

# Good governance in strategic planning of local development in rural and urban-rural gminas of the eastern peripheral voivodeships of Poland

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**Abstract.** The work aimed to determine the scope of the good governance approach in the local development planning of local governments of rural and urban-rural gminas in the eastern peripheral voivodeships of Poland (Lubelskie, Podlaskie and Świętokrzyskie Voivodeships) and how the implementation of good governance principles in the process of elaborating and implementing local development strategies correlates with assessments of the strategy's suitability as a development management tool. The research used methods of analysis and criticism of the literature, statistical analysis and a survey method using an interview questionnaire addressed to local government authorities. According to our research, especially at the stage of developing the strategy, actions were taken regarding local-community and local-authority participation and active communication between the two, but a lower level of community participation was found at the implementation stage. There was a statistically significant relationship between adopting the principle of participation and accountability in preparing and implementing the strategy and how suitable the strategy was assessed to be as a tool for development management. It seems reasonable to apply the principles of good governance more widely in planning local development, not only while developing the strategy, but also in its implementation.

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## 1. Introduction

Since the early 1980s, there has been a considerable outpouring of literature on the subject of local economic development (Perry, 1987; Blakely, 1989; Bennington, Geddes, 1992; Galaway, Hudson, 1994). The core premise underlying much of the literature on local economic development is that a community can and will “grow” if it correctly organises itself; that is, if local actors (authorities, entrepreneurs, politicians, financiers, researchers, community groups, etc.) work together to create an environment conducive to innovation, entrepreneurship and economic growth. Features such as partnership, vision, leadership, cooperation, trust and synergy are part of the standard vocabulary of most local economic development strategies, which are indicated as the basic tools for local development management (Polèse, Shearmur, 2006: 28).

Local development is a very complex process whose direction is influenced by many entities located in the territory, and by many factors. The local government authority is undisputedly the main entity stimulating development processes (Blakely, 1989), but as a representative of the local community it should take into account and define what place the community has in setting the vision and development goals.

The right for the needs of the local community to be expressed is especially articulated in the concept of sustainable development (Ray, 2006). “Participation, stakeholders’ approach to policy making and its implementation, the use of public and private resources as well as the use of general knowledge and skills in the development of society are prerequisites for sustainable development” (Kruzmetra, Bite, Kronberga, 2018, p. 154). Sustainable development should be based on mechanisms of development whose essence is the participation of interested parties in formulating and applying a development strategy in partnership with other social

actors, both local and external (Gorlach, Adamski, 2006).

As stressed by Junjan (2015, p. 46) “within the research area dedicated to improving the efficiency and effectiveness of public organizations, strategic planning occupies an important role”. In this process, not only does strategic planning (creating a long-term development plan) take a special place, but so too does a series of measures to effectively implement it. The local development strategy sets a trajectory of future behavior that local government authorities will strive to follow while continually analysing the situation, choosing specific directions of development and involving active public participation in the whole process of formulating and implementing the strategy (Wiatrak, 2012). Therefore, the gmina’s development strategy is one of the basic instruments for managing local development (Blakely, 1989).

Nowadays, the recommendation to implement good governance is appearing increasingly often in studies on local development. The idea of good governance presupposes the use of various forms and tools of civic participation and a diversity of participants in the process of co-management. Citizens’ control (through transparency and accountability), openness, participation, efficiency and effectiveness in the exercise of power are the key principles of the “governance” approach in public sector management (Commission..., 2001).

Since the first application in 1992 of the concept of “good governance” by the World Bank, defining its characteristics and significance for the development of countries and regions (World..., 1992), other international organisations, governments and institutions of various countries and many scientists have also given their own definitions. The principles of good governance are defined as, for example: transparency, accountability, participation, response, striving for consensus, vision of development, cohesion, effectiveness, efficiency, principles of the rule of law (International..., 1999, p. 6; Commission...,

2001, pp. 8-11; OECD, 2010, p. 19). The European Commission (2001) described the following principles of good governance:

1. openness – through active communication, in a commonly available and understandable way;
2. participation – as broad participation at all stages of policy making, from the preparation of the concept to its implementation;
3. accountability – thanks to the transparency of the policy and the identification of entities responsible for the implementation of individual activities,
4. effectiveness – implementation of the objectives and assessment of future impact and, where possible, previous experience, also conditioned by the implementation of policies in a proportionate manner and by undertaking decisions at the most appropriate level;
5. coherence of the implemented policy.

