ Party. After the defeat in the 2005 parliamentary elections and the loss of power, the party joined the ranks of the parliamentary opposition. Its political position was undergoing gradual marginalization, which was crowned in 2015 when it failed to exceed the electoral threshold (8% for a coalition) and to introduce any representatives into the parliament. About the shaping of the Polish party system and the recent parliamentary elections, see Gwiazda (2009) and Markowski (2016).

15 Although the councillors who had run as LAJ candidates officially act as the Independent Councillors Club.

16 However, this is not the case with so-called non-competitive elections where there is only one candidate running for the office of mayor. The data of the National Electoral Commission for 2002-2014 show that the incumbent mayor had to face: one rival in the 2002 elections (who lost with 44% of votes), three rivals in the 2006 elections (in the second round the main rival lost with 47% of votes), one rival in 2010 (who lost with 48% of votes), three rivals in the 2014 elections (in the second round the main rival lost with 48.5%).

17 After the local elections held in 2014, 32% of the 1569 rural communes had commune leaders who had been in office since 2002, and commune leaders who had not held power during the previous term of office constituted the same percentage (Bartnicki 2015, 67).

Table 2: The structure of the council of the commune of Domaszowice during the past four terms of office in terms of the number of mandates held by the particular groupings

Name of election committee	2002-2006	2006-2010	2010-2014	2014-2018
The Democratic Left Alliance Election Committee; in 2002 The Democratic Left Alliance – Labour Union Coalition Election Committee; in 2014 The Democratic Left Alliance – the Left Together Coalition Election Committee	8	8	11	8
The Law and Justice Election Committee			1	7
The Polish Peasants’ Party Election Committee	6	3	1	
The Namysłów Land Development Forum Election Committee		3	2	
The National Party of Old Age and Disability Pensioners Election Committee		1		
The Gręboszów Voters Election Committee	1			

Source: the author’s own work based on the data from the National Electoral Commission

It should be underscored that holding an office for many terms co-exists with the commune council's being dominated by the same political grouping as the one represented by the commune leader. Thus, the commune leader enjoys arithmetic advantage in the council with respect to votes on resolutions concerning matters of key importance for the commune, such as a budget resolution, votes of approval, or a long-term financial plan. An analysis of all ten minutes of the commune council meetings held in 2016 with respect to questions and requests submitted by councillors showed that the councillors representing the majority rarely submitted any comments or questions. Their activity in this area was limited to obtaining information on matters related to road repairs or the cutting of trees and bushes on particular plots of land. The eight DLA councillors took the floor on 17 occasions; the most active of them spoke 5 times, while the least active one did not take the floor even once. Meanwhile the seven opposition councillors took the floor altogether 134 times. It was mainly the leaders of the opposition in the council that were responsible for this result; they took the floor 49, 34, and 31 times respectively.

The analysis of the council meeting minutes projects an image of a group of eight passive councillors supporting the commune leader in all votes and a group of 3 opposition councillors critical of the commune leader and accusing him of treating the commune as private property. There are many squabbles, accusations of absolutism, and demands that the commune leader resign. During the 18th session, when one of the important items on the agenda was the restructuring of the commune's debt under so-called subrogation[18], the opposition councillors invited journalists to monitor the course of the meeting, which the commune leader referred to as a "spectacle" organized by the councillors. During that session the opposition councillors accused the commune leader of bad management of the commune reflected in the debt of 5 million PLN[19] and demanded his resignation. It should be noted at this point that one of the councillors supporting the leader proposed that the opposition present an alternative solution to the commune's financial problems. The main opponent answered that the commune's financial management was the responsibility of the leader and that the credits had been obtained during the previous council's term of office, that is before 2014 (Protokół nr XVIII 2016). Thus, the opposition leader did not put forward any constructive solutions, but implied that he was not responsible for the incurred debt. The session shows that the commune's difficult financial situation did not persuade the participants to look for constructive solutions together; being strongly divided, the councillors allowed the session to be dominated by their personal or group ambitions and conflicts. During the vote on the resolution concerning subrogation the seven opposition councillors voted against the proposal submitted by the leader. Similarly, during the 16th session the seven opposition councillors voted against the resolution approving the leader's discharge of duties (Protokół nr XVI 2016). These votes show a high intensity of conflict over the matters of key importance for the proper functioning of the commune.

18 Subrogation is a financial instrument consisting in the restructuring of debt based on the debtor's consent to the repayment of their debt by a third party which, in consequence of such repayment, assumes the role of the creditor. The new creditor offers the debtor more favourable debt repayment conditions, e.g. an instalment plan.

19 As the commune's budget in 2016 amounted to approx. 13 million PLN the debt constituted approx. 38% of the budget's value (debt ratio). It must be stressed that in 2016 the average debt ratio for rural communes in Poland was 20%, and there were 219 rural communes with a debt ratio between 30 and 40% (133 rural communes had a debt ratio over 40%). So, while the debt ratio of the studied case was over average, it cannot be concluded that, in light of the data presented, it was an extraordinary situation. Actually till 2014 the public finance law did not allow it to exceed a 60% debt ratio (now this threshold is calculated on a commune-specific basis) (Główny Urząd Statystyczny 2017b/2018).

4. Discussion

In this part, on the basis of the existing data and the material acquired during the interviews, the author makes an attempt to explain the position of the commune in the proposed governance quality index. It is possible to distinguish three factors jointly responsible for this position. The first and major factor is the commune leader’s style of governance based on power concentration and personalized relations and his resultant long lasting domination in the local political system. The second factor is the strong political polarization in the commune and the culture of political conflict. The third one is the condition of the local community characterized by the division into micro-worlds focused on particular interests rooted in familial and neighbour identities.

During the interviews both the representative of the opposition in the commune council and the representative of the commune authorities drew attention to one particular feature, namely the centralized management model based on the commune leader’s ideas. Simultaneously, either party used a slightly different language. A professed opponent of holding an office for many terms, the leader of the opposition in the council described the commune as a “crystal clear” specimen of a “political scene embedded in concrete” and cliquishness, which was the reason of the poor development of the commune. He emphasized that comparing Domaszowice to other communes in the district, one could easily see civilization backwardness; additionally, the commune was “always last” in various rankings, e.g. the ranking of the periodical Communities. He also pointed out that Domaszowice was the most highly indebted commune in the district.[20] He called the commune a “socrealistic backwater” ruled in an authoritarian manner and referred to his activities in the commune council as a “fight for democracy (An interview with A).[21]

The representative of the commune authorities used more delicate language in his description of the local political relations. In his opinion, it was one of the “more red communes” where the “eastern style of governance” dominated. Asked about the phenomenon of the commune leader’s holding the office for many terms, he referred to the “old style of governance” consisting in the leader making decisions individually, where “the leader decides about everything and assumes responsibility for it.” The leader’s strategy was based on “not pushing forward”, which allowed him to avoid mistakes and ensure stability for the commune. According to the respondent, such a style of governance was received well by the inhabitants. He declared that he was aware of the increasingly fossilized character of the commune governance model and the necessity of modernizing the commune office, e.g. the office did not use modern technologies, there were no areas available for new business undertakings, sports activities were practically non-existent, and there were no initiatives aimed at the integration of the whole community. Asked about the leader’s passivity in these respects, he indicated some kind of standstill preventing him from adopting a more development-oriented strategy (“if you

20 According to the Ministry of Finance, indebtedness per one inhabitant in the communes of the district (in the third quarter of 2017) was as follows: Domaszowice – 1293; Namysłów – 1128; Świerczów – 1042; Pokój – 915; Wilków – 492 (Zadłużenie gmin … 2017).

21 Actually, when it comes to the financial situation of the commune, in the index covered mainly by the sub-index of efficiency (see Graph 1 and the Appendix), it was not so difficult. If we trace a place of the commune in the countrywide affluence ranking (based on a commune’s own revenue per capita) published by the professional journal *Wspólnota* we see that the commune’s situation deteriorated between 2010 and 2018; however, it was still moderate. In the years 2010-2014 the commune’s place in the rural communes ranking (including 1548 entities) varied between 672 and 203, while in 2015-2018 this variation stretched between 1258 and 844. If we take into account the debt ratio, it dropped approx. 10% between 2014 and 2017. Thus, we can imagine that the difficulty of the financial situation was exaggerated by the opposition, being a part of political struggle. Of course, one must remember that the perception of civilizational backwardness might be (and very often is) also determined by non-financial factors, like the political culture of those in power (Swianiewicz and Łukomska 2018, 2019).

function for many years within one community, you have no opportunities for comparisons with the outside world"). It is also important that answering the question about the potential for establishing a youth council or a senior citizen council, the respondent said that such initiatives were not undertaken because the model of single person's decision-making was too strongly rooted in the commune. Thus, he showed a clear connection between the style of governance in the commune and the fulfilment of the two criteria for the principle of equity in the governance quality index. The commune leader regarded the potential establishment of such bodies as a threat to his authority and a risk of other groups' becoming stronger, although the respondent himself was of the opinion that such bodies should exist in the commune and could become platforms for pursuing compromise and improving the quality of decision-making processes. According to the respondent, the commune was at a turning point because of the appearance of a new group of young voters (some of them became familiar with other standards while staying abroad) who expected governance based on "openness" and needed both changes and success (Interview B).

Thus, every player on the local political scene presented a picture of a commune where power was concentrated in the hands of the leader having a monopoly on making the most important decisions (similar conclusions could be drawn from the other interviews) and unwillingly delegating authority outside the commune office.[22] The respondents also drew attention to the fact that such a manner of governing a commune turned out to be ineffective, which was proved by the commune's problems with modernization (e.g. a lack of a sanitary sewage system), the absence of any ambitious plans ("no forward drive"), and the growing dissatisfaction of some inhabitants expecting greater openness and modernity.[23] Thus, the question arises: How is it possible to hold power for many terms of office in the circumstances of a low quality of governance? An answer to the question constitutes a supplementation to this part of the exploration in which the commune leader's style of governance is the major factor responsible for the commune's low score in the index. The author is of the opinion that for a long time the governance style that generated a low quality of governance turned out to be advantageous from the point of view of re-election, i.e. the reproduction of the local power structures and interests; therefore, there were no stimuli to change. Paradoxically, the low quality of governance (in the light of the selected indicators) was not only an effect but also a unique political strategy helping the commune leader to remain in office for a number of terms. Let us consider the following arguments in favour of the thesis.

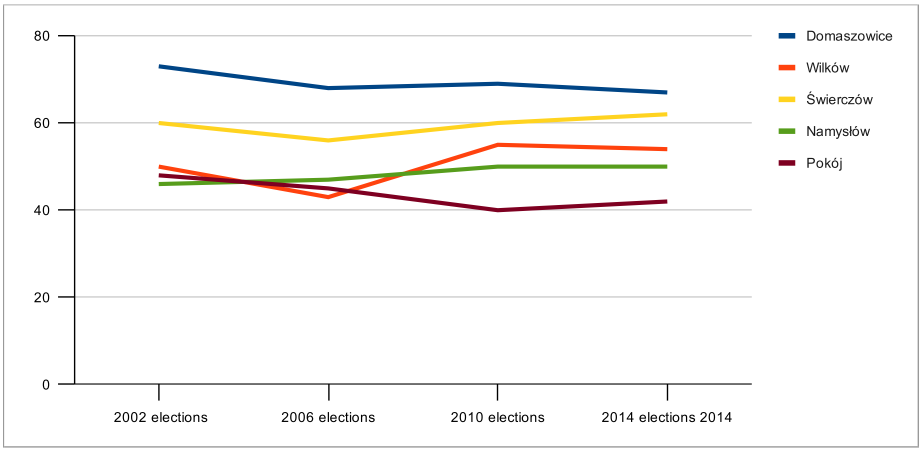
Firstly, during the many terms of office the commune leader managed to create a well-functioning system of connections with the local electorate. In the author's opinion, this may be the reason for the highest turnout in local elections among the communes in the district (see Graphs 2 and 3). One of the methods of developing such connections was using public resources and distributing them in accordance with the logic of a patronage policy. The interview with the representative of the commune authorities indicates that the commune has a clear pyramid-shaped political hierarchy comprising the commune leader, the local priest, the village leaders, and the voluntary fire brigade – these social forces ensured support for the commune leader. One of the instruments of strengthening this structure was the distribution of the commune

22 It should be noted at this point that since 2002 Poland's local government system has been characterized by the so-called strong leader model. Thus, a mayor's or a commune leader's special influence on the quality of local governance results to a considerable extent from their institutionally determined position in local power structures. However, as Swianiewicz and Klimska indicate, "a personal characterization of the leader may lead to different results within the framework of standardized institutional solutions." Besides formal competencies, it is a leadership style that matters (2003, 37).

