

BASIC VALUES OF LOCAL GOOD GOVERNANCE IN RURAL AREAS IN POLAND

Małgorzata MARKS-KRZYSZKOWSKA^{1*}, Wawrzyniec RUDOLF²

¹ Uniwersytet Łódzki, Wydział Ekonomiczno-Socjologiczny, Katedra Socjologii Wsi i Miasta;
malgorzata.marks@uni.lodz.pl, ORCID: 0000-0001-9430-8476

² Uniwersytet Łódzki, Wydział Zarządzania, Katedra Zarządzania Miastem i Regionem;
wawrzyniec.rudolf@uni.lodz.pl, ORCID: 0000-0003-0729-7823

* Correspondence author

Purpose: This article contributes to the discussion on local good governance (LGG) by proposing an indicator that takes into account the main values of LGG, measures its level, and considers selected determinants. The considerations were based on an assessment of the actions of local authorities from the perspective of residents in rural areas in Poland.

Design/methodology/approach: A bibliometric analysis of works dedicated to LGG and its main principles was conducted. Additionally, a quantitative data analysis was carried out based on a survey using the Computer-Assisted Telephone Interview (CATI) method among 700 residents of rural areas in Poland.

Findings: The bibliometric analysis revealed a research gap in the issues addressed. The empirical study provides evidence of a moderately positive assessment of actions in terms of credibility, transparency, participatory readiness, willingness to share power, responsiveness, and efficiency. Psychosocial factors significantly influenced the evaluation of LGG. Sociodemographic variables did not significantly differentiate the assessments.

Research limitations/implications: Quantitative research has a general nature. It would be valuable to also apply qualitative methods to deepen the understanding of the interpretation of individual LGG values by both rural and urban communities, taking into account the local context.

Practical implications: The relatively poor assessment of local authorities' activities from the perspective of LGG principles suggests the need to reconsider the introduction of changes in this sphere of public governance.

Social implications: The discussion of the role of LGG values can contribute to greater awareness and solidify these principles among both the authorities and citizens.

Originality/value: The contribution to the development of knowledge includes the characterisation of the dynamics and trends in the international scientific discourse on local governance. It also constructs and empirically verifies the LGG indicator (based on statistical analyses).

Keywords: local good governance, value of governance, rural areas, Poland.

Category of the paper: Research paper.

1. Introduction

Increasingly aware citizens worldwide expect elected authorities to act in line with their expectations (Farazmand, 2004). However, the success of the democratic system depends on the trust that citizens place in it (Houston, Harding, 2013). This trust grows with the increasing assessment of individual governance values such as transparency, accountability, and responsiveness of power (Beshi, Kaur, 2020). It is hard to dispute the thesis that the issue of measuring this phenomenon is becoming increasingly important (Besancon, 2003). Internationally developed principles of good governance are successfully adopted at the local level in many countries and continents (Council of Europe, 2007). However, there is a belief that the unique characteristics of individual countries or regions of the world determine the proposed solutions, for example, the Methodological Guidelines for Local Governance Analysis in Latin America (UNDP, 2008).

The measurement of good governance has been the subject of numerous studies and has resulted in developments that make it possible to quantify its values/dimensions. Below, we list a few of the most promising approaches related to the local level:

- *Good Governance for Local Development* – Representation, Participation, Accountability, Transparency, Effectiveness, Security, and Equity (UNDP, 2009);
- *The Local Governance Barometer* – Effectiveness, Transparency and rule of law, Accountability, Participation and civic engagement, and Equity (Bloom, Sunseri, Leonard, 2007);
- *Indicators of Local Democratic Governance* – Policy-making performance: informed and coordinated decisions; Democratic performance: openness and fairness; Policy implementation: effectiveness; Responsive performance: satisfaction and goal congruence; and The level of service provision as a performance measurement (Soós, 2001);
- *The Urban Governance Index* – Effectiveness, Equity, Participation and Accountability (UN-HABITAT, 2005);

Most studies are based on measurable criteria, while there is a deficit in measurement based on residents' subjective satisfaction with the exercised power, considering the assessment of individual principles. Topics related to good governance in rural areas also attract considerably less attention from researchers, as we will attempt to demonstrate in the next part of the paper. Rural areas still constitute the majority of land in individual countries, and their population is a significant part of societies. It is estimated that more than 76% of the units¹ in European Union countries are classified as rural, and more than 86% of the Union's territory is located in the territories of rural municipalities (Jonard et al., 2009). The population density index for Poland

¹ Communes with a population density of less than 150 km².

in 2022 was 121 km². Therefore, it can be assumed that the whole country meets the criterion of delimitating rural areas according to the OECD classification. Taking into account the country's internal territorial division, rural municipalities (1513 units) and rural areas of urban-rural municipalities (662) constituted 92% of the total area, and in 2022, 40% of the Polish population inhabited these areas (Statistics Poland). Therefore, it seems that the characteristics of rural communities must be considered in the context of effectively implementing good governance principles.

The purpose of the article is to contribute to the discussion on local good governance (LGG) by proposing an indicator that incorporates the main values of LGG, measures its level, and considers selected determinants. The considerations are based on an assessment of the actions of local authorities from the perspective of residents in rural areas in Poland.

2. Governance at the local level

Governance has been promoted by international organisations for three decades, initially targeting countries with deficits in institutional and democratic systems. Only later did more attention shift to the quality of governance at the local level, which will be further developed in this study. For this article, a bibliometric analysis was conducted, and its methodology is described in the footnote².

² The bibliometric study focused on scientific articles found in the SCOPUS database on November 4, 2023, with the author-provided keywords "local governance" (976 articles). Subsequently, a reduction was applied by selecting those classified in the field of social sciences and written in English. As a result, 620 articles were further subjected to comparisons and analyses. Additionally, articles (35) were distinguished in which the keywords included both "local governance" and "rural". To visualize the results (keyword map, keyword co-occurrence map, co-authorship network), the VOSViewer program was employed.

