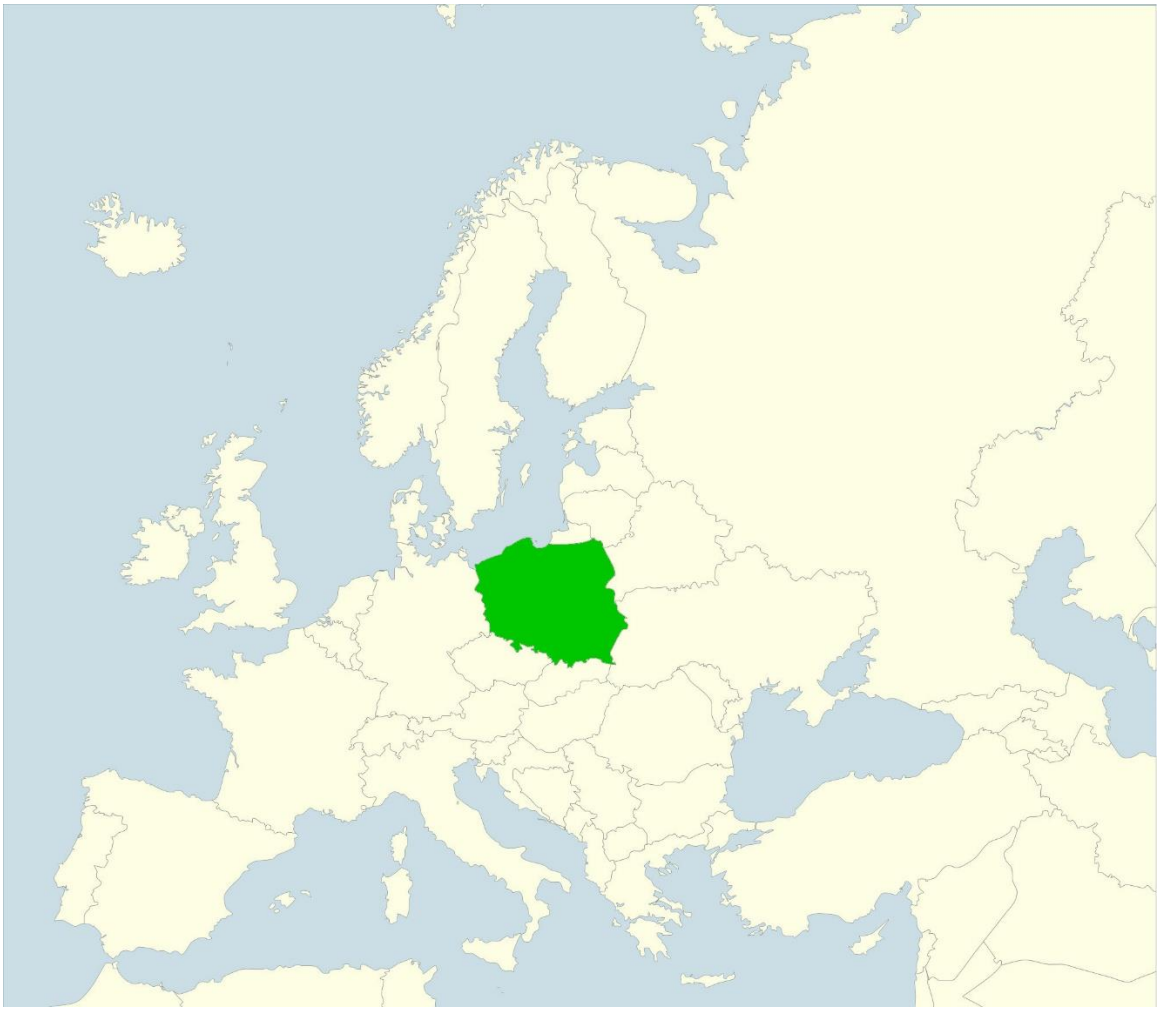
European Countryside | volume 14 | No. 4 | p. 623-637 | DOI: 10.2478/euco-2022-0031

PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS AND NGOs COOPERATION FOR SOCIAL INNOVATIONS IN POST-SOCIALIST RURAL POLAND

Katarzyna Zajda[1], Damian Mazurek[2]





[1] dr Katarzyna Zajda, , Department of Rural and Urban Sociology, University of Lodz, Poland, ORCID: 0000-0001-5568-3644, e- mail: katarzyna.zajda@uni.lodz.pl

[2] mgr Damian Mazurek, Department of Rural Geography and Local Development, Inistitute of Geography and Spatial Organization, Polish Academy of Sciences, Warsaw, Poland, ORCID: 0000-0003-1056-1752, e-mail. d.mazurek@twarda.pan.pl

Received 17 December 2021, Revised 28 June 2022, Accepted 13 July 2022

Abstract: Social innovation (SI), which is known as an alternative practice for solving social problems, can be implemented by various actors, including nongovernmental organisations (NGOs) and public institutions. This article addresses the implementation of SIs by public institutions in rural areas of Poland. Its aim is to answer two questions: 1) Does cooperation with NGOs distinguish rural public institutions in Poland that have implemented SIs from those that have not? 2) Does the level of human and financial resources of NGOs affect the level of cooperation between public institutions and NGOs from rural gminas? The results of an internet survey conducted on a random sample of 330 public institutions and 400 one-to-one interviews conducted on a random sample of NGOs from rural communes (rural gminas) are presented to answer the research questions posed. According to the findings, collaboration between public institutions and NGOs does not distinguish institutions that implemented SI and those that did not. In addition, the level of human and financial resources of NGOs was not a factor in determining whether or not public institutions cooperated with NGOs.

Keywords: public institutions, nongovernmental organisations, social innovation, cooperation, post-socialist Poland, rural areas

Abstrakt: Innowacje społeczne (SI), rozumiane jako alternatywne praktyki rozwiązywania problemów społecznych, mogą być wdrażane przez różne podmioty, w tym organizacje pozarządowe (NGOs). W krajach post-socjalistyczych, takich jak Polska sektor pozarządowy jest słaby, co ogranicza potencjał NGOs do wdrażania praktyk ryzykownych, jakimi są innowacje społeczne. W związku z powyższym to instytucje publiczne mogą stać się agentami innowacji społecznych, zwłaszcza na wsi, gdzie w porównaniu do miast NGOs są jeszcze słabsze. Celem artykułu jest odpowiedź na dwa pytania: 1. Czy polskie wiejskie instytucje publiczne, które wdrażały SI odróżniały się od tych, które nie miały takich doświadczeń podejmowaniem współpracy z NGOs? 2. Czy na poziom współpracy między instytucjami publicznymi a NGOs z gmin wiejskich wpływa poziom zasobów ludzkich i finansowych tych organizacji? Celem udzielenia odpowiedzi na postawione pytania badawcze zostaną zaprezentowane rezultaty badania przeprowadzonego za pomocą sondażu na losowej próbie: 330 instytucji publicznych z gmin wiejskich and 400 organizacji pozarządowych z gmin wiejskich. Ustalono, iż podejmowanie współpracy przez instytucje publiczne z NGOs nie odróżnia tych instytucji, które wdrażały SI od tych, które nie miały takich doświadczeń. Ponadto instytucje publiczne nie współpracują przede wszystkim z NGOs o najwyższym poziomie zasobów ludzkich i finansowych.

Słowa kluczowe: instytucje publiczne, organizacje pozarządowe, innowacje społeczne, współpraca, postsocjalistyczna Polska, obszary wiejskie

Highlights

- Public institutions and NGOs can implement social innovations.
- Cooperation of rural public institutions in Poland with NGOs
- Do rural public institutions cooperate only with NGOs with the highest level of human and financial resources?
- Collaboration between rural public institutions and NGOs does not affect their implementation of social innovations.
- Public institutions from Polish rural areas do not cooperate only with NGOs that have the highest level of human and financial resources.