23 For example, in the commune under examination there was no cash machine, although there was a small bank. Thus, the only opportunity for obtaining cash in the amount of up to 300 PLN is provided by the Dino supermarket.

budget. For example, a considerable percentage of the budget was allocated to the local voluntary fire brigades.[24] But the respondent emphasized that there were hamlets where the commune leader lost elections, for example Domaszowice (Interview B). The representative of the opposition also referred to the use of the commune's resources. He said that it was one of the methods of rewarding for loyalty and punishing for the lack of it. The available communal resources are more diversified; they include employment in the commune office and its subordinate entities, dealing with matters in the commune office (disloyal persons have to cope with administrative hindrances, the course of their matters is delayed), and the public works as an instrument of distributing employment opportunities in the commune (Interview A). The commune newsletter constitutes another example of using the commune's resources. The newsletter fulfils important functions in the lives of inhabitants as an instrument of providing information on communal matters and integrating the local community. Its circulation is 1000 copies so that every household could get its own copy (Interview C). Simultaneously, an analysis of the first 8 issues of the newsletter published from March 2017 to June 2018 shows that it is an instrument for promoting the commune leader and officials subordinate to him. Each issue has 12 pages, with pages 1-3 being devoted to the commune leader and his deputy. Opinions of local activists are also presented in the newsletter, and they have one page in every issue at their disposal. However, such activists are always people related to the commune authorities. In 4 issues of the newsletter there is no information on the opposition in the commune council, and in 4 of them there is criticism aimed at the opposition councillors from the commune leader, his deputy, and the chairperson of the council. The opposition is presented in a negative light only (*Gazeta Gminy Domaszowice* 2017/2018).

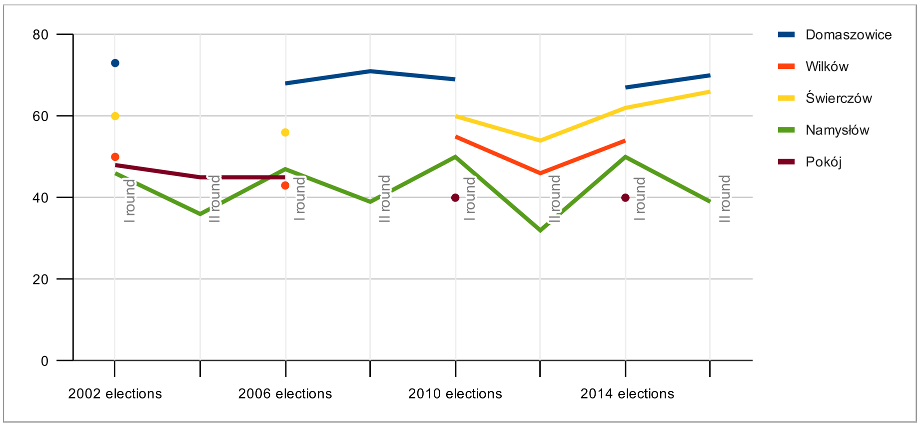
Graph 2: Voter turnout in commune council elections in the Namysłowski District



Source: The data of the National Electoral Commission

24 In one of the interviews, the commune leader states that, among the communes of the Namysłowski District, the commune of Domaszowice allocates the largest percentage of its budget to the functioning of the fire protection system, i.e. approximately 2.5% (in 2017 it was 336,000 PLN; *Gazeta Gminy Domaszowice* 2018, no 6, 2).

Graph 3: Voter turnout in commune leader elections in the Namysłowski District (including the second ballot)



Source: The data of the National Electoral Commission

Besides the distribution of resources as a method of building local support, it is impossible to disregard emotional ties between the commune leader and his supporters. It seems that some of his advocates support him because of his deep roots in the local community, personality traits, and ability to build personal relations with people. Back in the times of the People’s Republic of Poland, in the capacity of the first secretary of the local unit of communist party, he was regarded as a person who could arrange important things for local farmers, e.g. spare parts for tractors. This strategic position and personal charisma ensured that he was held in high esteem in the local community. Representing the peasants’ Polish Peasants Party, his main rival in the commune leader elections (in the years 2002, 2006 and 2010) already in 2004 stated that the commune leader “had perfectly mastered techniques of social engineering”, implying that he knew how to talk to people (Zyzik 2004). In an interview, one of the village leaders, a supporter of the commune leader, declared that he voted for the commune leader because he “knew him” and the leader “was from here” (Interview D). Thus, the commune leader is defined as a fellow-countryman who skilfully builds personal relations constituting social capital, which is subsequently converted into political capital during elections.

Another factor deserving attention is the high level of political polarization, which hinders constructive cooperation aimed at solving common problems and undertaking initiatives for the development of the commune. The results of the 2014 local government elections (in which the commune leader won with a majority of 54 votes)[25], the council session minutes, and information acquired during the interviews show a strong division in the local community and a culture of political conflict. The representative of the commune authorities drew attention to the fact that the local opposition was pursuing a policy consisting in “bashing”, lies, undermining the credibility of commune office employees, and spreading gossip about their private lives.

25 In connection with the 2014 local government elections, one of the opposition leaders filed an election complaint, accusing the commune leader of election-related manipulations. The public prosecution office dealt with this matter and in November 2016 charged the commune leader and the commune secretary with violating the freedom of voting by persuading people to vote for a particular candidate, driving voters to the seats of election commissions, entering ineligible people in the electoral register, or urging witnesses to make false statements. The charged officials claimed their innocence (Staśkiewicz 2017).

In his opinion, the opposition is not interested in compromise and often manipulates with facts; their politics is based on conflict and backbiting (Interview B). Meanwhile, the opposition leader accused the authorities of authoritarian tendencies, unwillingness to accept criticism, and preventing access to information on the functioning of the commune office (Interview A). It is difficult to settle unambiguously to what extent the provided information is true and to what extent it is the result of political emotions and squabbles. Nevertheless, it shows evidently the absence of mutual understanding and the mutual attribution of bad intentions. The division into the supporters and opponents of the commune leader extends also to relations with the commune office because the leader’s opponents have a negative attitude towards commune office employees, treating them with distrust and assuming that they will not be treated impartially. There are inhabitants who do not go to the commune office because they do not trust anybody there (Interview C). The aforementioned circumstances may cause the maintenance and strengthening of strong relations between the office and a separate group of satisfied citizens with a simultaneous lack of any critical feedback from dissatisfied citizens, which may facilitate the continuation of the current governance model.

The last important issue shedding light on the quality of governance in the commune is the condition of the local community and its relations with the institutions of the commune authorities. The conducted interviews indicate that the level of interest in commune matters and readiness to act for the common good is rather low. This does not mean that there are no grass-root initiatives, but they are usually limited to the level of hamlets and are implemented with traditional rural social integration institutions, such as a village leader, a voluntary fire brigade, or a village housewives’ association – the most dynamic initiatives are the effect of cooperation among these institutions. There are also village leaders who do not act actively for the benefit of their own communities and pursue “minimum effort” programmes; some of them hold offices because there are no other volunteers (Interview C). According to one of the village leaders, “everybody lives for themselves”. In a hamlet of 400 people, a recent hamlet meeting was attended by 15 people. The meeting concerning the possibility of selling alcohol in the village was attended only by the village leader and a representative of the commune office. The interviewed village leader says that “people are self-contained” and leave local matters to the commune leader, council, and village leaders (Interview D). In a similar vein, a representative of the authorities indicates that the hamlets hold on to the idea that the commune authorities are responsible for solving all problems. Attendance at hamlet meetings is very low; an attendance of 10% of those eligible is a very good result, despite the fact that such meetings are devoted, among others, to the distribution of funds for the financing of local undertakings. In the hamlets, the level of integration is also low; loyalty and mobilization are determined by familial criteria. There is no sense of a self-governing local community (Interview B). It should also be noted that village leaders do not perceive their functions as political; for them, politics start at the level of the commune council. One respondent assumes the role of an external observer and is not interested in being a part of such politics. He keeps a safe distance to politics because “if you are not careful, you can get burned” (Interview D). Thus, the commune under analysis is divided into social micro-worlds dominated by an identification with one’s own village. Politics is perceived as something reserved for formal political institutions, i.e. the commune leader and the commune council, and involvement in politics is regarded as a potential threat.

The local community represents features characteristic of many small rural communities dominated by focus on particular interests and disregard for matters from beyond the circles of one's family and neighbours.[26] The representatives of the authorities also drew attention to the fact that the factor explaining the existence of divisions in the commune was their inhabitants' places of origin. According to them, the villages dominated by the population that after World War II arrived from the Eastern parts of Poland are characterized by more intense local ties rooted in familial structures than the villages dominated by settlers from central Poland (they refer to "clannish identities"). Settlers coming from the former Eastern borderlands still created closed communities where in time one surname starts to dominate (Interviews B and C). It seems that a low level of interest in commune matters may result also from the one-man commune governance model. The specific character of the long-lasting politics of the commune leader, which was a reproduction of the power exercise models inherited from the times of socialism, facilitated the petrification of the passive attitude. Thus, the local population was getting accustomed to a top-down and centralized governance model where, with the exception of election periods, bottom-up participation appeared to be redundant and violating the traditional power exercise models.

5. Conclusions

The objective of the case study presented in this paper was an attempt to answer the question about the factors responsible for the lowest place of one of the communes in the Opolskie Province in the local governance quality index. The author concluded that it was possible to identify three factors which had contributed to the low quality of governance. The first factor is the commune leader's centralized style of governance and his consequent long-term domination in the local political system. The second factor is the strong political polarization in the commune council and the culture of political conflict, which both hinder cooperation for the good of the commune. The third one is the condition of the local community characterized by the division into micro-worlds focused on particular interests.

What deserves special attention is the dynamics of self-strengthening relations among the commune leader's governance style, his remaining in office for many terms, and the quality of governance. Allowing him to get elected the commune leader for many terms of office, the governance style simultaneously kept the quality of governance at a rather low level (at least in the light of the indicators proposed in this paper). The author would venture the statement that the low quality of governance was not only an unintended consequence of the commune leader's holding the office for many terms but also the strategy aimed at holding the office for many years. Such characteristic features of local governance as unwillingness to appoint bodies constituting a potential threat to the position of the commune leader, a lack of a resolution regulating the matter of social consultations, or a low level of openness to the outside world ensured the stability and petrification of the local power structure. This means that in the studied commune there remained a group of advocates of this style of governance which was large and organized enough to ensure the reproduction of the existing power structure guaranteed by the commune leader during the periods of electoral mobilization. It is possible that if asked about the quality of governance in their commune, this large group of voters

26 What seems to be occurring in this case is the phenomenon of "amoral familism" (Banfield 1967) described in the introduction to this paper.

would question the assessment of the quality of governance formulated by the author on the basis of the objective indicators.

The main conclusion of the case study is the significance of the leadership style as an important force behind the quality of local governance. What dominates in the Polish local government system is the model of a strong mayor; hence it seems natural that a leader’s personality and experience considerably influence the quality of local governance, despite officially existing institutional constraints. It also means that by making proper electoral decisions (for example electing a mayor with a strong good governance agenda), voters can seriously influence the quality of governance in the long run, but it is also possible that after they have made their choices the quality of governance will depend too much on the personality and management style of just one person.

Acknowledgement: The research results presented in this paper constitute a part of a larger research project carried out under the grant funded by the National Science Centre for the years 2016-2018, “Regional Multiculturalism and its Impact on Civil Society and Quality of Governance: A Diagnosis of the Opole Voivodship” (grant number 2015/19/D/HS5/02566).

Appendix

1. A table of the governance quality indicators

Indicator	Period to which data refer	Data source	Sub-index	Scoring system on the scale 0-1
1. The number of non-governmental organizations in the commune per 10,000 inhabitants	2016	National Court Register, communal registers of non-governmental organizations, communal representatives for NGOs	Participation	
2. The number of library members per 1000 inhabitants	2015	Local Data Bank of the Central Statistical Office	Participation	

3. The average mark in the junior secondary school examination in the knowledge of society and history	2016	Regional Examination Board	Participation	Conversion of percentage into decimal numbers
4. Funds from the 1% mechanism acquired by the commune's public benefit organizations per 1 inhabitant.	2015	Ministry of Labour and Social Policy	Participation	
5. The percentage of votes cast for voters' election committees in relation to the total number of votes cast in the commune council elections	2014	State Electoral Commission	Participation	Conversion of percentage into decimal numbers
6. The percentage of women in the commune council.	Term of office: 2014-2018	Local Data Bank of the Central Statistical Office	Equality	Conversion of percentage into decimal numbers
7. The percentage of women holding key positions in the commune office	February 2017	Analysis of communes' Public Information Bulletins and websites	Equality	Conversion of percentage into decimal numbers
8. The activities of the youth council	July 2017	CAWI	Equality	Binary (0 or 1) assessment
9. The activities of the senior citizens council	July 2017	CAWI	Equality	Binary (0 or 1) assessment

10. The degree of the poverty risk	31 December 2015	The Regional Social Policy Centre in Opole	Equality	Using ready-made "poverty indicator" with a gradual 0-1 value provided by the Regional Social Policy Centre
11. The commune's own revenue per 1 inhabitant	2015	Local Data Bank of the Central Statistical Office	Efficiency	
12. Investment expenditures from the commune budget per 1 inhabitant	2015	The Central Statistical Office	Efficiency	
13. The percentage of people using social assistance services on a long-term basis in relation to all people receiving social benefits	2015	The Regional Social Policy Centre in Opole	Efficiency	Conversion of percentage into decimal numbers with resulting value being subtracted from 1
14. Expenditures on public administration per 1 inhabitant	2014	Report: Swianiewicz, Łukomska 2014	Efficiency	
15. The commune's usage of one of the three quality management systems.	July 2017	CAWI	Efficiency	Binary (0 or 1) assessment
16. The existence of a local media organization that is not controlled by the commune authorities	April 2017	Analysis of data available in the Internet based on key words	Accountability	Binary (0 or 1) assessment