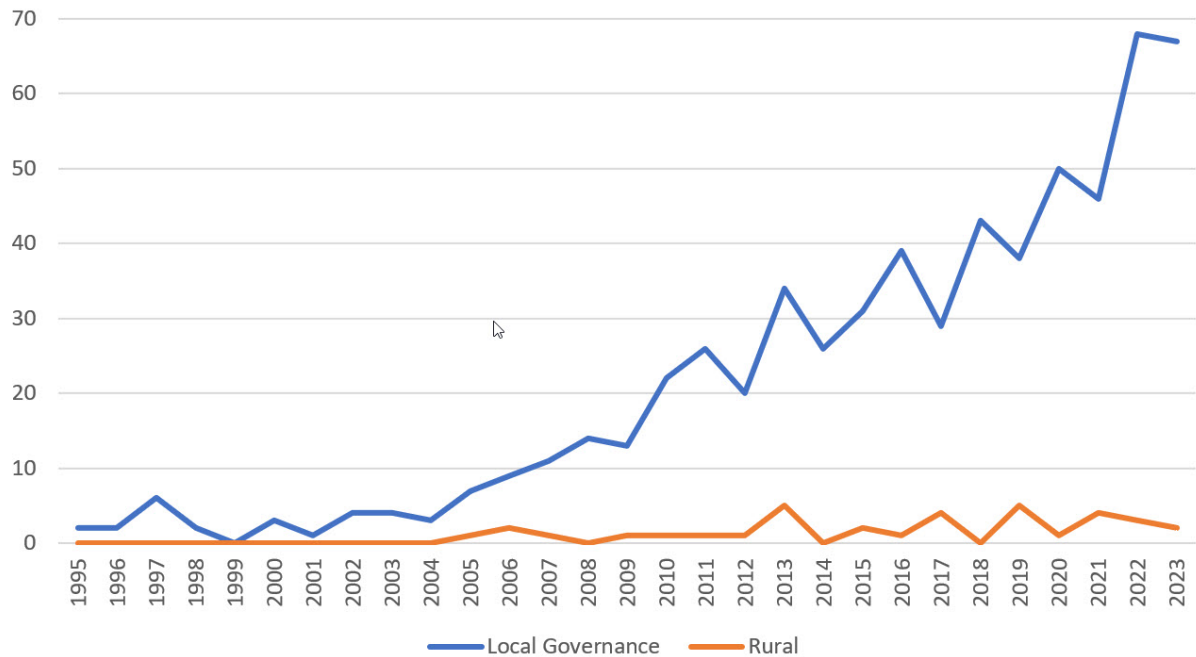


Figure 1. The number of articles related to local governance (n = 620) published annually, as well as the number that specifically focus on rural areas (n = 35).

Source: Own compilation based on 620 records from the SCOPUS database.

The results of the analyses, based on keywords, clearly demonstrate a systematic increase in international researchers' interest in local governance, especially over the last 20 years (Figure 1). The most significant growth occurred in 2021/2022, during the Covid-19 pandemic. This may be because projects initiated before 2020 were being implemented during this time. However, the slightly lower result in 2023 may be associated with the fact that November and December have not been taken into account yet.

Nevertheless, few of these publications (just under 6%) address local co-governance in rural areas. There were 35 academic articles that included "rural" in the keywords. They included terms such as rural area/s (14), rural development (13), rural politics (7), rural policy/ies (5), rural resources (2), and rural livelihoods (2). The first article that included both "local governance" and "rural" in the keywords appeared only in 2005. In subsequent years, there were between 1 and 5 such articles annually (Diagram 1). This moderate scale of literature development on rural governance demonstrates a relative research deficit in relation to rural areas compared to the dynamic growth of literature in the broader category of local co-governance. Publications in this field have been published in a variety of journals. Journals such as *World Development*, *Local Government Studies*, the *Journal of Chinese Political Science*, *Environment Development and Sustainability*, and *China Quarterly* each featured two articles. The remaining 25 articles were published in 25 different academic journals, indicating that this subject matter is fragmented and the discourse does not revolve around specific perspectives.



Figure 2. Word cloud based on authors' keywords.

Source: Own compilation based on 620 records from the SCOPUS database.

Figure 2 shows the keywords that co-occur with the term “local governance”. Their frequency is reflected in the font size. Particularly prominent are decentralisation, participation, and citizen participation, indicating that most of the social science literature is indeed related to contemporary decentralisation and civic participation. Individual dimensions of good governance, such as accountability, collaboration, transparency, and partnership, also appear. The keywords also include names of territories or countries likely related to the described examples. The most common ones include China, Ghana, Indonesia, and India, as well as broadly defined territories such as Africa and Latin America. This may be related to the fact that the term governance gained popularity in the context of democracy support programmes by international organisations such as the World Bank in countries with lower levels of development.

The VOSviewer programme makes it possible to identify co-occurring keywords in the form of a keyword co-occurrence map. Diagram 3 presents these associations using different colours for the 14 identified clusters. The programme visualised the connections by considering the 54 keywords that appeared the most frequently in the analyzed set of articles.