The implementation of these principles in EU countries should take place at all levels of government, because it is an important determinant of the social welfare achieved in economies (Helliwell, Huang, 2006). With regard to the local level (local governments), in the good governance approach, the following are important (Schmitter, 2002):

- interaction between public and private entities;
- binding coordination of activities based on negotiation and mutual balance of interests;
- the importance of understanding common problems and the objectives of the action;
- various forms of participation.

Some time ago a perplexing lag was noted between the attention accorded to the emergent phenomenon of governance in national and urban contexts and the same in rural contexts (e.g. Marsden, Murdoch, 1998; Goodwin, 1998). Although the issue of urban governance has become more popular, and despite its tactical usefulness as a concept, the theories and academic studies on urban governance to date have not yet established a mature and consolidated field of study (Davies, 2014; Lucas, 2017; Pierre, 2005, 2014). As stressed by Da Cruz et al. (2018: 1), as a consequence of these conceptual and explanatory struggles, urban governance research has been dominated by case studies or by theoretical claims with little empirical support. In terms of exploring and explaining the phenomenon of governance in rural contexts, the gap

clearly remains (Pemberton and Shaw, 2012). All of these suggest the need to focus attention on the still emerging phenomenon of governance in rural contexts (Douglas, 2018) .

In operationalising the concept of good governance, it seems advisable to regularly identify the principles of good governance from the perspective of a given public institution's objectives, thus creating unique sets of features, while the principle of civic control, participation and efficient administration should be treated as superior. It is difficult to define a coherent and closed set of principles of good governance, because of, *inter alia*, differences in political culture and institutional heritage at state, regional and local government levels (Szumowski, 2017). As noted by Gisselquist (2012), most scientific studies in the field of good governance focus on definitional aspects instead of testing causal links between government quality and development. "Development and improved governance have tended to go hand in hand. But, contrary to popular belief, there is little evidence that success in implementing governance reforms leads to more rapid and inclusive economic and social development" (Sundaram, 2015). This is partly because it is difficult to construct a universal measure or measures of good governance and because the effects of soft actions that constitute the implementation of good governance take time to be felt. Despite the indicated criticisms of the concept, it is difficult not to agree that "the interactions between *governance* and growth are intimately linked to the interactions between institutions (broadly construed) and economic growth" (North, Acemoglu, Fukuyama, Rodric, 2008, p.1). "So, *good governance* is both an end and means. It is a key goal of development, broadly construed, and it is also an instrument for achieving better policy-making and improved economic outcomes" (North et al., 2008:18).

Despite public sector management having seen a spread of the principles of good governance – including openness, civic participation and the role of residents in the sustainable development of gminas in Poland – this subject has been neglected for years. The same is true of many countries with little experience in the development of democracy and local government (Kruzmetra et al., 2018). The problem also lies in the dissemination in politics of the principles of accountability and transparency of

actions, which in turn applies to countries undergoing transformation towards a free market economy. On the other hand, there are reasons to believe that local rural and urban–rural gminas are gaining experience in implementing participation. This is facilitated by their fairly common participation in the EU LEADER programme, in which, based on the principle of participation, local governments cooperate with other local governments and representatives of local communities in their area in order to build bottom-up joint development strategies (Community-led local development CLLD).

In the light of the previous considerations, it should be stated that the concept of good governance is not precisely defined or operationalised, especially at the level of local governments, so it is necessary to translate the principles of good governance into specific actions according to which the strategic planning of gminas will be critically analysed in terms of its accordance with the concept of good governance. The purpose of the work was:

- to determine the scope of the good governance approach in local development planning by local governments of rural and urban–rural gminas in the eastern peripheral voivodeships of Poland.

- to determine the relationship between implementing good governance principles in the process of developing and implementing local development strategies and assessments of the suitability of the strategy as a development management tool.

A research question has been formulated: is there a relationship between public participation in the preparation stage and the implementation of the strategy and the assessment of the suitability of the strategy as a tool for development management? The non-parametric U Mann–Whitney test has been used to resolve the question.