17. The publication of internal inspection reports in the Public Information Bulletin for the years 2015-2016	April 2017	Analysis of communes’ Public Information Bulletins	Accountability	Binary (0 or 1) assessment
18. The number of candidates for the position of commune leader / mayor in the 2014 local government elections.	2014	State Electoral Commission	Accountability	Value of one candidate was 0.125 (result of dividing maximum number of candidates in a commune by 1)
19. The publication of the councillors’ and the commune leader’s property statements in the Public Information Bulletin before 2 June 2017.	2 June 2017	analysis of communes’ Public Information Bulletins	accountability	4 options were possible: 0 (no publication), 0.25 (only commune leader), 0.75 (only councillors), 1 (all of them)
20. The percentage of councillors with higher education.	2015	Local Data Bank of the Central Statistical Office	Accountability	Conversion of percentage into decimal numbers
21. The commune’s response to the questionnaire by the set deadline, i.e. 21 July 2017	21 July 2017	CAWI	Openness	Binary (0 or 1) assessment

22. Easy access to and availability of a valid annual programme of cooperation with non-governmental organization (for the year 2017) in the Public Information Bulletin or on the commune office’s website	August 2017	Analysis of Public Information Bulletins and Internet content	Openness	Binary (0 or 1) assessment
23. The number of non-governmental organizations which have submitted comments on the programme of cooperation with non-governmental organizations for the year 2017	2016	CAWI	Openness	Three options were possible: 0 (lack of comments), 0.5 (1 NGO provided comments), 1 (more than 1 NGO provided comments)
24. The passing of a resolution determining the rules and procedures of social consultations.	July 2017	CAWI	Openness	Binary (0 or 1) assessment
25. The publication of commune council session minutes for the year 2017 in the Public Information Bulletin	15 August 2017	Analysis of communes’ Public Information Bulletins	Openness	Binary (0 or 1) assessment

2. The CAWI questionnaire

Dear Madam/Sir

The Institute of Political Sciences of the Opole University is conducting research on the functioning of commune/town offices in the Opolskie province in the framework of the project funded by the National Science Centre. The objectives of the research include, among others, a diagnosis of the use of solutions facilitating the strengthening of local democracy. In connection with the aforementioned research, we would like to ask you to provide answers to the following questions. The questionnaire consists of 20 questions.

1. Can you provide the name of the commune that you represent?

………

2. Does your commune have an active youth council?

a) yes

b) no (if the answer “no” is chosen, please move to question 5)

3. If your commune has a youth council, when was it established (this question concerns the year in which the council was established, and not the year of the approval of its latest term)?

…….

4. Can you provide the exact date of the latest session of the youth council?

…….

5. Does your commune have an active senior citizens council?

a) yes

b) no (if the answer “no” is chosen, please move to question 7)

6. If your commune has a senior citizens council, when was it established (this question concerns the year in which the council was established, and not the year of the approval of its latest term)?

……

7. Can you provide the exact date of the latest session of the senior citizens council?

……

8. Can you provide the number of interpellations submitted by the councillors, irrespective of whether they were written or oral?

9. Can you provide the number of questions asked by the councillors, irrespective of whether they were written or oral?

10. Did the commune/town office receive any complaints in the year 2016 (this concerns complaints within the meaning of the Code of Administrative Procedure)?

a) yes

b) no (if the answer “no” is chosen, please move to question 12)

11. If so, can you specify how many complaints the commune/town office received in 2016?

……

12. Did the commune/town office receive any proposals in the year 2016 (this concerns proposals within the meaning of the Code of Administrative Procedure)?

a) yes

b) no (if the answer “no” is chosen, please move to question 14)

13. If so, can you specify how many proposals the commune/town office received in 2016?

……

14. Has the commune adopted a resolution specifying the rules of conducting social consultations?

a) yes

b) no (if the answer “no” is chosen, please move to question 16)

15. If so, can you provide the exact date of adopting a resolution specifying the rules of conducting social consultations in the commune?

……

16. How many non-governmental organizations submitted, under the consultative procedure, their comments/opinions concerning the annual programme of cooperation with non-governmental organizations for the year 2017?

17. Did the commune prepare a report on consultations about the annual programme of cooperation with non-governmental organizations for the year 2017?

18. How was the report on the conducted consultations about the annual programme of cooperation with non-governmental organizations for the year 2017 publicized?

a) It was published on the office’s website/in the Public Information Bulletin.

b) It was sent by regular/electronic mail to the interested parties.

c) It was made available for inspection in the commune/town office.

d) No measures were taken to publicize the report.

e) other

19. Does the commune use one of the quality management systems mentioned below?

a) ISO 9000

b) PRI (the method of Planned Institutional Development)

c) CAF (The Common Assessment Framework)

d) The commune does not use any of the aforementioned quality management systems.

20. If the commune uses one of the above systems, in which year was the latest self-assessment or certification procedure conducted?

.....

3. The Quality of Local Governance score for the 60 communes of the Opolskie Province

Commune	Governance Quality total score (max 25)	Participation sub-index (max 5)	Equity sub-index (max 5)	Efficiency sub-index (max 5)	Accountability sub-index (max 5)	Openness sub-index (max 5)
Głuchołazy	16.77	2.89	3.272	2.94	4.17	3.5
Paczków	15.32	2.60	3.544	1.85	3.32	4
Kolonowskie	14.91	3.57	1.691	2.98	3.67	3
Niemodlin	14.77	2.79	3.699	1.61	2.67	4
Zawadzkie	14.47	3.18	1.671	1.6	4.02	4
Zdzieszowice	13.96	3.32	3.956	1.68	2	3
Ozimek	13.36	3.23	1.569	1.64	2.93	4
Gogolin	13.24	2.87	3.212	1.99	0.67	4.5
Grodków	12.86	2.98	2.39	2.02	3.47	2
Byczyna	12.82	2.64	2.253	3.56	0.87	3.5
Biała	12.73	2.69	1.928	1.56	2.05	4.5
Leśnica	12.66	4.21	1.415	1.63	2.4	3
Dobrodzień	12.55	3.64	2.363	1.95	1.6	3
Tarnów Opolski	12.50	2.82	2.44	1.52	2.72	3
Bierawa	12.17	3.07	1.441	2.63	1.53	3.5
Komprachcice	12.15	2.88	1.175	1.41	2.68	4
Cisek	12.01	2.98	2.522	2.04	0.47	4
Ujazd	11.99	2.18	1.523	2.24	2.05	4
Jemielnica	11.94	2.86	1.319	1.29	2.47	4
Branice	11.92	3.01	2.102	1.68	2.13	3
Murów	11.81	2.36	1.687	2.29	1.47	4
Chrząstowice	11.66	2.47	1.765	1.35	4.07	2
Reńska Wieś	11.63	2.93	1.709	1.67	2.32	3
Głogówek	11.38	3.53	1.644	1.76	2.45	2
Wołczyn	11.26	2.31	1.456	1.77	1.73	4
Polska Cerekiew	11.20	4.01	1.672	1.51	1	3
Lewin Brzeski	11.16	2.77	1.252	1.47	2.67	3
Korfantów	11.12	2.46	1.515	1.54	1.6	4
Strzeleczki	11.06	2.91	1.922	2.42	1.8	2

Łubniany	10.99	2.03	1.611	2.35	2	3
Popielów	10.96	2.64	1.647	2.34	2.33	2
Dąbrowa	10.90	2.39	1.275	1.59	1.65	4
Turawa	10.74	2.44	2.581	1.99	1.73	2
Radłów	10.64	3.35	1.648	1.31	2.33	2
Pruszków	10.49	3.01	2.2	1.95	1.33	2
Dobrzeń Wielki	10.47	2.77	2.762	2.43	1.52	1
Pokój	10.45	2.97	3.602	1.55	0.33	2
Pawłowiczki	10.41	2.60	1.581	1.90	1.34	3
Olszanka	10.38	2.00	1.818	1.76	1.8	3
Rudniki	10.37	2.85	1.754	2.05	1.72	2
Lubrza	10.27	3.22	1.539	1.59	0.92	3
Kamiennik	10.17	1.96	1.432	1.45	2.33	3
Praszka	10.15	3.39	1.158	2.03	1.58	2
Kietrz	10.11	1.58	2.061	1.64	2.33	2.5
Tułowice	9.85	2.06	1.258	1.74	1.8	3
Lubsza	9.84	1.76	1.728	2.02	1.33	3
Skarbimierz	9.83	3.07	1.378	2.46	0.93	2
Lasowice Wiel-kie	9.72	2.66	1.403	1.81	0.85	3
Zębowice	9.59	3.12	1.707	2.31	0.45	2
Świerczów	9.44	1.94	1.603	0.98	1.92	3
Pakosławice	9.39	1.98	1.189	1.22	2	3
Izbicko	9.19	2.85	1.757	1.44	1.13	2
Walce	8.73	3.53	1.539	2.46	0.2	1
Baborów	8.66	2.03	2.048	1.85	1.73	1
Otmuchów	8.61	2.06	1.11	1.84	0.6	3
Wilków	8.31	1.33	1.443	1.42	1.13	3
Skoroszyce	8.13	1.60	1.84	1.77	0.93	2
Łambinowice	7.47	2.26	1.278	1.46	1.47	1
Gorzów Śląski	7.03	2.59	1.198	1.57	0.67	1
Domaszowice	6.66	0.91	0.99	2.03	1.73	1

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The Use of Social Media in Public Administration: The Case of Slovak Local Self-Government

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Abstract

Regarding the constantly growing importance of social media, public administration tries to find optimal solutions, which might help to increase the qualitative aspects of governance processes. The aim of this study is to analyze Facebook profiles of regional cities in Slovakia, focusing on the general features of social media usage, content and the purpose of posts published between 2016 and 2019. The selected methodology aims to perform an in-depth analysis of Facebook page usage in the long term. The main finding is based on the statement that selected official Facebook pages mostly include informational posts and selected cities do not use Facebook to ask citizens' input or participation. Simultaneously, the benefit of the article is associated with fostering an interest in examined issues of social media usage, which we hope might improve the quality of social media policies and benchlearning in other Slovak cities and hopefully other local self-government units in the European territory. Finally, various limits and perspectives of social media use are discussed in the final part of the article.

Key words: public administration, local self-government, governance, information technologies, social media, Facebook, Slovakia

1. Introduction

As digital transformation consolidates, we are being forced to readjust the ability of public administration to satisfy citizens' needs. Public administration, as sophisticated and planned executions of irreplaceable functions of democratic states, has a decisive position in contemporary governance. Experts on public administration mostly argue that public administration organizations ensure the relationship between politicians and the public service, guarantee the interface between state and society, weigh the participation of citizens in general elections and the engagement of citizens on a daily basis, as well as make it possible to engage in policymaking beyond legally defined tools (Murray Svidroňová et al. 2018; Peters and Pierre 2018; Shafritz et al. 2017). In this sense, we might argue that modern technologies transform various aspects of governance. According to Filipec (2018), information technologies could be the source of prosperity, but simultaneously could be misused as a tool of control and weapon. The benefits and threats of information technology implementation must be considered in parallel, weighing their consequences. Various positive, negative and contradictory impacts of information technologies can be discussed for a long time, but most of them relate to the fact that the role of information technologies is irreplaceable. As was stated by Iosifidis and Wheeler (2016) the widening access to modern technologies has laid the foundation for an informed citizenry capable of effective participating in political and public affairs. However, almost every technical, social, political or economic improvement of our society could be misused. Informed citizens can collaborate with public administration to achieve better quality of public services and higher quality of life, and this impact of information technologies is indisputable.

E-government, e-services or the concept of the smart city might be perceived as a stable part of contemporary discussions associated with current challenges of public administration. The quality of information shared by public administration seems to be more important than in the past. Put differently, technological changes have opened new dimensions of fundamental aspects of democratic societies. Regarding the growing use of innovative and modern tools, public administration has started to use social media as an alternative communication platform. The implementation of these new platforms with positive impacts on participation and engagement of citizens has not been examined deeply so far. On the other hand, the use of social media might be characterized as a crosscutting problem of contemporary governance. Social media usage and sharing information must be analyzed in its connection to transparency and openness. The legitimacy of retrieved opinions cannot harm the ideals and principles of democracy. Using the words of Kim et al. (2014) researchers have recently begun to explore social media as a formidable medium for social movements.

The purpose of this study is to examine selected aspects of social media usage focusing on local self-government units in Slovak Republic. More precisely, the paper is focused on the Facebook page usage of eight regional cities between 2016 and 2019. Besides that, the article tries to provide theoretical and practical insight to the use of social media in public administration. Regarding the importance of social media in public administration the paper focuses on Facebook usage. Facebook is currently the most popular social networking site in the world (Mergel 2013; Shafritz et al. 2017). The selection is underlined also by the popularity of Facebook and its use by organizations from the private, public and non-government sectors. Public administration uses Facebook as a tool which could make communication with the public more effective (Lee and Reed 2015; Lev-On and Steinfeld 2015).

The paper consists of three parts. The theoretical introduction regarding the potential of information technologies concentrates its attention on the importance of new forms of communication and use of social media in the sphere of public administration. The second part examines selected aspects of social media usage in the conditions of regional cities in Slovakia. Regarding the findings the article ends with a discussion about the perspectives and limits of social media usage in the public administration.