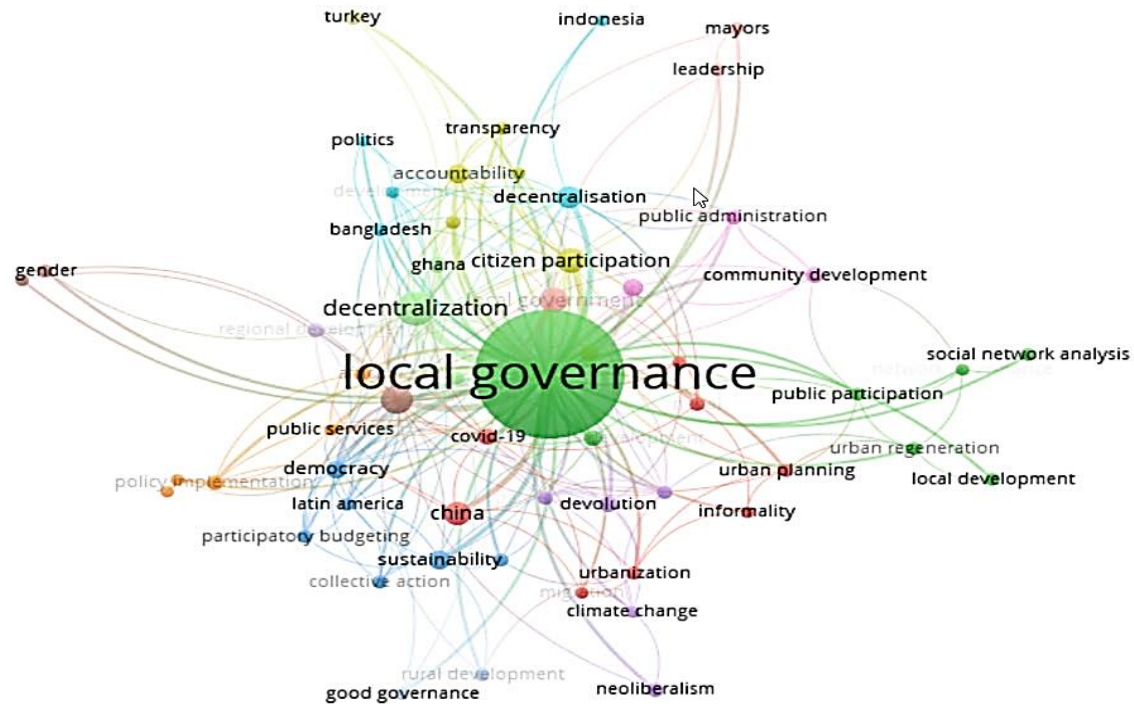


Figure 3. Co-occurrence of keywords for the term “local governance” grouped into 14 clusters.

Source: Own compilation based on 620 records from the SCOPUS database.

In the context of the theme of this article, the blue cluster is noteworthy, as it comprises elements (keywords) such as sustainability, democracy, Latin America, participatory budgeting, collective action, good governance, rural development, and local governance. The term “rural development” appeared sporadically, indicating a research gap that justifies the undertaking of this study.

Among the subsequent notable networks of connections, other noteworthy clusters include the green one (decentralisation, public administration, local development, public participation, urban regeneration, Ghana, local governance), the red one (China, COVID-19, urban planning, urbanisation, climate change, informality, local governance), and the yellow one (citizen participation, accountability, Turkey, local governance).

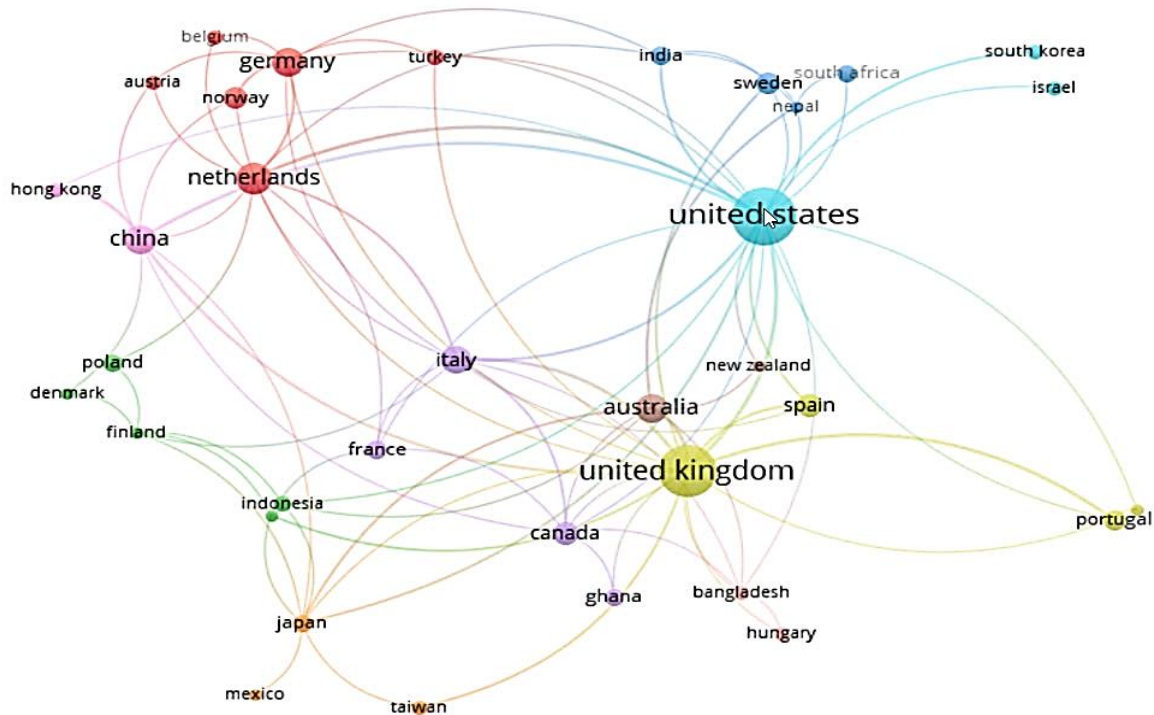


Figure 4. Countries from which scientists are co-authors of articles on local governance.

Source: Own compilation based on 620 records from the SCOPUS database.

Figure 4 visualises the countries around which research networks that focus on local governance are formed. The clear leaders are the United States and the United Kingdom, followed closely by the Netherlands, China, Germany, and Italy. Polish-authored works on local governance seldom gain international academic recognition. Occasional collaborations have been recorded with social scientists from the Netherlands or Scandinavian countries.

In the context of rural areas, the term “governance” first appeared in the late 1990s in articles by authors from the United Kingdom, the United States, Australia, and New Zealand (Goodwin, 2017; Martin, Halpin, 1998; Mattson, 1997; Perry et al., 1997). At the time, these countries were leaders in the development of governance as an alternative to the New Public Management model in public administration (Anders-Morawska, Rudolf, 2015).

In the Polish literature, over the past decade, local governance has emerged in various contexts. The authors of a monograph on the authorities and administration of Polish Voivodeship Cities successfully operationalised governance using marketing processes (Anders-Morawska, Rudolf, 2015). Research on the establishment and functioning of consultative structures in Polish cities demonstrated the practice of governance (see, e.g. Pawłowska, Radzik-Maruszak, 2022). Meanwhile, co-governance in the context of building local partnerships in rural areas has been explored through Leader projects co-financed by the European Union (e.g., Fałkowski, 2013; Furmankiewicz, Macken-Walsh, 2016) or in the context of practical collaboration in ecological agricultural production (Śpiewak, Jasiński, 2020). However, attempts to measure the values of good governance in rural areas in Poland are still rare, further justifying the study described below.

