

Conclusions

The starting point for the conducted research was the authors' assumption that there existed differences in the quality of governance between the western, more ethnically homogeneous part of the Opolskie province, and its south-eastern part inhabited by the German and Silesian minority. This assumption had the character of common-sense knowledge determined by stereotypical convictions functioning in the consciousness of many inhabitants (as well as regional political elites and journalists) of the province and concerning its division into a poorer western part and a more successful eastern part, which is under a considerable political, economic, and cultural influence of the German minority. At the perceptual level, this division was strengthened by differences in the aesthetics and development of rural areas between the western and eastern parts of the region. This dissimilarity stirred imagination, resembling the Weberian concept of Protestant values and stereotypes about German order and work organization, and raising the question about the impact of the German-Silesian factor on the quality of governance at the commune level. Besides the influential book by Robert Putnam, it was to a considerable degree everyday experience of the local reality that motivated us to formulate a research problem whose focus was possible relations between ethnic diversity in the province and the quality of governance in its particular communes.

We were interested in finding answers to the question whether the quality of governance would be factually higher in ethnically diversified communes than in ethnically homogeneous ones. We also wanted to find out what possible connections between the existence of the German and Silesian minority and quality of governance consisted in. Based on everyday experience, our hypothesis was that the quality of governance would be higher in communes characterized by ethnic diversity. We also assumed that it would result from the minority's sense of separate identity and political interests that constituted a force mobilizing minority members to spare no effort with respect to the exercise of power. In order to verify the proposed hypotheses, we carried out the research in two stages. Conclusions drawn from both of them are presented in the subsequent paragraphs.

The conducted quantitative analysis indicates that there are no clear relations between ethnic diversity and the holistically perceived quality of governance, i.e. in light of our data, governance quality in ethnically diversified communes is not higher than that in the other communes. Speaking of the holistically perceived

quality of governance, we mean the total value of a particular commune's governance quality index proposed by the authors and based on five principles. Thus, it can be concluded that the authors' hypothesis was not confirmed. However, if we take into consideration the particular sub-indexes of governance quality and their relations to ethnic diversity identified in both the qualitative analysis and the case studies, it seems that ethnic diversity plays a certain role. In comparison to the ethnically homogeneous communes, the ethnically diversified ones are characterized by a higher level of participation. The qualitative analysis shows that it is first of all the effect of the functioning of active non-governmental organizations, with the special role of the Social and Cultural Association of Germans as a multilevel, province-wide structure with strong foundations at the level of communes and villages in the form of commune boards and German friendship circles. The local structures of the Social and Cultural Association of Germans constitute a platform for local integration in the social, cultural, and political dimensions. The higher level of participation may also result from the minority's greater attachment to little homelands whose strength results from the fact that the minority comprises the autochthonous population which lived in the region before World War II and which refers to the pre-war period (through the continuity and maintenance of collective memory, the institutions of the economic, religious, and cultural life, and symbolic politics). Accepting the findings made by Danuta Berlińska in her research conducted in the 1990s (Berlińska 1999), we also do not rule out that the awareness of belonging to a minority is a force encouraging people to be more active at the level of local governments. It is believed that it is the local government level that creates the greatest opportunities for protecting people's interests and rights, and strong rootedness in local power structures guarantees such protection.

It should be also remembered that in one of the variants of the analysis of correlations between governance quality and ethnic diversity in which only rural communes were taken into consideration, the interdependence between the variables was clearly visible. Nevertheless, this topic did not draw special attention in the qualitative analysis mainly in view of the fact that the quality of governance in rural communes had turned out to be evidently worse than that in rural-urban communes. It is highly probable (which can be concluded from an analysis of the tables and graphs presented in Chapter IV) that this interdependency is determined by the much higher level of participation in the ethnically diversified communes.

The phenomenon of high participation occurs also in the community of Walce, where the overall quality of governance is low. An analysis of this case allowed the authors to reach the conclusion that at a local level, strong

participation might have negative consequences for the assessment of the quality of governance in the other dimensions. The strength of the minority's local institutions facilitating participation may lead to the monopolization of a local political scene and the weakening of such classical accountability mechanisms as regular and competitive elections. It can also lower the level of openness because the strength of institutional and informal connections between local authorities and a local community (dominated by the representatives of the minority) is great enough to guarantee minority members access to the local political system and to weaken the need to use more formalized and transparent solutions. Thus the quantitative data and the case studies show that ethnic diversity is not a factor influencing unidirectionally the holistically perceived quality of governance, but that its character is rather ambivalent, i.e. depending on a governance quality dimension, it may generate positive or negative phenomena. In order to verify this observation by means of the quantitative data, having completed the qualitative analysis, we conducted an analysis of correlations between the dimension of participation and the dimension of accountability. In the group of the rural communes, we observed a negative, although weak, correlation (-0.172; $n=35$). In the whole sample ($n=60$), we found no interdependencies between either these dimensions or participation and openness. However, in our opinion, the described mechanism is important and interesting enough for us to recommend the continuation of research in this area at the level of small rural communes.

Despite the fact that the conducted research did not confirm the proposed hypothesis, the added value of the performed analysis is the fact that the quality of governance in the ethnically diversified communes is not worse than that in the homogeneous ones. Such a possibility was implied by the literature review presented in Chapter I. The majority of research indicates a negative correlation between ethnic diversity and phenomena such as social trust, social cohesion, the strength of the civic society, and economic equalities. We did not find the multi-ethnic communes to be characterized by a high degree of social polarization or an open inter-group conflict. Nevertheless, we regard the case of the Opolskie province as, in a sense, unique. The factors that should be taken into consideration in this context include the following:

- a relatively short cultural distance between the particular groups;
- a legal regime guaranteeing the representatives of all studied groups Polish citizenship, equality before the law, and additional guarantees for the German minority under the Act on National and Ethnic Minorities and Ethnic Languages;

- a good economic status of the majority, which fulfils the role of an anti-discrimination mechanism.