With regard to the process of creating and implementing local development strategies, the authors operationalised the principles of good governance such that specific actions in the following areas were assumed to be indicators of the respective principles being enacted:

- Regarding the openness principle: the scope of communication related to strategy creation

- Regarding the participation principle: the scope of participation of individual representatives of the local community in developing and implementing the strategy

- Regarding the accountability principle: the scope of assigning competences related to implementing the strategy

- Regarding the effectiveness principle: the scope of actions to improve the effectiveness of the strategy as a management tool, such as monitoring strategies, updating the strategy, intervention of the group responsible for implementation, preparation of sectoral strategies relative to the general strategy

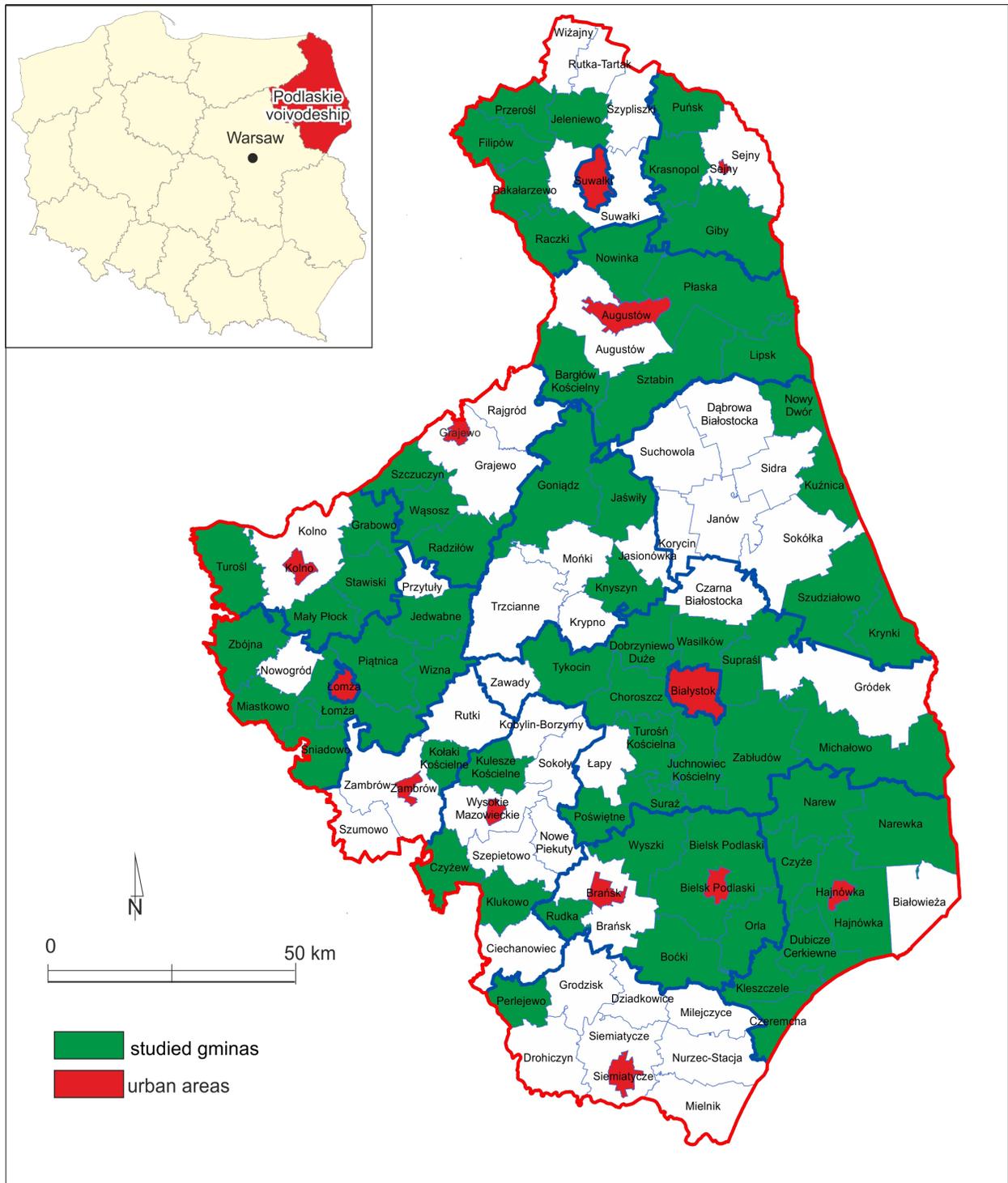
- Regarding the coherence of the implemented policy principle: the scope of local strategies' coherence with the strategies of higher territorial government units and with LAG strategies within the EU LEADER programme to which the local governments belonged

## 2. Material and research methods

The research involved analysis and criticism of the literature, statistical analysis (including descriptive statistics and the non-parametric U Mann–Whitney test) and a survey method using an interview questionnaire addressed to local government authorities of rural and urban–rural gminas in the Lubelskie, Podlaskie and Świętokrzyskie Voivodeships.