3. Disseminating good governance values

The discussion of the values that constitute good governance is ongoing and varies based on the level of authority or cultural context. A key stakeholder in this discussion is the World Bank, which pioneered the development of a list of dimensions of this concept, although these efforts were initially directed at the national level. Below are the dimensions/values around which the World Bank formulates specific indicators (Kaufmann et al., 2009); these are:

1. Voice and accountability: Captures the perception of the extent to which citizens in a given country can participate in the selection of the government, as well as freedom of speech, freedom of association, and free media.
2. Political Stability and Absence of Violence: Measured by the likelihood of government destabilisation or overthrow through unconstitutional or violent means, including politically motivated violence and terrorism.
3. Government Effectiveness: Assesses the perception of the quality of public services, the quality of the civil service and its independence from political pressures, the quality of policy formulation and implementation, and the government's credibility in pursuing such policies.
4. Regulatory Quality: Evaluates the perception of the government's ability to formulate and implement reasonable policies and regulations that enable and promote the development of the private sector.
5. Rule of Law: Assesses the perception of the extent to which entities trust social principles and adhere to them, particularly the quality of enforcing contracts, property rights, police, and courts, as well as the likelihood of crime and violence.
6. Control of corruption: Evaluates the perception of the extent to which public power is exercised for private gain, including both petty and grand forms of corruption, as well as the "capture" of the state by elites and private interests.

The dimensions mentioned above have been a standard in democratic countries for years, and the World Bank's effort was especially directed towards African and South American countries where adherence to these values was lower.

For the countries of the European Union and candidate countries, the provisions of the White Paper on European Governance (European Commission, 2001) are important. The document outlines the following values: openness, participation, accountability, efficiency, and coherence. Coherence is understood as coordination and consistency in implementing programmes, strategies, and policies. In the same way that developing countries must undertake reforms to secure funding from the World Bank, Poland, as a beneficiary of EU cohesion policy, is encouraged to more fully implement the principles of good governance in the shaping and implementation of public policies.

However, guided by the argument that measuring governance should take into account both local and regional conditions, two attempts to operationalise it are presented below. The first was carried out in relation to the regional self-government administration authorities (Czyż, 2009). He adopted overarching values such as openness/transparency, partnership, effectiveness, efficiency, and coherence. In line with these values, he formulated a series of indicators mainly related to evaluating the implementation of tasks and activities of regional administration. By contrast, the second example concerns the creation of a governance indicator system in Poland by ECORYS, as carried out in 2008. An extended list of eight dimensions/values was adopted: the democratic rule of law, transparency, accountability, participation, social inclusion, effectiveness and efficiency, the rule of law, and consensus-oriented management.

4. Research methodology

This research focuses on LGG. Using opinions on values that align with the concept of good governance, an overall LGG indicator is constructed. Opinions on this matter are vital, as they allow for a better understanding of the actual needs and expectations of local communities in the context of LGG. Furthermore, by recognising residents' opinions, the scope and unique characteristics of local government practices can be assessed, and areas for improvement can be identified. This, in turn, can help improve decision-making and the implementation of local policies. Therefore, research in this area can contribute to the development of evidence-based management models.

Based on the purpose of the article, three main research questions have been formulated:

1. How do rural residents assess the activity of local authorities from the perspective of implementing basic values of good governance?
2. Which of the assessed dimensions will prove appropriate for the construction of a synthetic LGG index?
3. Is there any variation in these assessments based on the sociodemographic and psychosocial characteristics of the respondents?

The findings from the Public Opinion Research Center (*Oceny działalności...*, 2022) indicate that in Poland, local authorities receive comparatively higher evaluations than other public institutions, especially regarding rural areas. Furthermore, half of rural residents positively assess the effectiveness, believing that the funds at the disposal of local authorities are spent appropriately; only 18% believe the opposite (*Oceny władz...*, 2018). This suggests that a considerable group are satisfied with the actions of the authorities, but also that up to one-third of the population is not interested in these matters. In 2018, 80% of village residents (77% of city residents) declared an interest in the decisions of the commune authorities

(Wybory samorządowe..., 2018). At the same time, fewer residents of villages (48%) than cities (63%) wanted more influence on what happens in their commune. It can be assumed that respondents in the above-mentioned studies will appreciate aspects related to representative democracy more than direct democracy. Other studies also suggest that rural residents highly rate municipal authorities and their past actions; the opinions of men do not differ significantly from those of women (Marks-Krzyszowska, 2021).

Therefore, we anticipate that the rural residents who participate in our study will generally evaluate the actions of local authorities more favourably, particularly women, respondents with higher education, individuals displaying a heightened interest in municipal affairs, as well as those with better-informed perspectives on municipal issues. Furthermore, we posit that the variables we identified, including transparency, credibility, participation, power sharing, responsiveness, and effectiveness, will be especially relevant within the local framework of the good governance concept.

4.1. Constructing the variables

In our research, we have designated an LGG assessment as the dependent variable. We constructed it following this procedure. First, the following variables that most substantially reflect the core values of local good governance were identified and characterised both substantively and statistically:

- **Credibility:** Understood as the fulfilment of promises made to voters.
- **Transparency:** Residents' ability to control the implementation of authorities' tasks is a fundamental pillar of democracy. The authorities' actions should be carried out transparently, and the effects should be readily accessible to those who are interested. Transparency is understood as the ability to monitor the activities of the authorities.
- **Participation:** The authorities' openness to collaboration, even with entities that hold different views.
- **Power Sharing:** Sharing power with residents is one of the fundamental principles of direct democracy, good governance, and collaborative governance. Not all people in authority, even those who approve of certain forms of public participation, are willing to allow residents to make decisions, even in selected areas. An example could be a village or civic fund.
- **Effectiveness:** Understood as achieving a goal; the goal of local authorities who represent residents is to satisfy their collective needs; the effectiveness of actions can be measured by the residents' level of satisfaction with the actions of institutions managed by the municipal authorities. The quality of public services can directly impact resident satisfaction. Better efficiency and a better understanding of the needs of the community usually translate into greater satisfaction. We assume that this assessment will correspond to the extent that needs are met in this area, hence the effectiveness of authorities.

