

Introduction

This book is devoted to relations between the ethnic diversity of the region and the quality of governance at the local level. Opolskie province in Poland is a case for explaining this interdependence, because of its history of multiculturalism, its changes after 1946, and the present state of its ethnic diversity. The important feature of the analyzed region is, that nearly half of the communes is ethnically homogenous when the rest is ethnically diversified with a strong position of German and Silesian minorities.

Since the beginning of the 1990s, under the influence of international organizations promoting the cause of global development, the notion of good governance has become an important category in both the normative and analytical dimensions. The World Bank, the International Currency Fund, the International Monetary Fund, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, and the United Nations Organization regard so-called good governance as a prerequisite for the effective use of development assistance and a foundation for social and economic development (Khan 2016: 4–5). Simultaneously, as Tadeusz Borys notes after reviewing various concepts of good governance, they are deprived of a universal character because they usually concern the national level, “with marginal references to the local level” (Borys 2014: 61). This is also noticed by Grzegorz Kula, according to whom “important aspects of good governance refer to the very structure of a state, its political system and traditions, therefore, it is difficult to assess them at the levels lower than the central one” (Kula 2013: 284). Simultaneously, Kula observes that “theoretically, the shorter the distance between authorities and citizens, the easier it is to assess the quality of governance” (Ibidem 286). It seems therefore that the problem of measuring the quality of governance should be less complicated at the level of local government than at the central level. Not only the alleged ease of access to information on activities of local authorities but also the fact that the individual directly experiences the result of the governance process at this level determine the importance of research on the quality of governance at the commune level. According to the authors, this position is supported by the still valid opinion of Alexis de Tocqueville on the special role of commune institutions which “for freedom, are what primary schools are for science: they cause freedom to become available to the people, allow it to develop a taste for its practice, and make it accustomed to use it” (De Tocqueville 2005: 57). Thus, the commune has an enormous potential for political socialization consistent with

the spirit of the international standards of good governance, but it is also a unit in which, because of its sociological features, there exist considerable opportunities for the implementation of such standards.

Offered to readers, this book is the crowning element of the research project carried out by the authors in the years 2016–2019 thanks to a grant obtained from the Polish National Science Centre. The original idea motivating the authors was to combine their respective research experience in the fields of local politics, borderland issues, and multiculturalism of the Opolskie province (Opioła and Trzcielińska Polus 2013; Ganowicz and Opioła 2017; Opioła 2014a; 2014b; 2015) as well as governance quality and anti-corruption (Czepil 2014; 2015; 2016). This bore fruit in the form of a proposal to examine the quality of governance at the commune level and to diagnose to what extent and in what manner local governance quality could be influenced by the ethnic diversity of a particular commune's inhabitants. As the area of their research, the authors selected the Opolskie province, where a half of the communes are inhabited by German and Silesian communities.

At the beginning the authors were also interested in the issue of the strength of a local civil society. However, during the course of the project the decision was made – in accordance with the practice of research on governance quality – to treat a civil society as one of the dimensions of governance quality (participation).

In accordance with the adopted research method (nested analysis), the authors first conducted a statistical analysis based on the existing data (supplemented with a questionnaire survey). On the basis of the quantitative data, four communes were selected for the next stage of a qualitative analysis with a view to a more thorough exploration of possible relations between ethnic diversity and governance quality.

The theoretical and methodological guidelines for the research were developed in 2015. In 2016, following project reviewers' suggestions, the authors simplified some elements of the research process. The operationalization of the basic research categories, the selection of indicators, and the preparation of governance quality and ethnic diversity indexes, as well as a statistical analysis were carried out in 2016 and 2017. A CAWI questionnaire was administered in the middle of 2017 and the period from June 2018 to June 2019 was devoted to qualitative research conducted in the four communes of the Opolskie province: Domaszowice, Kolonowskie, Paczków and Walce. Simultaneously, from the spring of 2018 the authors were working on the final version of a research report in the form of this very book.

The book consists of five chapters. As this publication is a research report, there are considerable differences in the volumes of the particular chapters, but

the authors decided to maintain the originally adopted structure of the book consistent with the logic of the conducted research. Chapter one includes a presentation of the research problem, research questions and hypotheses. It also contains a review of the literature on relations between ethnic diversity and quality of governance, as well as certain preliminary assumptions/dilemmas allowing the authors to place the research in a broader context. The final part of chapter one describes the subsequent research stages and defines the basic notions applicable to the reality under examination, i.e. ethnic diversity and governance quality.

Chapter two describes the theoretical background for the conducted research. It starts with a general description of the Polish commune, which constitutes a unit of analysis in the research. It is followed by an operationalization of the notion of “ethnic diversity” and deliberations on issues related to the measurement of ethnic diversity that the authors had to deal with. The last part of chapter two contains an operationalization of the notion of “governance quality” and a presentation of the authors’ original local level governance quality index.

Chapter three is devoted to a description of the Opolskie province, in particular its multiculturalism as a feature distinguishing it from the other regions of Poland. It also contains a short historical analysis of the multiculturalism and borderlandness of the region as well as a comparison between its social and economic situation and those of the other Polish provinces.

Chapter four constitutes a presentation of the results of the quantitative analysis conducted by the authors. It contains a part of the collected statistical data, an analysis of correlations between the governance quality index and the level of ethnic diversity, as well as first conclusions and additional questions that arose in consequence of the conducted data analysis.

The longest in the book, chapter five presents four case studies based on the selected communes of the Opolskie province. It describes the method of selecting cases for the qualitative analysis, the procedures of collecting, analyzing and processing information, as well as four case studies based on one predetermined scheme.

The book ends with conclusions constituting responses to the questions posed and hypotheses proposed in its introductory part, as well as additional observations made during the course of the project. The final part of the book contains enclosures, lists of tables and figures, as well as a list of references.

From the perspective of the four years spent on the performance of the research described in the book, the authors regard it as an extremely difficult task. Being aware that the subject matter of the research belongs to one of the most inconclusive areas of research in social sciences (additionally, the manner of presentation depends on the discipline represented by a given researcher, and

a particular issue can be studied by political scientists, sociologists, economists, and representatives of other disciplines), we would like to thank all those people who contributed to the final shape of the presented research. The anonymous reviewers of our research project proposal submitted (twice) to the National Science Centre. Our colleagues at the University of Opole, who during – frequently heated – discussions helped us to understand better the subject matter of our research, particularly Błażej Choroś, Borys Cymbrowski, Ewa Ganowicz, Danuta Kisielewicz, Aleksander Kwiatek, Marek Mazurkiewicz, Kamil Minkner, Magdalena Ozimek-Hanslik, and Krzysztof Zuba. The participants of the conferences (held in Luxembourg, Warsaw, Kamień Śląski, Šiauliai, Kiev) during which the authors discussed the assumptions for, and the results of, the research. The anonymous reviewers of the authors' articles and the editors of academic periodicals and collective monographs in which the authors published partial results of their research. And last but not least, the reviewers of this book (and its Polish language version) and all those involved in the publication process.