1.1. The Role of Social Media in Contemporary Governance

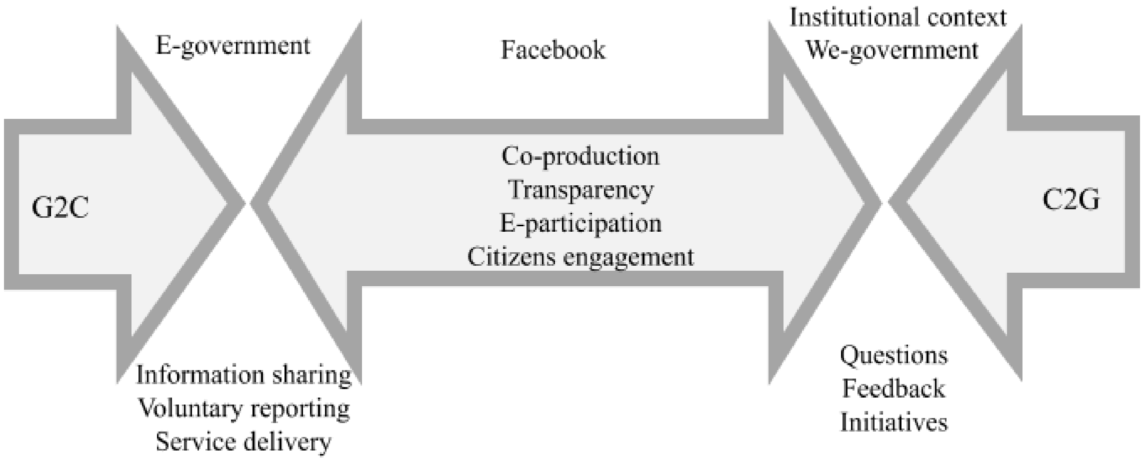
The impact of information technologies is a decisive challenge of contemporary governance. According to Mergel (2013) these technologies increase transparency, support interorganizational and intraorganizational collaboration, and enable innovative forms of participation. Presumably, public administration represents an important entity in governance processes. However, the position and importance of an active public is irreplaceable as well. Participation and engagement of citizens are fundamental attributes of healthy and vital democratic societies. Regarding the contemporary crisis of democracy finding the new forms of citizen participation is a permanent process. The phenomenon of e-participation becomes an imperative in democratic societies, because e-participation increases participation through the information technologies, gives citizens the ability to take a role in the decision-making processes and represents the newest way how to foster the process of democratization (Abu-Shanab and Al-Dalou 2012; Džatková 2017).

Information technologies, e-participation and engagement have mostly been discussed in their connections to social media in the last few years. The use of Web 2.0 applications transforms activities of public administration, especially through its potential to enhance government operations, policy-making, and administration (Reddick and Aikins 2012). Social media and their impacts on society continue to grow, and there is no evidence that this popularity is slowing or stopping (Siena et al. 2019; Toscano 2017). This statement is intensified by the argument mentioned by Mergel (2017) that social media are free and do not need to build and maintain the technological background. The power of social media to connect people and information in real time is increasing the capacity of people to exercise power and mobilize into action, because a large number of groups can be reached very easily, but on the other hand, they have the potential to split the persons living in one joint household (Miňová 2020; Sihi 2018; Lev-On and Steinfeld 2015; Bourgon 2011).

Social media should be perceived as a tool which helps public administration to serve citizens more effectively, give them a voice, and at the same time helps public organizations to reduce administrative costs (Khan 2017). Moreover, public administration and citizens could use social media in ways that foster participation, deliberation, and collaboration (Brainard 2016). Public administration should listen more systematically to the voices and needs of the digital public in order to improve mutual communication through innovative social media tools, such as social media statistics and insights, online surveys or customer satisfaction questionnaires of target groups (Lovari and Parisi 2015). In this sense, social media bring sophisticated mechanisms, which can enrich communication and interactions between public administration and citizens.

Social media are not only a platform for two-way communication between public administration and citizens. Social media have the potential to create an environment where citizens feel more involved in the management of organization, measurement of its performance and at the same time feel more responsible for a concrete territory (Hartmann 2019; Dimitrijevska-Markoski 2018). In this sense, social media have the potential to raise public awareness of the execution of public administration functions. This can help citizens and governments, as partners, to be more informed and make socially responsible decisions (Bonsón et al. 2015). Figure 1 shows the role of the most used social media site on two-way communication between public administration and citizens. Put differently, social media represent a brand new communication platform between public administration and the public, which is extremely different from interaction tools used so far.

Figure 1. The role of Facebook on G2C and C2G communication.



Source. Bonsón et al. (2015)

The importance of social media in public administration could simultaneously be identified in the daily execution of public administration functions. The use of social media is expected to contribute to the fulfilment of goals and imperatives, such as cost saving, improvement of public services, citizen satisfaction, transparency, accountability, citizen participation or cooperation. In this sense, social media usage seems to be very attractive and promising (Sobaci 2016). According to Shark (2015) public organizations could very easily create their official Facebook pages, but at least the following aspects should be considered: social media policy with goals, tools and objectives, staff to make sure that content is up to date, the ability to protect and monitor the site to secure the site is not abused or hijacked. What is more, the specific character of public administration must be considered. As was stated by de Kool (2014) specific contradictions needs to be reconsidered: (1) the open character of social media versus the closeness of public organizations, (2) the self-organizing capacities of social media versus the focus of public administration on strict control, and (3) the horizontal character of social media versus the hierarchic structure in public administration. Obviously, some important challenges and differences must be solved. Otherwise, the ideal of public administration, cooperating with the digital and informed public through the modern technologies, would not be reached.

1.2. Social Media: The Missing Link between Public Administration and Citizens?

The implementation of social media is a very complex process in public administration organizations. According to Khan (2017) the simple presence on a social media site is not enough, because achieving full benefits of social media requires a culture of sharing, transparency, openness, and collaboration (STOC Culture). Besides, the implementation of social media should be based on an openness to share, a clear understanding of transparency, a desire to work collaboratively and a new literacy of how social media work (Miller 2011). Regarding the need of a systematic approach these activities should be based on a sophisticated strategy. As the use of social media increases, the need for rules, regulations and standardization has increased as well (Mergel and Greeves 2012). We might agree with R. Laforest (2013) that social media strategies need to be a part of a larger institutional framework for engagement policy that helps democracy work. Using the words of Hrdinová et al. (2010) the core elements of social media policy include employees’ access, account management, acceptable use, employees’ conduct, content, security, legal issues, and citizens’ conduct. In this sense, social media activities need to be considered in wider circumstances.

The use of social media offers various types of opportunities for improvements in the sphere of public administration. However, the ability of public administration to reflect contemporary trends is quite limited. As was stated by Fyfe and Crookall (2010) there is considerable pressure on public administration to implement social media, because there is a legitimate fear that public administration will be left behind; thus social media might improve the decentralization of the decision-making process, empower collaboration, and achieve a better quality of services. Put differently, citizens’ engagement and participation does not rely on traditional mechanisms but is based on authentic and interactive dialogue, which produces positive effects on decision-making, citizenship, and governance (Laforest 2014, Denhardt and Denhardt 2015). This interactive dialog is possible thanks to social media. What is more, social media bring along interactivity, which distinguishes social media pages from traditional websites; thus these connections can contribute to a sense of engagement and loyalty among users (Bregman 2012).

Social media represent a platform which is not connected solely with communication and information sharing. According to Jukić and Svete (2018) public administration uses social media mainly to improve service delivery and the organizational image, as well as to prepare more inclusive policy processes. Social media should be used to share citizens’ opinions and ideas to improve public services, governmental effectiveness, and the quality of life (Alcaide-Muñoz and Rodríguez Bolívar 2019; Špaček 2018).

The importance of social media is growing in the local context. In this sense, especially local self-government units should improve local circumstances and improve the quality of life. According to Nilssen (2019) local government should use a combination of technology, human resources and interactive governance to promote local development. Social media help to create informational campaigns, create images of places where citizens live, exchange a realistic view of contemporary city life, and renew the sense of community and belonging (Paganoni 2015). An engaged community can lead to a better functioning, more effective and smarter city, which considers the needs of the local community (Ručinská and Fečko 2020). Besides, Bonsón et al. (2015) suggest that social media may have a better impact if relevant entities ensure that content posted is specially focused around topics of interest and significant to local citizens, rather than being of broader organizational interest. In this sense, social media should be managed by persons who are suited to prepare local awareness campaigns, interactive sessions and suitable content (Vinod-Kumar and Bimal 2015). Social media help to create an environment where citizens feel more involved and responsible for their city and its transformation into a smart city (Hartman 2019). Summing it up, social media represent important aspect of cities’ effort to become modern, inclusive and smart.

1.3. Content and the Purpose of Information Published on Social Media

Contemporary public administration provides various types of information to the informed public. Innovative forms of communication, especially social media, represent a unique platform for two-way communication, while the value of information stands at the beginning of this process. In this sense, content published on official Facebook pages could be perceived as a fundamental attribute of public administrations’ effort to foster the participation and engagement of citizens. If information is something that gives the recipient a new piece of knowledge and reduces the state of uncertainty, then information shared by public administration through social media can create a state where citizens feel more engaged and involved in processes of governance. Based on the abovementioned benefits of social media to enrich participation and engagement, the paper concentrates its attention on the content and purpose of information shared by public administration.

The impact of social media usage on participation and engagement is also very interesting in the context of the participation rate or increased direct real-life actions of citizens. But the paper concentrates its attention on the character of information published by selected cities in Slovakia. In this sense, the purpose of the study is not to examine reactions of citizens on actions of selected public administration entities. This decision was also based on the fact that the quality of information, the character of information and the purpose of publication stand at the whole process of fostering participation and engagement of citizens.

As was mentioned many times before, the paper is focused on the analysis of the official Facebook pages of eight regional cities in Slovakia. Regarding the principle of subsidiarity local self-government is a key part of public administration. Local self-government is a specific public activity different from the state, which is focused on public issues, has a powerful impact on living standards and serves to promote the democratic values of society (Alman and Volochová 2020; Župová 2020; Lentner and Hegedűs 2019; Jesenko 2017; Mäeltsemees et al. 2013). Selected regional cities are mostly perceived as initiators of innovative solutions in Slovakia. Besides, each of the eight selected region cities has a higher population than any other local self-government unit in Slovak Republic. It must be stated that there are only eight regional cities in Slovakia. Regional cities represent more than one-fifth of the total population of the Slovak Republic. The status of being a regional city is not associated with any special or unique legal position of these cities. According to legal norms, each local self-government unit has the same competences. The main difference between cities and other units is determined by the fact that cities realize key activities focused on the production of public services both for their own residents and residents from the nearest territory. Besides, selected regional cities are the headquarters of local self-governing regions and mid-level offices of state administration. Regional cities were also selected because of the high fragmentation of local self-government in Slovakia. According to the official statistics, local self-government consists of 2,933 units (Government Office of the Slovak Republic 2020). Altogether there were 1,919 units with a population under 1,000 inhabitants and 1,145 units with a population lower than 499 inhabitants (Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic 2019).

We must admit that the number of similar studies, based on content analysis and in-depth empirical evidence, has increased at all levels of government in the last few years, such as analyses of Facebook usage in local self-government units (Jukić and Svete 2018; Murray Svidroňová et al. 2018; Gesuele 2016; Bonsón et al. 2015; Lev-On and Steinfeld 2015), measuring the use of social media by self-governing regions (Špaček 2018) as well as the use by state administration (Callejo-Gallego and Agudo-Arroyo 2019; Jukić and Merlak 2017). The mentioned papers examined social media usage mostly in a short period, while our paper analyzes posts published in a period of four years. Besides, the main focus is put on the content included in the posts, which means that the centre of the paper’s attention is the activity of cities on their official Facebook pages, while most previous studies concentrated their attention on interactions with citizens, the content and motive for information sharing was left behind. In our opinion, the purpose of published content and spheres of social life represent an aspect of social media usage which needs to be examined more deeply in future research to understand the ability of social media to foster the participation and engagement of the public.

2. Research Design and Methodology

The aim of the paper is to analyze the Facebook pages of selected local self-government units, focusing on the general features of social media usage, content and the purpose of posts published between 2016 and 2019. At the same time, the paper tries to highlight the rise of innovative communication solutions and provides theoretical and practical insight to the application of social media in public administration. The hypothesis is based on the statement that selected cities use their official Facebook pages primarily to foster participation and the engagement of citizens. In this sense, the paper tries to answer these research questions: What are the general features of the selected official Facebook pages? Which content is included in the posts published on the official Facebook pages of regional cities? What is the purpose of posts published on the official Facebook pages of regional cities?

The research sample was selected intentionally. The study analyzes the official Facebook pages of eight regional cities in Slovakia (Banská Bystrica, Bratislava, Košice, Nitra, Prešov, Trenčín, Trnava and Žilina). The selection of cities was determined by the fragmentation of local self-government and the importance of regional cities in Slovakia. Data were collected between 1 January 2016 and 31 December 2019. All data were obtained by analyzing the official Facebook pages of regional cities in Slovakia. The acquired data were processed by using methods of descriptive statistics. Each post is assigned only one purpose. Besides, one post might include information about various spheres of social life. Altogether 15,508 posts were analyzed, and all of them were checked manually. The selected period of four years made it impossible to use free and often used sophisticated tools (for example QUINTLY).

The selected groups of indicators (Table 1) were inspired mainly by the methodology of Jukić and Svete (2018), Lappas et al. (2018), Murray Svidroňová et al. (2018), Špaček (2018), Jukić and Merlak (2017) and Lev-On and Steinfeld (2015). However, the method was slightly adjusted to conditions of Slovak cities. The spheres of social life included in the table are based on original and assigned competencies defined by relevant legal norms. The selected methodology aims to perform an in-depth analysis of Facebook usage in the long-term period, concentrating mainly on spheres of social life included in posts and the purpose of posts published on the official Facebook pages of regional cities. Indicators presented in the table are precisely defined in the findings chapter. Put differently, the centre of our attention is the character of the information shared by selected cities.