- **Responsiveness:** The ability of the authorities to adapt to changing circumstances, public opinions, or citizen pressure. The term emphasises the authorities' ability to respond to expectations and feedback from society. In the study, we understand this characteristic as the authorities' readiness to change decisions as a result of citizen intervention³.

The respondents were asked to assess the dimensions of the actions of local authorities and their effects⁴. In all cases, the evaluations were conducted using a seven-point Likert-like scale ranging from 0 to 6, where 0 indicated the lowest rating and 6 the highest.

The next step in the research procedure was to construct the synthetic LGG assessment indicator. It involved estimating the level of consistency among the partial indices used to create the overall synthetic index. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the variables hovered at 0.888, which is deemed satisfactory from the perspective of the reliability of the scale. Therefore, we concluded that components such as credibility, transparency, participation, willingness to share power, responsiveness, and effectiveness reasonably constitute a coherent phenomenon, namely the LGG index.

The independent variables included the following:

- Sociodemographic characteristics (such as sex, age, place of residence, education).
- Psychosocial characteristics, including the level of interest in municipal management (plans, decision making, and task implementation) and the sense of being informed about public life in the commune (such as the municipal authority's plans and decisions and generally important matters happening in the commune). The variables were characterised by comparing their arithmetic means.

To examine the relationship between the dependent variable (the composite index of the LGG assessment) and the independent variables, Pearson's correlation coefficient was used. It allowed us to estimate the strength and direction of the relationship between continuous variables. We used the arithmetic mean to analyse the relationship between a nominal variable (gender, place of residence, education) and a continuous variable.

³ The question pertained to the following scenario: "Suppose that the authorities of your commune intend to make a decision that you consider inappropriate or harmful. To what extent is it probable that if you were to attempt individually or collaboratively with others to take action in this matter, the municipal authorities would take such citizen activity seriously and reconsider their decision, reversing the decision?"

⁴ The question was formulated as follows: How do you evaluate the following aspects of the municipality's management, where 0 is very low and 6 is very high: 1) the municipal authorities consistently fulfil their promises; 2) the residents' ability to control the implementation of tasks by the municipal authorities; 3) the authorities' openness to cooperate with those who hold different views; 4) the authorities encourage residents to engage and participate in decision-making on all municipality matters, even those solely within the competence of the authorities. The respondents were also asked to indicate their satisfaction with various areas of life in the municipality, such as education, culture, health, road infrastructure, where 0 indicated that they were very dissatisfied, and 6 indicated they were very satisfied.

4.2. Description of the survey

We seek answers to our research questions based on data collected during research conducted between June 1 and June 30, 2023, using the Computer-Assisted Telephone Interview method (CATI) among a sample of 700 adult residents of rural areas in Poland. The sample selection was randomised, with the strata represented by the 16 voivodeships. The number of interviews conducted in each voivodeship was proportional to the population size of rural residents in the structure of the voivodeship, as well as gender and age. Therefore, the results are representative of rural residents in Poland. The survey included all adult individuals registered in the voivodeship and those without a permanent registered address but who had resided there for at least six months in the past calendar year. This article presents a portion of the results related to the respondents' opinions on selected dimensions of local good governance (dependent variable) and their subjective assessment of their interest in the public sphere in the municipality (independent variable).

Most of the respondents resided in rural municipalities (79%), while the remainder were residents of rural areas within urban-rural municipalities (21%). The study included 348 women and 352 men. For comparison, according to Statistics Poland (GUS BDL), in rural areas of Poland in 2022, there were more than 7.619 million men and 7.658 million women, indicating nearly equal gender proportions.

The average age of the respondents was 47 years. In terms of age structure, people between 35 and 54 years old predominated (39%). The second-largest group comprised older people, 55 and older (37%). The youngest participants (18-34 years old) were the least numerous, comprising 25%. The youngest respondent was 18 years old, while the oldest was 78.

Analysis of the educational structure of the respondents leads to the conclusion that there are two better-educated and relatively better-educated groups of respondents, i.e., those with secondary education (47%) and those with tertiary education (32%). Less educated respondents (no education beyond primary or vocational education) constituted a minority of 21%.

5. Results

For a better understanding of LGG, an assessment of individual aspects that constitute this phenomenon is presented (Table 1). Subsequently, an investigation is conducted to determine whether and how strongly they are interconnected. It is assumed that a significant correlation between these elements would indicate that the appropriate variables had been selected to build the LGG indicator.

The level of satisfaction, which served as a measure of the effectiveness of the actions of the authorities, was the highest across all dimensions examined (average rating: 3.49). The question of effectiveness relates to the areas of operation of local institutions managed by municipal authorities, functioning in domains such as education, health, safety, communication, and road infrastructure. It can be assumed that the subject of evaluation is relatively well recognised by respondents compared to others, as they have daily contact with it. However, the result indicates that the assessment of the effectiveness of actions is not high.

Moderately positive evaluations were also given to the credibility of the authorities, i.e., consistently fulfilling promises made to voters (3.32). Responsiveness, understood as the authorities' willingness to reverse decisions due to the intervention of residents, was also relatively positively assessed (3.26). Slightly lower ratings characterise the possibility of citizens controlling the authorities (transparency) (3.23) and the authorities' readiness to share power (3.21). Values such as effectiveness, credibility, and transparency may reflect the principles of representative democracy. Representative democracy assumes that citizens have the right to choose representatives to act on their behalf, meet collective needs, and control their actions, such as fulfilling promises or performing duties correctly.

In this case, the relatively high ratings may mean that people in rural areas are happy with or accepting of these kinds of practices. This is different from the needs of direct democracy, which also values leaders who are willing to share power and talk with groups that often have different opinions. The latter element in our studies received the lowest assessment (3.15). Earlier research (Kalisiak-Mędelska, 2012; Marks-Krzyszowska, 2017; Marks-Krzyszowska et al., 2022) supports the notion that there is a low likelihood of Polish rural municipal authorities being receptive to involving residents in co-governance.

In summary, the evaluation of local authorities' performance through the prism of LGG values is relatively low, with averages only slightly exceeding 3. This may suggest that the majority of respondents lack sufficient knowledge on the subject and choose responses from the middle of the scale cautiously, or they perceive weaknesses in the authorities in those aspects. In all LGG dimensions analysed, the respondents assigned similar ratings to the local authorities. The difference between individual dimensions is small, i.e., approximately 1/3 of a point.