1. Introduction

The issue of social innovation has sparked the interest of researchers and practitioners from around the world. They were associated with the hope of empowering individuals and communities experiencing social exclusion and increasing their participation in solving various social problems (Moulaert et al.2017, Grimm et al. 2013, Shockley 2015). These include, inter alia, unemployment, poverty, homelessness, and discrimination based on gender and age as well as the place of origin, race, and religion (Huq 2019, Milley et al. 2018). There are many more of these problems. In times of intense social change, new problems are created, while others are difficult to solve or even minimise (Coyne 2005).

The development of research on social innovations generated an increase in their definitional approaches and ways of conceptualising them and questions about their common features distinguishing them from technological, organisational or governance innovation (Anheier et al. 2014; Morais-da-Silva 2020). They were looking for agents of change, i.e., entities ready to implement them. At the same time, the analyses pointed out many barriers to the implementation of social innovations by public institutions.

Public institutions (PIs), in contrast to nongovernmental organisations (NGOs), are not perceived as entities willing to introduce social innovation (Oosterlynck and Cools, 2020). In fact, PIs are criticised for their over-centralisation and inability to respond flexibly to change. The obstacles impeding their innovative capacity are manifested by, among other things, bureaucratisation, which involves the repetition of procedures that are reproduced, not modified (MacCallum et al. 2009), while the motivation to implement social innovation stems from the inefficient or unsatisfactory practices along with the desire to modify them to improve the quality of life and eliminate social problems (Bock 2016). Barriers to the implementation of social innovation are also the result of the short-term nature of PI activities; this can be attributed to the need to achieve rapid, visible successes (Bekkers et al. 2013).

There is relatively little research on the implementation of social innovations by rural public institutions in post-socialist countries (Vercher et al. 2020, Franklin et al. 2017). In these countries, such as Poland, the nongovernmental sector is weaker than in Western countries (Magner 2005, Ringdal 2019). The low level of public trust and citizens' belief that public institutions are responsible for solving social problems are not conducive to their involvement in the activities of NGOs (Potluka and Fanta 2021). These NGOs are struggling with deficits in many human and financial resources, including competition for funding from other NGOs (Waniak-Michalak et al. 2020). Therefore, PIs can play a significant role in implementing social innovations.

93% of Poland is rural[3]. Rural areas are inhabited by nearly 40% of the population who struggle with many social problems, including unemployment, poverty, limited access to preschool and extracurricular education (Bendowska et al. 2020). Public institutions are primarily responsible for solving these problems, including institutions operating locally, i.e., in the area of a specific territorial unit. They can carry out their activities independently or involve non-governmental organisations in them. Cooperation with NGOs is desirable because, *inter alia,* they can be useful in diagnosing a local problem and establishing contact with people who experience it (Potluka et al. 2022). Besides, NGOs are credited with greater interest in implementing atypical, nonstandard activities. They are not as bureaucratic as public institutions (Oosterlynck et al. 2020; Shier and Handy 2016).

This article addresses the implementation of social innovations by PIs in rural communes (rural gminas) of Poland. Its aim is to answer two questions: 1) Does cooperation with NGOs distinguish rural public institutions in Poland that have implemented SIs from those that have not? 2) Does the level of human and financial resources of NGOs affect the level of cooperation between public institutions and NGOs from rural gminas? To answer the research questions posed, the results of an internet survey and one-to-one interviews conducted in 2018 will be presented.

[3] Poland has a three-level territorial division. According to this, the territory of the country is divided into voivodeships, powiats and gminas. Gminas are divided into urban, rural and urban-rural. Rural gminas and the rural parts of urban-rural gminas account for 93% of the Poland's land area. In 2018, there were 1,559 rural gminas in Poland (https://stat.gov.pl/en/regional-statistics/classification-of-territorial-units/administrative-division-of-poland/accessed 1.05.2021).

A random sample included:

a) 330 public institutions from rural communes (rural gminas) considered key to solving local social problems, including gmina offices and social welfare centres.
b) 400 NGOs from rural gminas.