Table 1: Set of indicators

Group	Indicator	Indicator's value
General features of Facebook page usage	Existence of official FB page	Yes/no
	Availability of link to the official FB page on the city's web page	Yes/no
	Availability of link to the official web page on the official FB	Yes/no
	Creation of official page	Year
	Number of fans (31 December 2019)	Number
	Number of posts, reactions, comments, shares	Number
	Number of inhabitants	Number
	Ratio of fans to number of inhabitants	Number
Character of information included in analyzed posts published on Facebook pages	Purpose of the posts	Calling for participation
		Calling for opinion
		Information on future events
		Information on live events
		Information on past events
		Service posts
		Passive posts
	Spheres of social life included in posts	Environmental issues
		Order and safety
		Social issues
		Education
		Traffic
		Public infrastructure
		Sport
		Culture
		Self-government issues
		Other

In the paper, content analysis was used to analyze posts published on official Facebook pages. Content analysis was selected because of its potential to convert qualitative data, published on official Facebook pages, into quantitative data. Abstraction was used in the context of filtering those aspects of published information which are relevant for our research. The attention was directed to specific selected indicators, which were measured in selected years. Comparisons were made between both the selected Facebook pages and findings with relevant research. A synthesis was used to draw conclusions resulting from the analysis.

3. Findings

The paper focuses on the character of information published between 2016 and 2019. Based on the methodology, the analysis was dedicated to general features of Facebook usage, spheres of social life mentioned in published posts and purpose of published posts.

3.1 General Features of the Official Facebook Pages

General features of the analyzed official Facebook pages represent the introductory part of our research. Basic attributes of Facebook page usage are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: General features of Facebook usage

	Banská Bystrica	Bratislava	Košice	Nitra	Prešov	Trenčín	Trnava	Žilina
Creation of Facebook page	2012	2011	2012	2015	2015	2011	2009	2012
Number of fans	12,158	33,450	16,834	16,516	17,780	11,680	24,137	10,361
Availability of link to the web page on the Facebook page	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Availability of link to the Facebook page on the web page	Yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Availability of official contact	Yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Availability of link to other social media	No	no	no	no	no	no	yes	no
Number of inhabitants	78,084	437,725	238,593	78,559	85,784	54,696	63,768	82,870
Ratio of fans to inhabitants	15.57%	7.64%	7.06%	21.02%	20.73%	21.35%	37.85%	12.50%

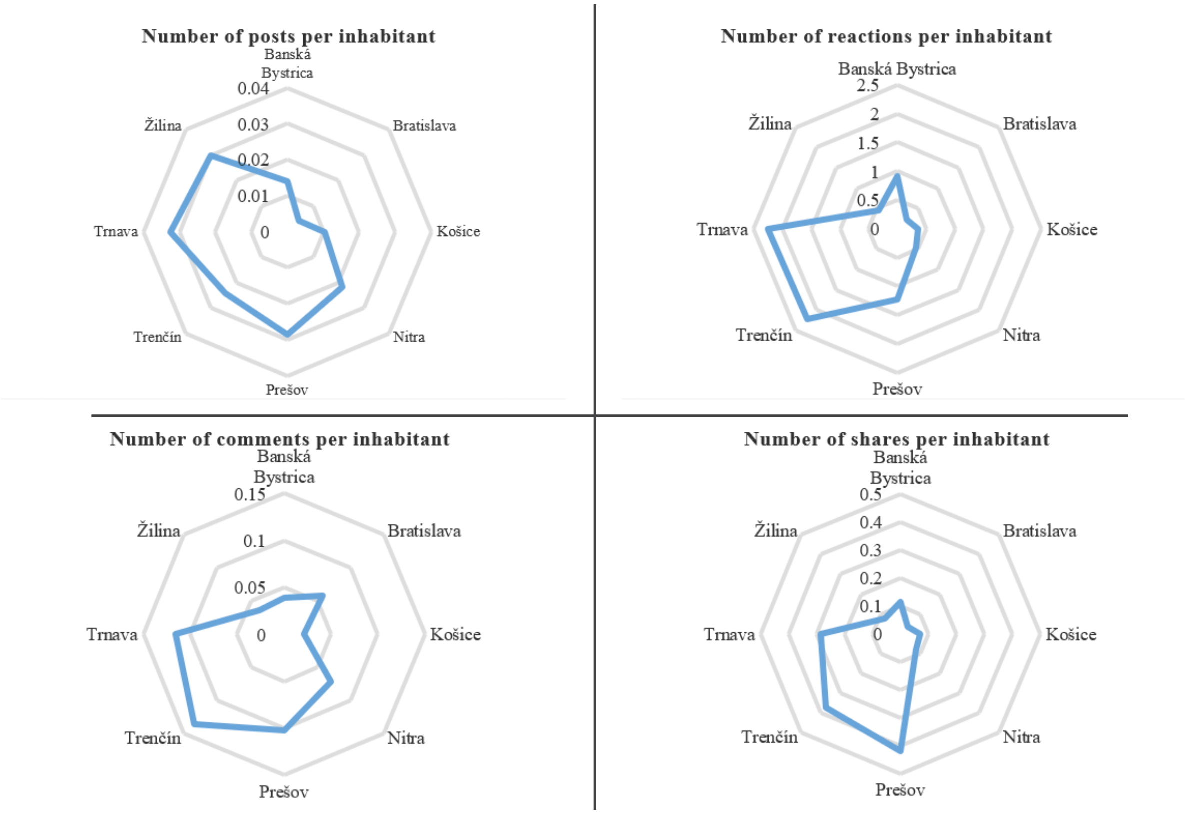
Source: Author

Every city maintained an official Facebook page during the selected period. Based on our analysis, Trnava founded its official Facebook page in 2009. On the other hand, the newest official Facebook page was identified in the case of the city Prešov. The rest of the official Facebook pages were created in 2011 and 2012. Another general aspect is associated with multi-channel features, put differently, whether cities add a connection to their web pages, a link to a direct contact or a link to other social media. According to our analysis, 100% of the selected pages contain a direct link to the official web page of city. A direct link to the Facebook page could be found on each web page of the regional cities. Only one page includes a direct link to another social media account.

Regarding the importance of transparency, the size of the audience is important in public administration. The highest number of fans was identified in the cases of Bratislava and Trnava. The official Facebook page of Trnava has more fans than the official Facebook page of Košice, which has almost 4 times more inhabitants. On the other hand, a relatively similar number of fans was identified in the cases of Banská Bystrica, Trenčín and Žilina, while these cities have the lowest number of fans. The ratio of fans to the number of inhabitants is another general feature which indicates the popularity of official Facebook pages. It must be said that Facebook pages of cities with lower number of inhabitants achieved the highest percentage of this indicator (Trenčín, Trnava). On the other hand, Bratislava and Košice, the two biggest cities in Slovakia, reach the lowest percentage of the ratio of fans to inhabitants.

The activity of regional cities should be measured by the number of posts, number of reactions, number of comments and number of shares (Graph 1). The graph reveals general features of Facebook usage evaluated per inhabitant, which resulted in a higher relevance of the presented data.

Graph 1: Selected quantitative aspects of the use of Facebook by Slovakian regional cities



Source: Author

According to our analysis, the lowest number of posts in each year was identified in the cases of Banská Bystrica, Nitra and Trenčín. Three cities (Košice, Prešov and Žilina) use Facebook more often than the other cities with more than 2,400 posts. If we consider the size of the cities, the two biggest cities (Bratislava and Košice) are the two cities with the lowest value of posts per inhabitant. The highest number of posts in one year was reached by Žilina (709 posts in 2018) while the lowest number of posts was identified in the case of Banská Bystrica (214 posts in 2016). The comparison of citizens’ reactions has shown big differences between the cities with higher numbers of reactions (Prešov, Trenčín, Trnava) and the lowest numbers of reactions (Nitra, Žilina). The highest number of reactions was identified in the case of Trnava (143,153). This result seems to be crucial if we consider that Trnava has the second lowest number of inhabitants. On the other hand, there was only 35,914 reactions on posts published by Nitra. A calculation to the number of inhabitants revealed that Žilina, Bratislava and Košice were the three worst-performing cities. The highest number of comments was identified in the case of Bratislava (25,453). This value seems to be more impressive if we consider the fact that there were only 3,015 comments in the case of Žilina in all four years. The significant difference was revealed between the highest and the lowest value in the number of shares. The highest number of shares was identified in the case of Prešov (35,865), while only 6,392 shares were identified in the case of Žilina. Summing it up, Trenčín, Trnava and Prešov have reached qualitatively better results than other cities in the case of number of comments and number of shares per inhabitant.

3.2 Spheres of Social Life Included in the Posts

Another important part of our research was focused on the spheres of social life mentioned in the posts of the selected cities. Table 3 includes the occurrence rates of spheres of social life mentioned in the analyzed posts.

Table 3: Spheres of social life mentioned in the posts published by regional cities

	Banská Bystrica	Bratislava	Košice	Nitra	Prešov	Trenčín	Trnava	Žilina	$\bar{x}$
Self-government issues	10.66	22.20	15.22	18.28	16.18	16.45	31.90	15.50	18.63%
Order and security	4.69	12.30	5.49	8.26	8.03	11.34	7.87	11.00	8.69%
Public infrastructure	14.98	20.63	8.55	9.26	9.74	22.39	11.53	3.90	11.59%
Education	4.41	4.61	4.40	7.15	10.84	6.84	12.64	7.27	7.52%
Social issues	6.89	8.38	7.90	9.96	11.01	4.21	17.28	10.04	9.89%
Traffic	7.08	17.75	10.26	6.33	6.52	15.33	6.81	4.50	8.98%
Culture	44.12	37.07	33.98	58.11	53.97	36.59	53.67	50.64	46.42%
Sport	21.51	8.59	10.95	12.71	15.53	11.19	9.75	13.29	12.55%
Environmental	9.10	13.93	4.88	8.03	5.34	12.02	13.27	7.99	8.94%
Other	24.54	26.13	39.64	15.99	17.69	33.51	17.57	18.51	23.97%

Source: Author

The research revealed that some spheres of social life are not mentioned very often by the selected group of cities. In this sense, we might identify spheres of social life with a lower average occurrence rate than 10%. Order and security, education, traffic information, social issues and environmental issues are not the centre of attention of regional cities.

The development of public infrastructure is a very complex group of posts (11.59% on average). This specific type of posts is closely connected with the development of the whole territory and is mostly associated with investments in the reconstruction of properties, the construction of roads, power or water delivery, as well as the maintenance of school, healthcare, and cultural facilities. It is difficult to say if the number of posts reflects the economic conditions of the selected cities. However, most cities reach an occurrence rate between 9 and 22% in the analyzed period of four years. An extremely low occurrence rate was identified in the case of Žilina (3.90%). On the other hand, an occurrence rate over 20% was identified in the cases of

Bratislava and Trenčín.

Sport is another important sphere which is included in the posts of selected cities (12.55% on average). The number of posts could not be compared with the dominant spheres of social life, but we might argue that sport posts represent an important part of cities' publishing activities. This statement is based on the fact that the lowest identified occurrence rate is 8.59% (Bratislava). Posts of this type mostly include information about various sport events and contests in the city, sport ceremonies, activities of the city's sport clubs, etc.

Another two spheres of social life should be characterized by high inconsistency. Self-government issues represent 18.63% of posts on average. The difference between two cities on opposite sides of the scale is more than 20% (Banská Bystrica 10.66% and Trnava 31.90%). An occurrence rate between 15.22% and 22.20% was identified in the case of the remaining six cities. This type of posts mostly includes information about activities of the city's office and elected representatives, local taxes, development of the territory or changes of opening hours. The group of posts called other posts is the most heterogeneous and the most inconsistent group. The difference between two cities on opposite sides of the scale is almost 25% (Nitra 15.99% and Košice 39.64%). Other posts mostly contain passive information, photos without text, information about the number of fans or a change of profile photo.

Finally, culture is the most frequently mentioned sphere in the posts of analyzed cities (46.42% on average). The lowest occurrence rate, identified in the case of Košice (33.98%), is higher than the occurrence rate of any other sphere included in posts of regional cities. This high occurrence rate is caused by the wide range of activities associated with cultural events and happenings, which were held by various entities in the analyzed cities. Very interesting is the fact that culture is included in more than half of all posts shared by Nitra, Prešov, Trnava and Žilina.

The in-depth analysis we performed of information included in posts allows us to create a word cloud with the 50 most frequently used words (Picture 1). The words “city”, “will be”, “day”, “you” and “year” were the five words the regional cities included most frequently in their posts. The word cloud consists of words which were mentioned more than 1,000 times.

Picture 1: The 50 most frequently used words – world cloud

Source: Author

3.3 Purpose of the Posts

Based on the purpose of the posts published on the official Facebook pages, the activities of selected cities were divided into seven groups (Table 4).