Table 1.

Assessing the value of local good governance

Item	Feature	
	Average	Standard deviation
Effectiveness	3.49	1.238
Credibility	3.32	1.549
Responsiveness	3.26	1.460
Transparency	3.23	1.520
Power sharing	3.21	1.568
Participation	3.15	1.563

Note. N = 700.

Source: Authors' own elaboration.

We used the Pearson correlation coefficient to examine the interrelationship between the variables. The relationships were statistically significant ($p < 0.001$) and were characterised by a positive direction and high strength (Table 2).

The strongest relationships were observed between the credibility of the authorities, understood as fulfilling complex promises, and transparency, that is, the possibility of citizen control (0.702) and participativeness (0.684). This implies a fairly obvious dependence: as actions become more transparent – allowing for greater control – the credibility also increases, enabling the verification of the implementation of electoral promises. With a slightly weaker but also relatively high strength, there is a relationship between the assessment of the authorities' willingness to share power and participativeness (0.674) and credibility (0.676). It is understandable that authorities that are open to cooperation with everyone, even the opposition, are perceived as being willing to enable others to effectively influence decisions. Furthermore, active individuals have a better opportunity to control the actions of the authorities. The higher the transparency rating of the authorities' actions, the higher the rating of participativeness (0.648) and power sharing (0.647).

The relationship between variables that identify the effectiveness of actions and other dimensions, i.e. credibility (0.542), transparency (0.544) and power-sharing (0.507), is slightly weak compared to other dimensions. The relationship between the effectiveness of action and the effectiveness of participation is relatively weak (0.498). This suggests that the involvement of other entities in management does not always correspond to the effectiveness of participation by individuals with different views from those of the authorities (Miessen, Choptiany (2016). The weakest relationships characterise responsiveness, effectiveness (0.305), and participativeness (0.384). This may indicate that from the residents' perspective, changing decisions under the influence of public opinion is not always perceived as an action that ensures effectiveness, similar to inviting opponents to the discussion. On the other hand, a difference was found between the willingness to reverse a decision and the willingness to share power (0.422). Therefore, it can be assumed that reversing a decision due to social pressure is not always identified as an act of power sharing.

The dimensions of LGG that we analysed are, therefore, statistically significantly interrelated, although the strength of the relationship between individual dimensions varies. We empirically confirm a phenomenon that is reasonably well described in the theoretical literature.

The sum of the values of all the variables discussed above, divided by their number (6), allowed us to obtain a synthetic index of LGG assessment in rural areas. The mean value was 3.27 (standard deviation: 1.163). This means that, like the partial indices, the LGG assessment was positive, although it only slightly exceeded the midpoint. All variables influenced the value, but the variables that assessed credibility ($P = 0.853$) and power-sharing ($P = 0.845$) exhibited the strongest correlation.

Table 2.*Pearson correlation coefficients between sub-variables of (values) of LGG*

Item	Feature					
	Credibility	Trans- parency	Partici- pation	Power sharing	Effective- ness	Responsive -ness
Transparency	0.702					
Participation	0.684	0.648				
Power sharing	0.676	0.647	0.674			
Effectiveness	0.542	0.540	0.498	0.507		
Responsiveness	0.370	0.384	0.361	0.422	0.305	
LGG index	0.853	0.840	0.832	0.845	0.705	0.604

All relationships are relevant at the level of <0.001 , $N = 700$.

Source: Authors' own elaboration.

In seeking answers to the next research question, selected explanatory variables related to sociodemographic factors (gender, place of residence, age, education) and psychosocial characteristics of respondents (interest in local government affairs, perception of being informed about local public life) were analysed. Sociodemographic characteristics were encoded as nominal variables; therefore, their impact on the explanatory variable will be examined using nonparametric methods, such as the mean (Appendix , Table 6)⁵.

Women tended to give slightly higher ratings than men, but this difference was not significant. An exception is how they evaluated the encouragement of individuals with different views to participate in decision-making, where men gave slightly higher ratings. The assessment of the ability to control authorities was the same regardless of sex. In summary, gender does not significantly differentiate the evaluation of LGG values.

The respondents' place of residence was a key differentiator in assessing the individual dimensions of LGG. Residents of rural areas in urban-rural municipalities generally rated the local authorities' activities higher than residents of rural municipalities. This was especially true for participatory aspects, power-sharing, and responsiveness. Perhaps this is due to the way such municipalities are organised. They are usually slightly larger in terms of population, indicating greater social differentiation and the need to cooperate with various social groups. The environments may be more closed.

The scores were also diverse according to age, although it is challenging to identify a clear pattern in this case. Younger individuals tended to give higher LGG ratings. The ratings given by respondents between the ages of 35 and 54 were lower for power-sharing, participatory aspects, and transparency. This age group represents the peak of public life activity. Older adults (55 years and older) gave the highest ratings to the authorities' effectiveness and credibility, i.e., whether they performed their commitments.

⁵ Consciously, despite the lack of methodological foundations for applying correlation coefficients, we attempted to calculate the Spearman or Pearson coefficient for this group of explanatory variables and the LGG index. Analyses indicated no statistical significance ($p > 0.005$) between them.

Education also influenced the ratings, although in an ambiguous manner. Respondents with a medium level of education tended to give slightly higher scores, while those with a basic education gave lower scores.

The second group of explanatory variables is related to the respondents' psychosocial characteristics. We examine the influence of variables such as:

- Interest in the management of the commune, that is, the authorities' plans, decision-making, and implementation of tasks;
- The degree of feeling informed about the plans and decisions of the commune authorities and about important matters happening in the commune.

Table 3.

Average level of interest in the management of the commune

Management aspects	Feature	
	Average	Standard deviation
Planning	3.92	1.674
Decision-making	3.65	1.655
Implementation and execution of tasks by the authorities	3.86	1.566

N = 700.

Source: The authors' own elaboration.

The level of interest in selected elements of municipal management is not high (Table 3). The respondents were more interested in following future municipal plans (3.92) and the implementation of tasks (3.86). The decision-making process was somewhat less frequently followed. However, the differences between the ratings of these aspects are small. Based on the variables presented, an index of interest in municipal management. The overall mean value for the respondents was 3.81 (with a minimum of 0, a maximum of 9, and a standard deviation of 1.506).