The area of empirical research was the three indicated voivodeships of the Eastern Poland macroregion. The choice of these voivodeships was deliberate. They represent the so-called Eastern peripheral type. They have the weakest parameters in terms of demographic characteristics and development of non-agricultural functions among all voivodeships of Eastern Poland. Monitoring of these voivodeships (Rosner, Stanny, 2016) indicates that these regions persistently maintain the country's lowest levels of deagrarianisation. The sample of gminas was random (stratified sampling). It was assumed that for the 395 local governments in question, the sample would be representative of the balance of rural and urban-rural gminas within each of the voivodeships being studied. The study involved 233 local governments, which constituted about 58.99% of the total population. The sample includes 183 local governments of rural gminas and 50 urban–rural gminas. The numbers of gminas by voivodeship was: 113 from the Lubelskie Voivodeship (Fig. 1.), including 16 urban–rural





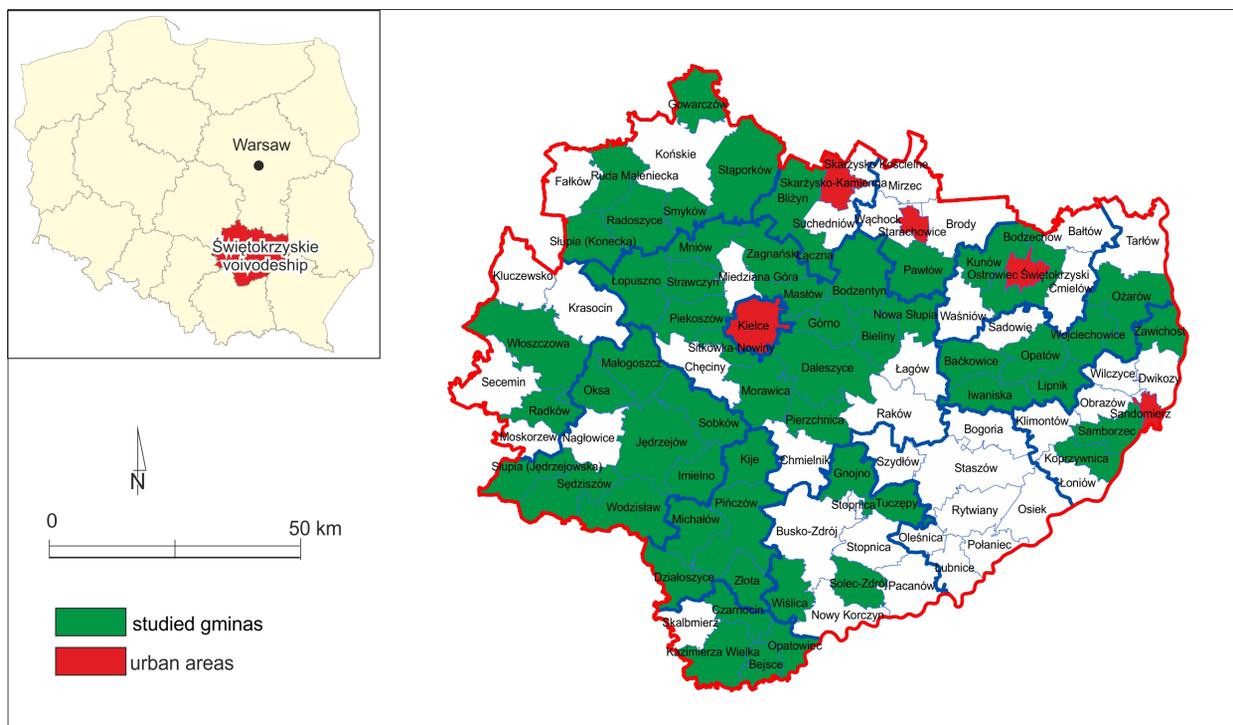
**Fig. 2.** Studied gminas' locations within the Podlaskie Voivodeship

Source: Author

orating strategies for local development (Bojar et al. 2010). Empirical studies conducted in local governments of rural and urban–rural gminas in the eastern voivodeships of Poland show that the development of a strategy for socio-economic devel-

opment is widespread in this area. Development strategies were implemented in as many as 220 gminas (94.42% of the total).