Furthermore, we would like to draw attention that what distinguishes Opole Silesia from other multi-ethnic regions around the world is the fact that in a relatively short period of time, i.e. approximately forty years after the war, the autochthonous population became dominated by the immigrant population with respect to both the numerical strength and the roles played in the region's politics, culture, and economy.

If we were to try to indicate determinants with the greatest influence on the quality of governance in the communes under examination, we could refer to the features common for Paczków and Kolonowskie, which at the same time do not occur in Walce and Domaszowice. These features are the tradition of employment in industrial enterprises and consequent urbanization manifesting itself in the existence of a small urban centre. Another feature is the existence of competitive, but simultaneously conciliatory, political groups in a commune. It should also be noted that the communes with the highest values of the governance quality index aspire to be tourist centers and take effort to use their tourism development potential as an important element of the local economy and their own identity. These characteristic features cannot be found in Domaszowice or Walce¹. At this stage of the research we are not able to provide an exhaustive and fully reliable answer to the question about the nature of the influence of these features on the quality of governance, the weight of each of them, or mutual relations among them. In the case of some determinants, particularly the issue of a competitive and conciliatory political scene, we face the problem of the direction of causal determinants. It seems that we can assume that the traditions of industrialization and urbanization as well as the existence of objective (i.e. geographical and architectural) foundations for the development of tourism are the primary, structural determinants of a higher quality of governance. However, in the case of a competitive and conciliatory political scene, we can conclude that it can be not only a cause but also a result of a high quality of governance.

We do not know how exactly the fact of industrial traditions and the existence of a small urban centre can translate into a higher quality of governance. The sociological imagination suggests that industrialization and urbanization should change the character of interpersonal relations in a given area, weakening local particularistic interests and simultaneously broadening the scope of interpersonal contacts in parallel to the appearance of larger urban centers. The existence of the industrial economy may have influenced the wealth of the local community, its life style, and expectations of the local elite. The presence of industrial

enterprises in the local landscape required also that the commune authorities provide necessary administrative services and professional personnel. Maybe the sociological fact of a small town as a centre of political and cultural integration facilitates more professional and open local administration. Also, political competition that does not exclude the possibility of supporting particular solutions and projects pursued by those in power appears to be a source of dynamics in local politics, constituting an alternative to local authorities and an entity supervising their actions. Focused naturally on people and institutions from outside a commune, tourism requires openness, a professional approach, and coordination/cooperation among local authorities and all grassroots entities interested in attracting tourists to their locality. At this stage of the research these are only interpretations that constitute inspiration for the formulation of further hypotheses and more systematic research on the determinants of the quality of governance at a local level.

What deserves separate attention is the role of commune leaders/mayors. The conducted case studies showed that their actions were of considerable importance from the perspective of governance quality. We are aware that this conclusion is open to the charge of banality because their special position results from the legal and political roles they play on the local political scene. What dominates in the Polish local government system is the model of a strong mayor, hence it is only natural that they have considerable impact on the standards of governance at the commune level. But the case studies show that a strong position in a local political system may lead to different consequences for the quality of governance because another thing that counts is a style of governance represented by the head of an executive body. Although commune leaders/mayors function in an institutional environment that imposes certain limitations on them, the cases of Paczków and Domaszowice show that they are able to initiate or block numerous initiatives, thus influencing the shape of the local public space. They may pursue more participatory agendas oriented towards risky investment projects or strategies aimed at the concentration of power and avoidance of large and risky projects. The case of Kolonowskie indicates also the importance of their social capital, i.e. connections with the structures of the local government at the provincial level that may favor the development of their communes. This leads to the conclusion that a leader's personality and experience considerably influence the quality of local institutions. Making proper decisions, voters can seriously influence the quality of governance, 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.

What is also very important is conclusions concerning the methodological aspects of the conducted research. At the particular stages of the research process there appeared dilemmas and problems that have to be taken into consideration in an assessment of the research results presented here. Undoubtedly, the major problem that we had to address was a method of measuring governance quality. This problem is described in detail in Chapter II and the annex. Nevertheless, in this part devoted to conclusions, we can supplement this description on the basis of the knowledge which we had not had at the stage of developing the governance quality index, and which we acquired in the course of the case studies. They showed once more how difficult it was to select measures that could fully reflect the application of the good governance principles in small rural communes. The case of Walce showed that the sub-indexes of openness and accountability were not able to capture governance mechanisms characteristic of a small commune and corresponding to the idea of good governance. This does not mean that these sub-indexes are deprived of any diagnostic value, but rather that they refer to official manifestations of openness and accountability, leaving aside more subtle and difficult to quantify mechanisms. We are also willing to risk the hypothesis that if the governance quality measuring methodology were based on the inhabitants' perception, the places of the particular communes on the governance quality scale would be different. Maybe a representative survey conducted among the inhabitants of Walce and Domaszowice would show that a considerable part of them perceive, for example, their local authorities as open and accountable, and local relations as egalitarian. It seems, however, that it is a manifestation of a more general problem that those studying the social reality have to deal with, namely discrepancies between the imagined world and the sphere of objective conditions/processes. The authors are aware of the methodological weaknesses and problems of the presented research undertaking; therefore, they try to provide possibly the most exhaustive and detailed description of the applied research methodology. Thus, the presented research results should be interpreted with some scientific detachment taking into consideration the problems facing the researcher measuring the quality of governance in small communes whose primary objective is to verify formulated hypotheses empirically despite methodological difficulties identified during the course of the research process.