The next group of explanatory variables was related to the sense of being informed about the authorities' actions and important events in the municipality (Table 4).

Table 4.

Average level of interest in public life in the commune

Sense of information about:	Feature	
	Average	Standard deviation
Authorities' plans and decisions	3.22	1.594
Important issues in the commune	3.56	1.519

N = 700.

Source: Author's own elaboration.

The respondents felt relatively well-informed about what important and interesting events were happening in their municipality (3.56). They rated their awareness less favourably in the context of plans and decisions made by local authorities (3.22). Both variables formed a synthetic awareness index, characterised by an average value of 3.39 (min 0, max 6, standard deviation 1.142).

To clarify the relationship between LGG and the interest and awareness of the respondents, Pearson's correlation coefficient was used.

Table 5.

Pearson's correlation coefficients between the sub-variables of the LGG index, interest, and information on issues of the communes

Synthetic variables	Synthetic variables	
	LGG index	Interest in communes management
Interest in commune management	0.403	
Being informed about commune affairs	0.589	0.325

N = 700. P <= 0.001 for all correlations.

Source: Author's own elaboration.

The research confirms the positive correlation between the evaluation of the authorities' actions (LGG) and interest in municipal management, as well as the sense of being informed (Table 5). The higher the level of interest and awareness, the more positively the activities of municipal authorities are evaluated in terms of LGG. The relationship is reciprocal. However, the strength of the association with the sense of being informed was higher (0.589) than in the case of interest in management (0.403). The analyses also corroborated a somewhat evident relationship between the level of interest in management-related matters and the sense of being informed (0.325), although this was a relationship of relatively weaker magnitude.

6. Summary

The bibliometric analysis conducted within the field of local governance has facilitated an understanding of the dynamics of the literature development in this domain, shedding light on the research issues addressed and the countries around which scholarly discussions revolve. The findings of this analysis revealed a research gap on the topic of local governance in rural areas, which constituted the subject of exploration in the article.

The empirical study conducted among rural residents in Poland demonstrated a moderately positive assessment of actions in terms of credibility, transparency, participatory practices, and willingness to share power, as well as responsiveness and effectiveness. The difference in the average rating is not substantial (approximately 0.3 points). Effectiveness received the highest rating, while participatory practices, understood as inviting others, including the opposition, to cooperate, received the lowest rating. Rural residents' positive yet moderately evaluated actions of local authorities indicate the need for change. This assertion refers to a situation where both authorities and residents approve of a governance model based on the principles of good governance. However, based on the data, it is not possible to unequivocally determine whether the predominance of ratings toward the middle of the scale indicates a lack

of opinion or knowledge among the residents regarding good governance values or if it signifies higher expectations in this area.

Simultaneously, the results of the statistical analyses lead to the conclusion that the values largely reflect LGG in rural areas. From a theoretical perspective, the variables selected for analysis appropriately represent the aspects included in the synthetic index. Empirically, they were based on available and reliable survey research and proved to be significant from a statistical analysis point of view. This was confirmed by the high Pearson correlation coefficients, indicating that each variable contributes value to the overall LGG picture.

The average LGG rating reflected by the indicator is positive but not high (3.3 points on a scale of 0-6). The study suggests that psychosocial factors, such as awareness of local events and interest in local affairs, influence this rating. Social-demographic factors did not have a statistically significant impact, with only certain tendencies observed. Women and younger people with a medium level of education who lived in urban-rural municipalities gave better scores.

The interpretations are subject to limitations, however. We solely employed quantitative methods. Therefore, it would be valuable to expand the analyses to include qualitative methods to deepen our understanding of residents' interpretations of LGG values and how they are represented by their authorities, taking into account their local context. Additionally, a comparison of opinions between urban and rural communities would be interesting to explore.

Acknowledgements

The analyses presented herein are based on data collected as part of the research project entitled "Rural residents' perspectives on governance in rural communes," funded by the Dean's Reserve of the Faculty of Economic and Sociology at the University of Łódź (Project Number 2121055000 ESG).

References

1. Anders-Morawska, J., Rudolf, W. (2015). *Orientacja rynkowa we współzrządzeniu miastem*. Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego.
2. Beshi, T.D., Kaur, R. (2020). Public Trust in Local Government: Explaining the Role of Good Governance Practices. *Public Organization Review*, 20(2), 337-350. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11115-019-00444-6>

3. Bloom, E., Sunseri, A., Leonard, A. (2007). *Measuring and Strengthening Local Governance Capacity: The Local Governance Barometer*.
4. Council of Europe (2007). *In pursuit of good administration*. European Conference, DA/ba/Conf (2007) 4 e.
5. Czyż, P. (2009). Wskaźniki pomiaru dobrego współrządzenia. In: A. Rogut (ed.), *Governance - Współczesne trendy zarządzania regionem* (pp. 29-114). Łódź: SWSPiZ.
6. European Commission (2001). Communication from the Commission of 25 July 2001 "European governance - A white paper". COM(2001) 428 final - Official Journal C 287 of 12.10.2001.
7. Fałkowski, J. (2013). Political accountability and governance in rural areas: Some evidence from the Pilot Programme LEADER+ in Poland [Article]. *Journal of Rural Studies*, 32, 70-79. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2013.04.008>
8. Farazmand, A. (2004). *Sound governance: Policy and administrative innovations*. Greenwood Publishing Group.
9. Furmankiewicz, M., Macken-Walsh, Á. (2016). Government within governance? Polish rural development partnerships through the lens of functional representation. *Journal of Rural Studies*, 46, 12-22.
10. Goodwin, M. (2017). The governance of rural areas: Some emerging research issues and agendas. In: *The Rural: Critical Essays in Human Geography* (pp. 403-410). <https://www.scopus.com/inward/record.uri?eid=2-s2.0-85079540391&partnerID=40&md5=eea389b84e39f7bebaa10959bed4d6a8>
11. Houston, D.J., Harding, L.H. (2013). Public Trust in Government Administrators: Explaining Citizen Perceptions of Trustworthiness and Competence [Article]. *Public Integrity*, 16(1), 53-76. <https://doi.org/10.2753/PIN1099-9922160103>
12. Jonard, F., Lambotte, M., Ramos, F., Terres, J.-M., Bamps, C. (2009). *Delimitations of rural areas in Europe using criteria of population density, remoteness and land cover*. *JRC Scientific Report, EUR*, 23757.
13. Kalisiak-Mędelska, M. (2012). Partycypacja społeczna i jej znaczenie w działalności władz. Wyniki badań. *Zeszyty Naukowe Wyższej Szkoły Bankowej w Poznaniu, No. 42*, pp. 101-116.
14. Kaufmann, D., Kraay, A., Mastruzzi, M. (2009). Governance matters VIII: aggregate and individual governance indicators, 1996-2008. *World Bank policy research working paper*, 4978.
15. Marks-Krzyszowska, M. (2017). Uczestnictwo mieszkańców wsi we współzarządzaniu gminą – w opiniach wójtów. *Prace Naukowe Uniwersytetu Ekonomicznego we Wrocławiu, No. 477*, pp. 144-153.
16. Marks-Krzyszowska, M. (2021). Mieszkanki wsi wobec zarządzania gminą. *Kultura Współczesna. Teoria. Interpretacje. Praktyka, Vol. 116(4)*, pp. 75-89.