Communication actions related to the development and implementation of the strategy are a man-



**Fig. 3.** Studied gminas' locations within the Świętokrzyskie Voivodeship

Source: Author

ification of the openness principle being applied in public management. The most common such actions in the surveyed gmina offices concerned communicating that work was to begin on preparing the strategy (98.71% of indications), but other common actions (more than 90% of indications) concerned: communicating information about plans, intentions and decisions related to the implementation of the strategy; publishing information on implementation; obtaining information about residents' needs and preferences; and gaining local community acceptance for a strategy being implemented. Therefore, practice regarding local government authorities' communication actions should be assessed as positive. It is plausible that the local governments' high level of activity in communicating on the development and implementation of the strategy resulted from positive experience in implementing strategies led by the local community under the LEADER programme (obligatory communication plans with the local community).

The participation principle manifests in strategic planning as local community participation, from concept creation to strategy implementation. In 197 gminas (84.55% of the total number of re-

spondents), the authorities declared participation in the development of the strategy, and declared that representatives (around 80% participation) of various non-governmental communities actively participated in its elaboration. However, in only 142 gminas (60.94% of the total) did local government authorities declare that residents or representatives of various communities took part in implementing the strategy. Thus, participation is lower at the implementation stage than in developing the strategy.

With the high participation of local government representatives and other local community representatives in developing the strategy, the participation of external experts was relatively low, and the participation of representatives of universities was almost negligible (approximately 2%). Undoubtedly, this undermines the substantive quality of the document and proves the low activity of local governments in initiating cooperation with academic institutions.

With regard to the accountability principle, the scope of assigning competences related to strategy implementation was analysed. In practice, the personal assignment of competences not only serves the accountability principle, but also improves the

effectiveness of the action. In the local governments surveyed, it was not common for strategy implementation instruments to be created and improved by personally assigning each employee responsibility for part of the programme (54.08% of indications).

**Table 1.** Communication activities related to developing and implementing the strategy

Actions	% of local governments implementing the action
Informing about the start of strategy preparation	98.71
Informing the public about what we do, intend or decide to do (as a part of the strategy)	94.42
Making information about implementation public	92.70
Obtaining information about public needs, points of view and preferences	91.41
Obtaining acceptance of the solution among as many people as possible (residents are familiar with the strategy and convinced of its advantages)	90.13

Source: own research

**Table 2.** Entities participating in the development of the gmina development strategy

Entities	% of local governments in which a given entity participated
Mayor	98.71
Councilors of the gmina	97.85
National experts representing institutions (foundations, development agencies, etc.)	35.19
National experts representing private consulting companies	48.07
Foreign experts	3.86
Local entrepreneurs	82.83
Local leaders	78.11
Representatives of local non-governmental organisations	81.54
Residents	84.55
Representatives of local educational institutions	78.54
Representatives of local financial institutions, e.g. banks	25.32
Representatives of universities	1.72

Source: own research

**Table 3.** Actions to improve the effectiveness of the strategy as a management tool

Actions	% of local governments implementing the action
Strategy implementation group meetings at time of implementation problem	87.12
Monitoring implementation of goals and tasks and changes in conditions of implementation	85.41
Programme update to conditions of implementation	80.26
Annual meetings of people responsible for implementing strategy	40.34
Development of sectoral strategies, development plans for specific areas, tactical plans	39.48
Use of indicators to measure objectives adopted for implementation	35.62

Source: own research

In the local governments surveyed, actions to monitor and update the strategy were quite common (over 85% of responses). However, in the light of the results obtained, in more than half of the local governments surveyed, people responsible for implementing the strategy held meetings less than once a year, and no indicators were used to measure the achievement of strategic objectives, which actually indicates the often superficial and irregular course of the strategy's implementation. The specialist strategies and tactical programmes used as tools to implement the strategy must also be assessed as being poorly developed (having been developed in 39.48% of surveyed local governments). The scarcity of these documents hinders the real use of strategic plans in development management.

Regarding the principle of coherence, it was analysed to what degree local strategies cohered with the strategies of higher territorial government units and with LAG strategies within the EU LEADER programme to which the local governments belonged. All the local governments declared that their local strategies were coherent with regional and national strategies. All the local governments belonged to the LAG and, in the developed CLLD strategies, consistency was confirmed with the provisions of the local strategies of individual gminas.

Then, the local government authorities were assessed in terms of their strategy's suitability as a tool for stimulating development. This was assessed as moderately positive. The largest group (43.35%) of local government authority representatives assessed its suitability as "average", while 26.18% of respondents indicated "large" suitability, and 14.16% "very large". Nevertheless, for 11.16% of respondents, this suitability was "low", and for 4.72% it was "irrelevant".