Table 4: Purpose of the posts published by regional cities

	Banská Bystrica	Bratislava	Košice	Nitra	Prešov	Trenčín	Trnava	Žilina	$\bar{x}$
Call for participation	5.70	7.02	2.89	4.80	2.61	6.91	10.91	4.06	5.36%
Call for opinions	5.42	6.81	3.05	4.75	4.93	5.03	8.54	3.13	5.08%
Information about future events	37.22	42.67	30.44	52.26	39.38	40.05	50.58	57.07	44.03%
Information about live events	9.01	4.40	6.19	3.34	10.35	7.36	5.41	3.13	6.02%
Information about past events	31.43	29.58	23.89	27.01	31.63	30.58	16.70	16.87	25.17%
Service posts	1.75	2.15	1.10	2.17	1.22	1.05	0.53	2.17	1.50%
Passive posts	9.47	7.38	32.44	5.68	9.87	9.02	7.34	13.57	12.83%
Posts total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Source: Author

Information about future events or activities are the most frequently mentioned type of posts. Altogether 44.03% of posts include information about events, happenings or activities which will take place in a certain city. Information about future events represent more than half of all posts in three cities (Nitra 52.26%, Trnava 50.58% and Žilina 57.07%). These group of posts mainly include invitations to future cultural, sport, social, educational, and other events. The second most frequently mentioned type of posts include information about previous events. These posts represent 25.17% out of all posts of the selected cities over the four-year period. The occurrence rate ranges around 30% in six cities. But we identified a low occurrence rate in the cases of Trnava (16.70%) and Žilina (16,87%). Another type of posts which is comparable to the previous two types is information about live events. The average occurrence rate of 6.02% is an outcome of different occurrence rates between 3 and 10%. The purpose of these three types of posts is associated with similar events which take place in the city, but information is published at a different time.

The official Facebook pages of the selected regional cities include posts which invite citizens to participate and engage. Both types of posts, posts calling for participation (5.36%) and posts calling for opinions (5.08%), reached a relatively low occurrence rate. However, posts focused on calling for opinions are more consistent than posts connected with the active participation of citizens. The highest occurrence rate was identified in Trnava (8.54%). Posts calling for opinions include requests for surveys and questionnaires, opinions of citizens about realized activities and emotions of citizens associated with the latest happenings. Posts calling for citizens’ opinions represent between 3 and 8% out of all posts. Posts calling for participation include information, the aim of which is to foster active participation of citizens, such as active participation in meetings of city councils, participation and engagement in preparing strategic and long-term documents, application connected with the participatory budget of the city, invitations to public discussions on key issues. Posts calling for participation vary between 2 and 7% in most cases. However, Trnava paid the highest attention to active participation of citizens and in this sense, 10.91% of the published posts try to foster the active participation of citizens.

The last two types of posts are not connected with the expected activity of citizens. Service posts represent a minimal part of the overall posts with 1.50% on average. This type of posts mostly includes information about the number of fans, change of title photos or any change of the site’s propositions. Passive posts as another type represent 12.83% of all posts of regional cities. These posts mostly include passive photos with no other description or just simple greetings. The research revealed that data obtained from the official Facebook page of Košice (32.44%) show a high and enormously different occurrence rate in comparison to other cities. However, six out of the eight cities do not pay serious attention to passive posts (5-9%), except for Žilina with 13.57%.

4. Discussion

The local self-government units significantly affect the life of local communities in Slovakia. This fact is emphasized in the case of the selected regional cities, which should be perceived as the centres of wider territories. The ambition of the article was to examine impacts of information technology on public administration providing information, mainly social media. The analysis was focused on the official Facebook pages of regional cities, with an emphasis on general features of pages, purpose of shared posts and spheres of social life included in the published posts. As was stated in the introductory part, attention was put on the character of information published by regional cities.

The official Facebook pages of the selected cities are a relatively stable part of their image and can be perceived as an accepted communication channel. The analysis of general features revealed just fundamental informational basis. In this sense, even more impressive informational value connected with the activities of cities was gained through the content analysis of published posts.

Establishing an official Facebook page is not the key part of the success, because the content of the published information is the key attribute for fostering participation and engagement. If cities want to foster the participation and engagement of the citizens, published content cannot consist of passive information. Posts must include attractive and citizen-oriented information. We might argue that posts of the analyzed cities contain information about various types of spheres. The frequency of the presented spheres of life should be divided into three groups, spheres of social life with a frequency under 10% out of all posts, spheres of social life with a frequency between 10-19% and spheres of social life with a frequency higher than 20%. Based on our analysis, the type of posts with the highest frequency of posts are culture, other posts, self-government issues and sport. The occurrence rates of the mentioned spheres of social life usually reached more than 10% out of all posts on average. Simultaneously, we might identify spheres of social life with an occurrence rate under 10% on average, such as social issues, education, traffic information, environmental issues, order and security. The research revealed that the occurrence rate of spheres of social life is relatively homogenous in the selected group of cities. Summing it up, culture, local self-government issues and sport represent the dominant spheres of social life mentioned in the posts shared by the selected cities. Cities should publish information which is perceived as important and attractive from the perspective of citizens. These spheres of social life should be assessed as the spheres which citizens identify with.

The quality of information is one part of the success, which must be complemented by an adequate purpose. According to our research, we might say that two types of posts reach higher occurrence rates than all other types of posts. The highest occurrence was identified in the type of posts with a strictly informational character. In this sense, most posts included information about future events or activities. An occurrence rate over 50% was identified in three cities. The second most frequent shared type of posts provides information about past events and activities. The creation of a platform which might foster engagement and participation of citizens is an important benefit, which results from the intersection of the rise of information technology and social media usage. In this sense, special attention must be paid to posts calling for participation and posts calling for opinions. These types of posts are not so frequent as informational types of posts. However, a higher occurrence rate was identified in the case of posts calling for participation. The research revealed that cities which often call for the participation of their citizens reach relatively similar numbers to the type of posts calling for opinions. It must be stated that Trnava is the leader in both types of posts. As was mentioned before, Trnava has the highest ratio of fans to citizens. In this sense, Trnava might be perceived as a good example how to use Facebook to inform citizens. The character of the information shared and the city’s attitude to use the official Facebook page was evaluated as positive from the citizens’ point of view. The types of posts focused on calling for opinions and calling for participation represent an important trend connected with challenges of the contemporary crisis of democracy. On the other hand, with the highest number of passive posts Košice has the lowest ratio of fans to inhabitants. In this sense, improving the quality of information and the sophistication of posts’ purpose is the first step how to involve citizens into the decision-making process and improve the quality of public services.

Due to the intentional selection of the research sample, comparing the findings with existing research can only be superficial. Besides, differences between systems of public administration cause distinctions which make an exact comparison even trickier.

The discussion of general features of social media usage usually begins with number of fans, the number of posts or the presence on Facebook. The selected cites established their official Facebook pages many years ago. In this sense, this finding is in contrast with arguments that only 14% of the Slovenian state administration organizations established Facebook pages (Jukić and Merlak 2017). However, the soundness of this comparison is limited by the scope of the selected public administration units. On the other hand, all regional cities had established their Facebook page by the time when the analysis of Slovenian state administration organizations was performed. Besides, a relatively high adoption rate of social media by various types of local self-government units was identified in Slovenia 36%, Greece 53%, Israel 58.1%, Lithuania 77% and Romania 83% (Jukić and Svete 2018; Lappas et al. 2018; Sinkienė and Bryer 2016; Urs 2016; Lev-On and Steinfeld 2015). The total number of posts, reactions, comments, and shares could not be compared adequately with the research realized so far. Our research was focused on a four-year period, while similar research mostly analyzed only a one-year period. On the other hand, the average number of fans is another general feature which can be compared. According to previous studies, average number of fans reach 2,601 in Slovenian state administration organizations, 15,260 in Romanian local self-government, 1,877 in the case of Czech self-governing regions and 7,576 in Israel (Špaček 2018; Jukić and Merlak 2017; Urs 2016; Lev-On and Steinfeld 2015). The average number of fans reached in the regional cities in Slovakia is 17,864.

Our research revealed that culture is the most frequently mentioned sphere of social life in selected regional cities (46%). The analysis of the Slovenian municipalities also confirmed that culture is the most mentioned sphere with 44% out of all posts (Jukić and Svete 2018). Other posts represent part of shared content, which is the second most frequent both in the Slovak regional cities and the Slovenian municipalities. Altogether 24% of posts were not identified as belonging to the selected spheres of life and were categorized as other posts, while Jukić and Svete (2018) identified 21% of similar posts in the Slovenian municipalities.

According to our research, content published by regional cities is mostly informational, because 75.22% of posts just inform citizens about future, live or past events. In Slovenia, 57% of posts include just informational content, while only 0.41% of posts call for citizen participation (Jukić and Svete 2018). Altogether 5.36% of the selected cities’ posts invite citizens to participate. These numbers were also confirmed by a statement from Murray Svidroňová et al. (2018). What is more, only 0.80% of posts shared by Czech self-governing regions invite citizens to participate (Špaček 2018).

The benefits of the performed analysis and the defined recommendations should be considered in connection to their limits. The use of Facebook by public administration represents a relatively unexplored field of study, and possible negative aspects have not been examined so far. The question of legitimacy is raised automatically when we talk about these new platforms. There are important issues which need to be considered by the management of public organizations, such as the number of reactions and the number of fans. Besides, it should always be taken into consideration that potential key actors might have missed an important call for participation or call for opinions. The exclusivity of social media usage at the expense of other communication channels is dangerous and nondemocratic in our opinion. Social media need to be perceived as complementary communication channels. However, there is no doubt that the importance of social media will rise in the coming years. The research sample was selected intentionally, and the paper examines the official Facebook pages of eight regional cities. According to this fact, the widening number of organizations could be very useful both for theory and practice. However, the paper tries to be an initial insight into the relatively new aspect of public administration activities on social media.

The paper could foster future research. In this sense, the paper tried to support an interest in deeper research both in local self-government and public administration in general. The benefit of the paper might be a comprehensive view, thanks to which local self-government units could implement better social media policies. Moreover, the paper concentrates its attention to Slovakian cities, but findings could be inspirational for public administration organizations around the world. In this sense, the international comparison seems to be very attractive. Besides, interesting findings might be revealed by examining specific situations, such as periods before elections, extraordinary situations associated with weather or environmental catastrophes, etc.

5. Conclusions

Regarding the significance of information technologies, the implementation of social media might help to improve the qualitative aspects of the contemporary concept of governance. The growing importance of social media usage in public administration has been confirmed not only by theoretical discussion, but it has also been proven by our research.

Summing it up, social media should be characterized as a new platform for communication between the public administration and citizens. We might argue that according to this fact, the official Facebook pages are a constant part of cities’ images. The research revealed that the dominant part of posts aims to inform citizens about future and past events. According to content analysis, culture, sport and self-government issues were the most frequently mentioned spheres of social life in the conditions of the selected regional cities in Slovakia. The hypothesis has not been proven. The selected group of cities use their official Facebook pages mostly to share informational posts, while calling for opinions and calling for participation represents a significantly lower part of total posts. Improving the quality of information and sophistication of posts’ purpose is the first step how to involve citizens into the decision-making process, enhance the relationship between public administration and citizens, and improve the quality of public services and quality of life. On the other hand, the unanswered question is if fostering participation and engagement can be perceived as a side effect associated with creating the image of a proactive, inclusive, innovative and smart city through social media.

To conclude, the benefit of the article is associated with fostering an interest in the examined issues of social media usage, which we hope might improve the quality of social media policies and benchlearning processes in other Slovak cities and hopefully other local self-government units in the European territory.

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Who Creates Value? Insights on Value Theory from The Last Dance

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Abstract

The Last Dance is a sports documentary miniseries focusing on the 1997-98 NBA champions Chicago Bulls and their star Michael Jordan. Through the lenses of *The Last Dance*, whose global popularity has been unprecedented for a documentary, we discuss value from a historical, political and cultural perspective. First, this paper provides a concise account of the ambivalent nature of value from a historical perspective. We then discuss the Bulls' General Manager dispute with Jordan over whether the players or the organizations win championships; and the Scottie Pippen “injustice”, according to which Pippen, a top Bulls player, was underpaid. By addressing these two issues, we show that all value is collectively produced. We argue that all value approaches are imperfect, temporary and context-specific. We thus highlight the need for scholars and policymakers to critically discuss value and point to the commons sphere for more inclusive understandings of value.

Keywords: value theory; valuation; capitalism; pop culture; commons; collaboration

Introduction

The Last Dance is a sports documentary miniseries focusing on the 1997-98 NBA champions Chicago Bulls and their star Michael Jordan, who is by acclamation the greatest basketball player of all time (NBA.com 2020). Featuring unaired footage of Jordan's final season with the franchise and original interviews with key persons of the NBA and American pop culture, the release of the first two episodes marked *The Last Dance* as the biggest ESPN documentary debut of all time. Its popularity has been unprecedented for a documentary series (Katz 2020), arguably mirroring the global sports and pop culture appeal of Jordan and the Bulls in the 1990s (Langdon in Katz 2020; Dyson 1993). The series, which was scheduled to air in summer 2020, ultimately aired during the coronavirus lockdown in April 2020, and probably managed “to bridge the gap for both viewers missing live sports … and those seeking nostalgic comfort viewing” (Langdon in Katz 2020).

Entering the 1997-98 NBA season, the Chicago Bulls had won five championships in the past seven years. The management realized that many of the players were at the end of their high-productive years, so the team should be rebuilt instead of trying to win a sixth championship. However, a few key players, notably Jordan and Scottie Pippen, and Phil Jackson, the head coach, objected to rebuilding. In a flashback interview, Jordan[1] believes that the Chicago Bulls players were entitled to defend the previous year's championship. Moreover, looking at the dispute from a business perspective, Jordan thinks that rebuilding was a disrespect to the people who had laid the groundwork and made the franchise a profitable organization.

