

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 (Podgórnjak-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 (Gendźwił 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; Gendźwił 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 km²) 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 Opiola (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 similar 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

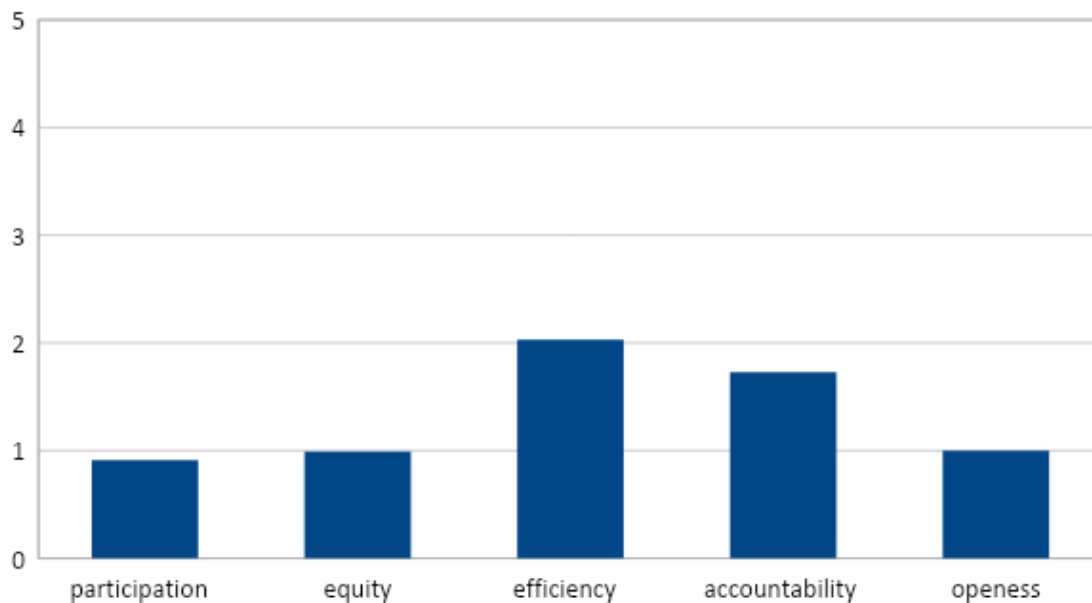
Table 1: The commune-level governance quality index (operationalization)

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 office¹⁶, 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	<u>8</u>	<u>8</u>	<u>11</u>	<u>8</u>
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 subrogation¹⁸, 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 PLN¹⁹ 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 "sorealistic 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 *Współnota* 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.

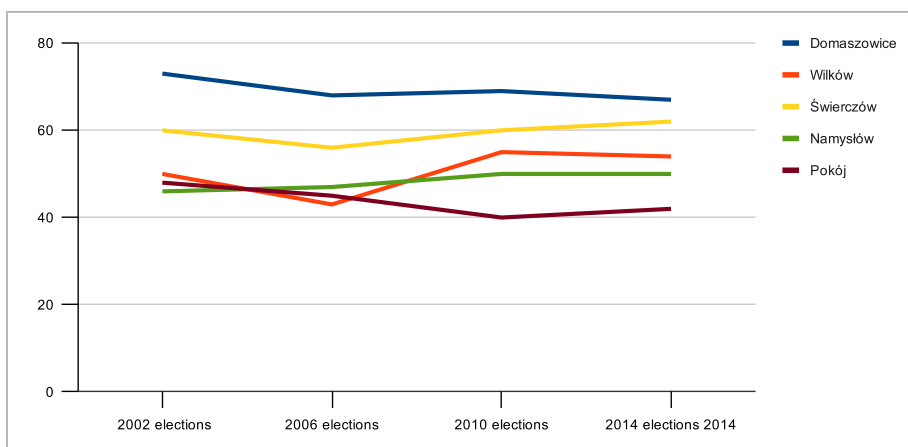
Firstly, during the many terms of office the commune leader managed to create a well-functioning system of connections with the local electorate. In the author's opinion, this may be the reason for the highest turnout in local elections among the communes in the district (see Graphs 2 and 3). One of 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).

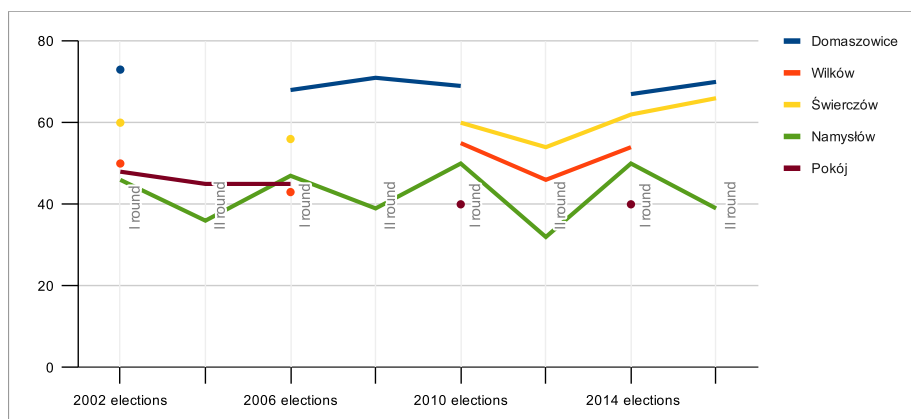
Graph 2: Voter turnout in commune council elections in the Namysławski District



Source: The data of the National Electoral Commission

²⁴ In one of the interviews, the commune leader states that, among the communes of the Namysławski 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)
Głucholazy	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
Chrzęstowice	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
Wolczyn	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
Strzeleczy	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 Wielkie	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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