Then, it was checked whether a relationship existed between the implementation of good governance principles in developing and implementing local development strategies and the assessment of the strategy's suitability as a tool for development management. The non-parametric U Mann-Whitney test confirmed that participation in the preparation and implementation of the strategy correlated with the assessment of the strategy's suitability as a tool for development management. The arithmetic mean of the suitability assessment in gminas where local community representatives participated in pre-

paring the strategy was 3.44, with a standard deviation of 0.99; by contrast, in the other gminas (where strategy development was not socialised) the average suitability assessment was 2.66, with a standard deviation of 1.14 ( $U=2035$ ,  $p<0.01$ ). Similarly, the suitability of the strategy for local development management was assessed more highly (and statistically significantly so) in gminas that declared local community participation in implementing the strategy. For the local governments that indicated local community participation in implementing the strategy, the average assessment of the strategy's suitability was 3.54, with a standard deviation of 0.94, and in the remaining gminas, where local community participation in strategy implementation was not indicated, the average assessment of its suitability was 3.00, with a standard deviation of 1.12 ( $U=4549$ ,  $p<0.01$ ).

It was also found that applying the accountability principle by creating and improving strategy implementation instruments in a way that assigned responsibility for its implementation correlated statistically significantly with the assessment of the strategy's suitability as a tool for development management. The arithmetic mean of the suitability assessment for those local governments in which responsibility for the strategy was assigned was 3.49, with a standard deviation of 1.03, and for the remaining gminas (where no responsibility was assigned) the average assessment of the strategy's suitability was 3.12, with a standard deviation of 1.05 ( $U=5253$ ,  $p<0.01$ ).

This quantitative study on the relationship between applying good governance principles and implementing a local development strategy is the initial stage of the research, and requires further in-depth research (as case studies) for a more detailed operationalisation of these principles and to identify irregularities and barriers, but also good practices, in applying individual principles of good governance. This research was conducted for the first time here, and, in light of its random and representative nature, may form the basis for discussion for other authors.

In strategic management using development strategies, good governance principals should be applied at every stage, i.e. strategy creation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation (Sztando 2016). Assessing how effectively the application of good

governance principles can be measured is very complex by its very nature (the process involves many parties/entities, both internal [including residents] and external stakeholders). Even in examining the participation in creating a document, despite the formal guarantee of participation, it may turn out that local authorities limit access to certain groups, deliberately excluding others from actual participation. Such a problem of planning local strategic development is reported by Sztando (2013) on the examples of Polish gminas, showing incorrect activities undertaken by local authorities in the process of preparing development strategies.

Good governance research should aim at qualitative analyses for local governments, in which the process can be analysed comprehensively in individual territorial units. Meanwhile, the quantitative research conducted by the authors signals a very important phenomenon generally related to the approach of good governance; that is, in the opinion of local authorities, greater participation in planning and implementing the strategy is accompanied by the belief that the strategy has a stronger impact on local development processes.

#### 4. Conclusions, proposals, recommendations

In the light of the research results:

- the good governance approach was shown to be applied to varying degrees in the planning of local development by local governments of rural and urban–rural gminas in the eastern peripheral regions of Poland. Actions were taken most extensively in relation to participation and active communication (by over 80% of local governments), especially in the strategy development stage. All representatives of the local community took part in the process of developing the strategy, and the local government authorities obtained information about needs, viewpoints and preferences regarding local development planning and acceptance of the proposals submitted under the strategy.

- in the local governments surveyed, however, participation was lower at the implementation stage (being present in only about 60% of local gov-

ernments) than in developing strategies (where it was present in about 85% of local governments); furthermore, creating and improving strategy implementation instruments by personally assigning each employee responsibility for the performance of some part of the programme was not widely practised (i.e. in about 50% of local governments)

- a statistically significant relationship between participation in the preparation and implementation of the strategy and the assessment of the strategy's suitability as a development management tool, and also between applying accountability principle in creating and improving strategy implementation instruments by assigning responsibility for its implementation on the one hand, and, on the other, the assessment of the strategy's suitability as a development management tool.

- it seems reasonable to take measures to apply the principles of good governance within a wider scope of local development planning activities – not only in developing the strategy, but in its implementation.

- due to the complexity of operationalising good governance, and the lack of research on governance in the rural context, analyses should be deepened to monitor changes in the implementation of good governance not only in cities but also in rural local government units.

The operationalisation of the principles of good governance and obtained research results may be useful for management practitioners in rural and urban–rural gminas as an index for measuring and monitoring governance in the work of local governments, and to improve this process.

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