However, who are those who had laid the groundwork? For Jordan it is mainly the players: "I would never let someone who's not putting on a uniform and playing each and every day dictate what we do on the basketball court … the team is much bigger than the 15 players. Those guys who work in the front office, they are good people, but the most important part of the process is the players." So do the players or the organizations win the championships? Who should take credit for delivering high-level basketball or any other team sports? Who creates values? And what lessons may we draw from the coronavirus pandemic?

This essay addresses these questions through the lenses of *The Last Dance*. We start by providing a concise account of the ambivalent nature of value in Western thought from a historical perspective. We then discuss two questions that play a key role in the narrative of the documentary: the Bulls' General Manager dispute with Jordan over whether the players or the organization win the championships; and the Pippen "injustice" according to which Pippen, Chicago Bulls star only second to Jordan, was underpaid. By addressing these questions, we highlight the need for scholars and policymakers to critically discuss value.

A Brief History of Value Theory[2]

Value is an abstract concept, riddled with ambivalence. Value as a term alone has no concrete meaning and must be interpreted within a broader social whole (Graeber 2001). In daily life and business practice it is used with a relative ease that indicates a common understanding. Yet, there is no definitive or objective definition for value in academic literature, as value is "the result of the whole set of operations by which a quality is assigned to an object, with varying degrees of consensus and stability" (Heinich 2020, 15). Rather various interpretations operate in the context of different theories of value.

In capitalism, value is almost exclusively perceived in the exchange of commodities. Markets are the primary institutions enabling and regulating exchange and, hence, the creation and distribution of value. In antiquity, Aristotle offered one of the first treatises on value in *The Nicomachean Ethics* (2009). He too held that value is expressed in the exchange of two goods but claimed that it is the usability of those goods that make them desirable in an exchange. Aristotle, thus, had already evinced one of the fundamental dichotomies of economic affairs: use-value and exchange-value. However, Aristotle's distinction of use-value and exchange-value already implied their close interrelation, whereas the former was held to be a prerequisite to the latter. Value was, then, defined by the desire or need for the products of human labor (things or actions). Exchange was all but an institution crystallizing this interaction.

1 All quotations, if not specified, are drawn from the *The Last Dance* documentary, which can be accessed at https://www.netflix.com/title/80203144 (last accessed 7 May 2020).

2 This section is significantly expanded, based on the 2.3.1 subsection from Bauwens et al. (2019).

Similarly, in medieval times in Europe, markets were also present. However, the value of goods, as perceived at the time by philosophers like Albert the Great and Thomas Aquinas, served a broader social necessity, bound to ethical and legal constraints (Baldwin 1959; Sewall 1901). For instance, the price of grain was regulated so that everyone had food in a medieval city, whereas speculative traders were put to death. This was still exchange-value, but it was not related to a “rational” economic aim; instead, it was embedded in cultural constraints.

The pursuit of economic affairs before the industrial revolution involved a notion of a “just price” reflecting the true value of goods in exchange, one that provided fair compensation for all the agents involved. Subsequently, economics as a discipline subsisted as part of justice and moral philosophy. It was not until the classical political economists and under the influence of established capitalist institutions that elements like a “natural” order (Smith 1776), scarcity (Ricardo 1951) and command of possession (Mill 1848) were associated with commodity exchange and subsequently value.

With ensuing generations of economists, discussion on value gradually abated, and the concept became almost interchangeable with the market price. A fierce economization of social life expanded turning land, things, actions, people and their relations into objects of exchange and profitability. An exaggerated version of this trend has developed in finance terminology, with value acquiring one superficial attribute wholly divorced from production. Simultaneously, economics emerged as a discipline “pure” from moral and value judgment, and economists deprived themselves from the analytical tools to examine value outside the market. Philosophical questions of value, justice and culture were transformed to calculable matters of productivity, interest rates and growth.

Mazzucato (2018) reinstates the significance of theory of value in economic affairs, by vindicating the classical economics debate on productive and unproductive activities. She distinguishes between “makers” and “takers” in the global economy to debunk the financialized interpretations of value creation and re-connect it to the productive economy. Mazzucato reframes the conventional understanding of economy, demonstrating that value creation is not a “natural” outcome of market competition, rather the result of mission-oriented policies and social mobilization. Yet Mazzucato fails to acknowledge the embedded structures that have attached value to any specific outcome, before it was created. Regardless of whether this mission is initiated by the state, the private sector or the civil society, success is often exclusively validated by market-driven outcomes.

There is a hegemonic culture today concerning value. First, the culture of metrics that penetrates many spheres in society (Bolin and Velkova 2020; Brighenti 2018). “What’s measured is what matters” as the well-known aphorism dictates (Muller 2018). So, value is mostly related to commodities and is measured in their exchange for one another based on a nominal representation as money. The culture of metrics is coupled with the culture of the self-made, talented and hardworking, individual, who exists, develops and succeeds apart from friends, family, colleagues and societal institutions. Next, we discuss how these two cultures penetrate the *The Last Dance* documentary. Within such an understanding of value, we address the two main questions of this essay and argue that a commons-oriented approach to value is a fundamental way to truly understand and manage it.

The Krause-Jordan Dispute: Do the Players or the Organizations Win the Championships?

Jerry Krause (1939-2017) was a sports scout and the General Manager of the Chicago Bulls. When Jerry Reinsdorf became the majority owner and chairman of the Bulls in 1984, Krause applied for and was granted the position of General Manager of the franchise. Until that time the Bulls exhibited poor results in the NBA league. Commercially the franchise was not successful either.

In 1984, Jordan joined the Bulls after studying at and playing for North Carolina University, a public university at Chapel Hill, USA. Jordan says he did not want to pursue a professional basketball career and that his North Carolina coach convinced him to do so. In his first NBA year, Jordan showed his great talent and potential, being selected as the rookie of the year. In the following years, Jordan would win six championships, five NBA Most Valuable Player awards and numerous other accolades.

From the first years of his Bulls career, Krause made radical changes in rebuilding the team. For example, the head coach was replaced in 1985, and an assistant bench coach was hired to teach a novel, at that time offensive, strategy. Moreover, Phil Jackson, who would later serve as the head coach in Bulls’ six championships, was hired by Krause as an assistant to the head coach. Krause had to insist on Jackson’s recruitment because the latter had very few credentials. As Reinsdorf says, “Krause started Phil Jackson’s NBA coaching career … If that hadn’t happened, you never would have heard of Phil Jackson”. Further, in 1987, Krause brought Pippen, an unknown player, at that time, from the public University of Central Arkansas, who would be a cornerstone in the Bulls’ dynasty of the 90s.

The Krause-Jordan dispute revolves around the question whether the players or the organizations win the championships. Before the beginning of the 1997-98 season, Krause was quoted: “Players don’t win championships, organizations do.” This line outraged Jordan and divided the players and the management. Krause later explained that he had been misquoted: “What I said was that players and coaches ‘alone’ don’t win championships, that organizations do. I do sincerely believe that organizations, as a whole, win.” Krause was actually of the same opinion at least since 1992 when the Bulls had won their second championship: “The one thing I would say, and I’d say it from Jerry Reinsdorf on down, this is a great organization. This organization is special … It starts with Jerry, and it goes down all the way to Joe Lee, our clubhouse guy who’s been here 25 years. It’s an organization thing, and that’s what it’s all about.” Jordan, however, insists that “the most important part of the process is the players.”

We disagree with him. Jordan highlights how important Pippen and Jackson had been not only in their collective success but also in his development and career. Pippen, Jordan says, “helped me so much in the way that I approached the game, the way I played the game. Whenever they speak Michael Jordan, they should speak Scottie Pippen. When everybody says, well, I won all these championships. But I didn’t win without Scottie Pippen.” Both Pippen and Jackson were unknown and with very few credentials when Krause brought them to the Bulls. Even Jordan, who later said that he would not play for another coach than Jackson, was sceptical when Krause promoted Jackson to the head coach position. So, from Jackson, Jordan, Pippen and the rest of the players, to the management who built the team, to the “clubhouse guy”, who made sure the ball is dry and the uniforms ready, all are parts of the value creation process.

Jordan, Pippen or Jackson are who they are and performed at such a high level not only because of their talent and hard work and the well-functioning organization of the Bulls, but also because of their families; their opponents; the (public) schools they studied at and played for; those who played and developed the game before them; the philosophical approaches to coaching and life; the fans who co-create the Bulls culture; or the African American culture (Dyson 1993). *The Last Dance* is rich in references to the aforementioned institutions, ideas and people that shaped Jordan and the rest. Other factors, which are taken for granted but are also an integral part of the value creation process, are the opportunity to train in peace, to stay healthy, to overcome an injury, to acquire the necessary skills to communicate, think, negotiate and so on. The value of their contribution cannot be measured. It alone has no exchange value for the market. Therefore, it remains invisible yet central to the functioning of the NBA – or whatever – ecosystem.

The Pippen “Injustice”: Was he Underpaid?

Ahead of the 1997-98 NBA season, Pippen ranked second on the Bulls in scoring, rebounds, and minutes played; he was first in assists and steals; but he was sixth in salary and 122nd in the NBA in salary. Jordan admits that he “would never be able to find a tandem, another support system, another partner in the game of basketball like Scottie Pippen.” Pippen was one of the best basketball players ever, but according to all the interviewees who participated in the relevant episode, he was extremely underpaid.

In 1991, Pippen had signed a seven-year contract for $18 million. Reinsdorf, Bulls’ chairman, recalls saying to him that “you may be selling yourself too short. It’s too long a contract you’re locking yourself in for.” Reinsdorf was right. As Telander, a senior sports columnist, notes “if he [Pippen] had played it right, he could have made nine times that amount, ten times.” In the following years, not only di Pippen excel in the game, but also the NBA league took off and, as Pippen says, “the revenues went way, way up, salaries went up.”

But Reinsdorf was adamant after a contract was signed: “I don’t want to hear from you again. Don’t come back in here, try to renegotiate”. Being the second-best player only to Jordan, Pippen’s “frustration bubbled over”, as his teammate and now successful NBA head coach Steve Kerr notes. Pippen would not undertake surgery during the 1997 summer, when the league was over, but, instead, he decided to do it at the beginning of the season. His aim was to save his summer holidays and retaliate because of the injustice he was feeling. Jordan believes that Pippen “was wrong … What Scottie was trying to do was trying to force management to change his contract.” So, he continues, “I felt like Scottie was being selfish. Worrying about himself as opposed to what his word was to the organization as well as to the team.”

While Jordan came from a middle-class background, Pippen came from a 12-member poor family with two members, the father and a brother, in a wheelchair. Hence, Pippen had signed such a contract because he could not afford to gamble himself getting injured and not being able to provide: “I needed to make sure that people in my corner were taken care of.” The conditions under which Pippen decided to sign were very different to those of Jordan. Presenting an outcome subject to so many unforeseen factors as an individual choice is a common hegemonic recipe for injustice.

The flip side of the same misconception is most apparent in the myth of the “self-made individual”. Risk-taking is often championed as a bold and decisive move, from history and economics, to daily affairs and media representations. Entrepreneurship is seen as an idiosyncratic, even congenital (Heitzman 2015), quality of certain people that manifests itself in the management of any given situation, be it business, family, or social life. Yet the reality is that bold and risky endeavors are, more often than not, based on secure personal and family backup, and access privileges to institutions and connections (Groth 2015). And all this, without mentioning the various structures and arrangements that need to be in place for any business to operate, such as basic research, infrastructure, education and labor markets, all of which only function on a collective level.

Hence, Pippen’s contract was far from an individual arrangement between him and the organization. It was yet another one of the various collective arrangements conditioning his role, contribution and commitment to the team, which affected other factors, from Jordan’s court performance, to the general manager’s negotiating power in other contracts. We cannot be sure how much of Pippen’s performance was attributed to his talent and dedication and how much to his salary, i.e. how his performance was measured in the market. He was valuable for the team in ways it could not be measured, let alone defined in advance.

On the one hand, if one considers the Pippen injustice in the NBA context, one may infer that Pippen was extremely underpaid. For CCN writer Tensley (2020) the Pippen injustice is a reminder of America’s enduring inequality when it comes to race. Miranda (2018), writing for *Jacobin*, claims that “the gap between working-class fans and millionaire players is no less a chasm than that between millionaire players and billionaire owners.” He considers Jordan, who in 15 years earned $93 million only as a salary from the Bulls, and another active NBA player Lebron James, who in 15 years has earned $237 million, to be NBA’s two most underpaid players. She compares James’ and Jordan’s earnings with the profits of the owners of their franchises. But his approach is myopic. First, James and Jordan have made hundreds of millions through endorsements. These endorsements are also possible because of the environment their team, the league and society offer them. Second, looking at the numbers Miranda cites, the gap between working-class fans and players, such as James and Jordan, is much bigger than between players and owners. The main problem does not rest in the players versus owners gap but in the dominant understanding of value today.

So, on the other hand, to say that a multi-millionaire is underpaid is an exaggeration when doctors, teachers, firefighters or even the US president make so much less money. To put things in perspective, in the 90s Jordan’s average annual salary in the Bulls was $10.6 million, Pippen’s was $2.5 million (Hoopshype 2020) while the average annual salary of the US president was $0.2 million (Elkins 2018). Medical doctors, teachers, scientists and other professionals who provide important services to the society had even lower average salaries. In the recent pandemic, the importance of their contribution became evident: The NBA league was suspended because of the coronavirus. Should the medical doctors, the nurses, the scientists not work to address the pandemic crisis, the NBA players and owners might not be able to continue making millions.