17. Marks-Krzyszowska, M., Dzwonkowska-Godula, K., Miklaszewska, A. (2022). Types of Rural Residents in Central Poland in Terms of Their Local Participation: The Perspectives of the Local Authorities and the Inhabitants. *Sustainability*, Vol. 14(20), 13512.
18. Martin, P., Halpin, D. (1998). Landcare as a politically relevant new social movement? [Article]. *Journal of Rural Studies*, 14(4), 445-457. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0743-0167\(98\)00014-X](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0743-0167(98)00014-X)
19. Mattson, G.A. (1997). Redefining the American small town: Community governance [Review]. *Journal of Rural Studies*, 13(1), 121-130. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0743-0167\(96\)00039-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0743-0167(96)00039-3)
20. Miessen, M., Choptiany, M. (2016). *Koszmar partycypacji*. Fundacja Nowej Kultury Bęc Zmiana.
21. *Oceny działalności instytucji publicznych* (2022). Komunikat z badań nr 50/2022, Warszawa: CBOS.
22. *Oceny władz samorządowych oraz ich kompetencji* (2018). Komunikat z badań nr 82/2018. Warszawa: CBOS.
23. Pawłowska, A. (2016). Governance jako podejście teoretyczne–kilka kwestii spornych. *Polityka i Społeczeństwo*, 14(03), 5-17.
24. Pawłowska, A., Radzik-Maruszak, K. (2022). From Advice and Consultation to Local Co-governance. The Case of Advisory Councils in Polish Cities [Article]. *Lex Localis*, 20(1), 55-76. [https://doi.org/10.4335/20.1.55-76\(2022\)](https://doi.org/10.4335/20.1.55-76(2022))
25. Perry, M., Le Heron, R., Hayward, D.J., Cooper, I. (1997). Growing discipline through total quality management in a New Zealand horticulture region [Article]. *Journal of Rural Studies*, 13(3), 289-304. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0743-0167\(97\)00016-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0743-0167(97)00016-8)
26. Soós, G. (2001). *The indicators of local democratic governance project: concepts and hypotheses*.
27. Śpiewak, R., Jasiński, J. (2020). Organic Farming as a Rural Development Factor in Poland – the Role of Good Governance and Local Policies [Article]. *International Journal of Food System Dynamics*, 11(1), 52-71.
28. UNDP (United Nations Development Programme) (2008). Methodological Guidelines for Local Governance in Latin America, report.
29. UNDP (United Nations Development Programme) (2009). A users' Guide to Measuring Local Governance, UNDP Oslo Governance Centre.
30. UN-HABITAT (2005). *Urban Governance Index: Conceptual Foundation and Field Test Report: Global Urban Observatory*. Nairobi: UN-HABITAT.
31. Wybory samorządowe - znaczenie, gotowość uczestnictwa oraz zainteresowanie decyzjami władz różnych szczebli (2018). *Komunikat z badań, nr 23/2018*. Warszawa: CBOS.

Appendix

Table 6.

Respondents' evaluation of the LGG by gender, place, education level, and age

Independent variables			Value of LGG						LGG index
			credibility	transparency	participation	power-sharing	effectiveness	responsiveness	
Gender	Women N=348	a	3.36	3.23	3.14	3.23	3.51	3.29	3.30
		st. d.	1.546	1.537	1.528	1.549	1.213	1.162	1.459
Gender	Men N=352	a	3.28	3.23	3.17	3.19	3.49	3.26	3.23
		st. d.	1.553	1.505	1.598	1.587	1.266	1.166	1.462
Type of commune	Rural N=551	a	3.31	3.23	3.11	3.16	3.51	3.26	3.26
		st. d.	1.555	1.549	1.562	1.578	1.251	1.184	1.488
Type of commune	Rural-urban N=149	a	3.34	3.23	3.3	3.4	3.47	3.33	3.27
		st. d.	1.532	1.411	1.562	1.519	1.195	1.083	1.354
Age	Younger adults N=175	a	3.28	3.34	3.28	3.33	3.53	3.37	3.46
		st. d.	1.522	1.425	1.537	1.577	1.191	1.101	1.405
Age	Secondary-aged adults N=269	a	3.27	3.13	3.10	3.09	3.35	3.19	3.22
		st. d.	1.532	1.511	1.568	1.519	1.216	1.164	1.472
Age	Older adults N=256	a	3.39	3.27	3.12	3.25	3.64	3.30	3.17
		st. d.	1.588	1.590	1.575	1.608	1.280	1.202	1.476
Education level	Basic N=141	a	3.23	3.06	3.04	3.08	3.41	3.15	3.06
		st. d.	1.375	1.405	1.519	1.608	1.257	1.087	1.458
Education level	Medium N=324	a	3.40	3.36	3.24	3.32	3.53	3.36	3.31
		st. d.	1.546	1.491	1.535	1.567	1.246	1.144	1.495
Education level	Higher N=219	a	3.33	3.23	3.16	3.19	3.55	3.30	3.35
		st. d.	1.621	1.604	1.626	1.535	1.173	1.216	1.374

a – average, st. d. – standard deviation.

Source: Authors' own elaboration.