Beyond Players and Organizations: Value as a Commons

As becomes evident, players and organizations are entangled in a dialectical relationship. Sports organizations cannot exist without players, while professional players are meaningless without organizations. Value is produced from this entanglement, with neither one alone being the cause or the effect. Similarly, the NBA cannot operate in a world lacking basketball courts, ball-making factories, sports education or the idea of basketball as a game. All the underlying relations, decisions and interaction only makes sense in a certain community, co-creating these resources along with the shared rules that provide meaning. So, the NBA cannot exist without society.

That is why value should be seen as a commons, i.e. a shared resource that is collectively managed through community-based norms and rules (Bollier and Helfrich 2019; Kioupkiolis 2019). While capitalism is based on hierarchical control from above as well as on commodification practices, the commons is related to self-management, democracy and cultures in common (Stevenson 2019). Commodity prices, salaries, and earnings are mere quantifiable trade-offs that often distort the underlying relations. The real value of things and actions acquires meaning within a certain space and time, environment and culture. To achieve success (or happiness) and avoid injustice (or suffering) we need to classify them as products of our shared sociality, acknowledging the structural and unseen factors this sociality is based upon.

Unfortunately, the genuine value of the natural commons, like the air, oceans and forests, usually becomes visible when they are destroyed. Likewise, the value of relational commons that make organizations work can be appreciated when injustice occurs. But unlike natural commons, relationships are easier to fix once destroyed. Global inequality is a failure of our collective arrangements to do justice to the contribution of the many that brought success to the few.

Value as a commons entails these moments of evolutionary self-determinations when the commoners, i.e. those who participate in commoning, "outspokenly reclaim a new right to assert measures for the polity" (Brighenti 2018, 31). Commoners "deliberately and unconsciously shift between different regimes of values in the interactions with market actors and with community members" (Velkova and Jakobson 2017, 26). Commoning is thus culturally embedded and includes a multiverse of value regimes (Velkova and Jakobson 2017; Bauwens et al. 2019). The commons sphere could offer insights to understand value and experiment with more inclusive, emancipatory and sustainable ways of taking credit and sharing value. From the natural commons (e.g. land, fisheries) to the digital commons (e.g. open-source software, Wikipedia, open design and hardware communities), a pluralism of understandings of value exists (Bauwens et al. 2019).

Commoning includes co-creative practices through which the commoners themselves redefine the social categories of work and labor (Banks and Deuze 2009). The creative commons-based communities revolt by making their own measure, their own value regimes; to paraphrase Camus' "measure is not the opposite of the revolt; instead, the revolt itself is the measure" (Camus 1951; for a discussion of Camus regarding value metrics see Brighenti 2018. They try to disregard or transcend established measures of value and work and produce and live in an emerging sphere that is both immanent and transcendent to capitalism (Bauwens et al. 2019; Kostakis 2018).

Conclusions

In the Krause-Jordan dispute, we side with the former: “organizations, as a whole, win”. Moreover, any reply to the question whether Pippen was underpaid is relative and context-specific. From our point of view, Pippen was overpaid, as all NBA players are. The profits that the owners of the franchises make are absurd, too. The reason is that society takes little credit. For the same reasons we side with Krause, we claim that society should take more credit for enabling and supporting the NBA ecosystem. Through the case of *The Last Dance*, this paper showed that in the Chicago Bulls all value was socially produced. It was co-created but the monetary benefits of the value that could be marketized were captured by a few.

In other words, all value should be a commons. Value is contextual, and thus all value systems and approaches are imperfect while, most often, not all of us contribute the same. Hence, the aim should be not a shift from one monolithic value understanding to another one, excluding all previous activities. Instead, it is important to understand how to practically enable communities and societies to collectively self-determine value and develop practices to allow this recognition to take place. We thus highlight the need for scholars, practitioners and policymakers to critically discuss value by pointing to the commons for more inclusive understandings of value.

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Max Weber (1864-1920)

Wolfgang Drechsler. 2020. "Max Weber (1864-1920) and Public Administration Today."
Halduskultuur: The Estonian Journal of Administrative Culture and Digital Governance 21(1), 86-91

Max Weber (1864-1920) and Public Administration Today

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Max Weber passed away on 14 June 1920 at the early age of 56, from consequences of the last pandemic – the Spanish Flu (Kaesler 2014, 15-16). During the last 100 years, Weber's position as one of the world's great economists, sociologists, social science theorists, and public administration scholars has been secure (see Whimster 2004), if with ups and downs. Weber's eminence is probably the least contested in the last field – not uncontested, for sure, as eminence must attract criticism. Ups and downs yes, but Weber remains central. At a minimum, we may say that he is the most important public administration thinker of his time, even of modern public administration. One can think with or against Weber in public administration, but by and large, not really without him. We therefore decided that it was not only fitting, but even necessary, to include a short tribute to him in a *Halduskultuur* issue this year, *a fortiori* seeing that this journal has carried several studies of Max Weber, Weberianism, and the Neo-Weberian State (e.g. Samier 2005; Drechsler 2005; 2009; Kostakis 2011), and indeed, that the concept of Administrative *Culture* is particularly Weberian.

Weber is most often associated with Weberian bureaucracy, i.e. hierarchical, career-organized, competence-based, rules- and files-based public administration of the now traditional type (when he conceived of it, this was public sector innovation), outlined by a short but powerful segment of *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft* (1922, 124-130). However, Weber was a Weberian only to the extent that Luther was a Lutheran or Marx was a Marxist: somewhat, but certainly not totally so. In fact, Weber did not particularly like what we understand today as Weberian public administration, often used interchangeably with the term "bureaucracy". He just thought it was the optimal administrative form, in the sense of rationalization, for the time and society he was analyzing (Germany at the turn of the 19th to the 20th century – both for the public and for the private sector). Nobody would have been more surprised than him that his framework is still the most used – and best – 100 years later. Indeed, it is often applied to systems for which it was never intended. But what is important is that, as in the case of Lutheranism and Marxism, both Weber's actual thought and what "Weberian" stands for, in public administration and otherwise, are interesting areas of scholarly inquiry.

In fact, Weberian public administration in the wider sense has been, and still is, much maligned; bureaucracy is an easy target, and whining about it is a steady feature of complex human societies, which always need and automatically generate it. And Weberian public administration has its systemic faults – slowness, process-orientation, a slippery slope to authoritarian, mindless hierarchization and shirking. However, this bureaucracy is in its optimal form ethics-based, high-capacity, and motivation-driven. It is meant to be both responsible – to a state that is above and beyond particular interests – and responsive – to groups and citizens, but not at the cost of the commonweal.

But neoliberal ideology never believed that this kind of civil service was real, or pretended not to. So Weberian public administration became the *bête noire* of the New Public Management (NPM). NPM transferred economic principles and management theories into the public sphere without recognizing the crucial, fundamental differences between public and private, not least as regards value creation. It was a direct reaction against what was felt to be the excesses of the Weberian public administration of the 1970s and beyond, as well as a product of fundamentalist anti-state ideology. We still stand in front of the smoldering ruins of a capable, responsible state because of the NPM onslaught, and we are still paying a high price for it. It is true that imperial civil servants of the Sir Humphrey Appleby – of *Yes, Minister* and *Prime Minister* fame – type exist that do not act in the public interest, and they exist a lot. There are plenty of incompetent civil servants as well, and the worst are those who combine both features. But the responsible, responsive civil service of the Weberian type existed and exists, and if there is an alternative to it in its best form, it would be interesting to learn what that could be.

There are valuable contributions of NPM, such as citizen participation, co-production, a managerial orientation, and a few more. Society has changed since 1920, too, if public administration not as much with it as we often like to believe (Drechsler and Kattel 2019). These aspects have been distilled into an updated model of Weberian public administration that the late Christopher Pollitt and *Halduskultuur* author and editorial board member Geert Bouckaert (2009) have called the Neo-Weberian State (NWS; Pollitt and Bouckaert 2004, 96-102). Importantly, the NWS starts with the classic Weberian variant and incorporates the lessons learned from NPM – not the other way round.

Regarding the other side of the traditional political spectrum, approaches that rail against Weberian public administration and any form of civil service, especially central civil service, from the perspective of Community Action, the Commons, or other forms of grass-roots, bottom-up decision-making, need to remember that Weberian bureaucracy – with all its faults – is also something like an insurance against the loudest, the richest, the most powerful in society dominating the discourse and gaining their rents. And sometimes central coordination is necessary, as is a cadre of well-motivated, competent civil servants that can actually accomplish such feats – not least for the moonshots at the center of mission-oriented innovation policy today (Mazzucato 2017). However we decide to manage the transition to a CO_2-neutral world – via Green Growth or Post-Growth – that process will have to be implemented by competent, motivated, and yes, Weberian civil servants. Along these lines, Vasilis Kostakis has therefore developed, in these pages, the idea of a Neo-Weberian "partner state" (2011).

This leads us to three aspects of Weberian public administration that are of utmost relevance for 2020 and beyond.

First, in innovation policy, the most successful systems, perhaps all successful ones, are marked by agile stability, as Rainer Kattel, Erkki Karo and I have been arguing (Kattel et al. 2019; 2021). Innovation bureaucracies are necessary because no policy implements itself, and innovation bureaucracy ecosystems need to be calibrated towards meeting the needs of the specific situation within the national innovation process, sometimes reacting in an agile manner, sometimes giving the stability the system needs. It is not the point of an innovation bureaucracy to imitate the kind of innovative organization of the day that the private sector sports; rather, it may be wise to fulfill those needs not covered by the latter. Stability is always associated with Weber; agility, however, more often with Schumpeter – yet Weber actually theorized both approaches as well as their interplay, which is why we call these types Weber I and Weber II.

Second, as I have just suggested, in line with this train of thought, in *Max Weber Studies* (Drechsler 2020a), it was actually Weber who, in his book on Confucianism, recognized why the Chinese empire could be as economically successful as it was, dominating the global economy across many centuries, even though its Neo-Confucian bureaucracy was geared towards stability. (The answer is the concept of the Mandate of Heaven, which provided the mandarins on all levels, up to the emperor, with an overall, severe performance indicator of which economic success was a key part.)

What is important in today’s context is that Weber was very careful to think in categories of non-Western civilization and Non-Western Public Administration. I would argue that overall, he was not a one-size-fits-all Western imperialist, although he was certainly not free from orientalism, in line with his times. But he did acknowledge his own deficiencies, yet did not use those as an excuse not to study cultures beyond what he recognized to be the Western model. For him, Confucian public administration was the most similar model to “his”, although based on a different mindset and thus with different effects regarding Capitalism. Because of this, Weber has remained a focus of scholarly attention in all of his fields, especially in Asia, and many of the conferences planned for the centennial of his death were actually scheduled to take place in mainland China.

Third, it was often surmised that the rise of Information and Communication Technology, the ascendancy of e-Governance and what we call digital transformation, would lead us either to NPM – or at least to some specific form of digital-era governance (Dunleavy et al. 2005). Not so: in fact, what we see is that e-governance has been implemented the best and most successfully mostly in those countries that at their core have a Weberian bureaucracy, now again in the wider sense. Some of them, such as Finland and even Estonia, seem NPM-like but underneath are very Weberian; others, such as Singapore, are Weberian in that wider sense, while uniting a well-working Westminster bureaucracy with Confucian public administration. Others again, such as New Zealand, which used to be the poster child of NPM, have long learned their lesson and are now again Weberian. I would go so far as to say that there is no country today that is more Weberian in a functional, ethical sense than New Zealand, and that this is part of the reason why that country is doing so very well (see Ideasroom 2019), including the response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The latter is an observation that, at least at the time of writing, can only be generalized very cautiously indeed (Nemec et al. 2020). Overall, the countries that have so far dealt with the crisis in a good way are the Confucian and the directly Weberian ones, from Taiwan (even if this may be changing), South Korea and Vietnam to Germany (if, unfortunately, only during the first wave) and New Zealand, that are built on administrative competence and state resources (Mazzucato and Quaggiotto 2020). In contrast, those countries where administrative capacity has been dismantled by NPM, first and foremost the United States and the United Kingdom, are failing. This is, of course, not the only reason for a good pandemic response, nor is it apparently sufficient. It is also true that many East Asian countries were successful because they were prepared due to the SARS epidemic and its response, but the quality of that response, and institutional memory, rested on a high-value, high-capacity civil service. It would therefore hardly be frivolous to say that today, to live in a place with Weberian public administration or not may be a matter of life and death.

Weber, as a person and as a thinker, was not perfect and beyond reproach. And Weberian public administration, normatively and empirically, is not the only framework through which to understand the public sector. Yet these are caveats that do not distract from the crucial importance of Weber's public administration theory and its legacy.

2020 is not the best year for statues, and Weber never had one anyway. But he has a better monument – as the epitaph to Sir Christopher Wren in St. Paul's cathedral reads: "If you search for a monument, look around you." We still live in an administered world, and there is no reason to think this will fade anytime soon (O'Flynn 2020). The 100th anniversary of Max Weber's death reminds us to critically and constructively engage with his thought, as his thought remains one of the best frameworks to approach the challenges of the next 100 years to come, intellectually as well as for the improvement of one of the key features of human existence today, and that is public administration.

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