2. Social innovations in the context of public institution and NGO cooperation in post-socialist rural Poland

There are many theoretical approaches to social innovations. As emphasised by Ayob *et al*. (2016), despite social innovation being interesting, researchers in various scientific disciplines for several decades, theoretical reflection on this social innovation was only observed in 2004. The concept is still contested, thus contributing to the multiplicity of its definitional approaches, which are sometimes so broad that they lead to the trivialisation of social innovation, that is, to call social innovation any novelty that leads to social change (Ziegler 2017, Marques et al. 2017).

Some authors assume that the purpose of social innovations is to meet broadly understood social needs. Others emphasise solving only social problems (van der Have and Rubalcaba 2016, Rüede and Lurtz 2012), agreeing that the motivation to implement SI stems from inefficient or unsatisfactory practices along with the desire to modify them. In this article, we define SI as *changes introduced to resolve social issues affecting the residents of a given area and consisting of the emergence of alternative social practices to those currently dominating that area* (Zajda, Pasikowski and Kretek-Kamińska 2020). Therefore, the subject of our interest is social innovations implemented locally, the aim of which is not a complete, radical change in the system of solving social problems. Marques *et al*. (2017), referring to such innovations as complementary social innovation, distinguish them from social structural innovation aimed at transforming social structures (e.g. through the activity of movements such as feminism) and radical social innovation, meaning a change in the way products and services are produced and delivered with the intention of changing the current state. The specificity of a given territory, the social problems present there, and the ways of solving them all affect the possibility of implementing social innovations in each local context. Second, these services may not be innovations if they are not an alternative to the dominant ways of solving social problems (The Young Foundation 2012).

In each Polish rural gmina, the most important institutions responsible for solving local social problems are the gmina office and the gmina social welfare centre. This centre is created by the gmina council's resolution and acts as a gmina organisational unit; it does not have its own legal authority. It is formally subordinate to the head of the gmina (wojt), which is also the executive body of the gmina.

The obligations of the gmina office and the gmina social welfare centre in solving local social problems are regulated by many legal acts[4]. Each gmina is tasked with ensuring the proper functioning of the Commune Commission for Solving Alcohol Problems, the Commune Consultation Point on Addiction, and the Interdisciplinary Team for the Prevention of Domestic Violence. Additionally, strategies for solving social problems are developed at the level of each gmina (as an official document). These legal acts constitute the basis of the operation of PIs in counteracting and solving local social problems. Their implementation may prove to be effective, i.e., it may contribute to counteracting and reducing the scale of local social problems. However, if these measures are not satisfactory, there is then a rationale for implementing social innovations.

NGOs are entities with which public institutions from rural gminas can cooperate. According to the Act of 24 April 2003 covering public benefit activities and volunteering, NGOs are legal persons or organisational units, including foundations and associations, that do not belong to the public finance sector and who do not operate for profit. NGOs are also entities that do not have a legal character.

[4] These acts include the Act of 12 March 2004 on Social Welfare, the Act of 26 October 1982 on Upbringing in Sobriety and Counteracting Alcoholism, and the Act of 29 July 2005 on Counteracting Domestic Violence.

The NGO sector in Poland is diverse. NGOs are differentiated not only by their legal character, but also by many other characteristics, including the 'tradition of action', which is important in the context of the specificity of rural Poland. Here, there is a visible division into existing organisations (present for generations) and so-called 'new organisations', mostly created after 1989[5] (Kamiński, Sitek 2019). It is estimated that between 80% and 90% of this kind of NGO was established after 1989 (Chimiak 2016). Traditional organisations are volunteer fire brigades and rural housewives' associations[6]. They operate primarily to preserve local cultural heritage. New organisations are more likely to work to solve social problems.

Rural NGOs differ from their urban counterparts. They operate locally, have fewer members, and are less likely to employ permanent and paid staff. They also have small budgets and usually do not operate as businesses (Charycka et al. 2020).

The Act on Public Benefit Activities and Volunteering provides the obligation for the constituent bodies of local government (e.g. the gmina council) to adopt annual cooperation programmes with NGOs. It also allows for the possible adoption of multiannual cooperation programmes. In other words, in each rural gmina in Poland, the council should adopt a document defining the objectives and principles of its cooperation with NGOs. However, the quality of these documents can be very low (Faliszek 2021). NGOs are often perceived as entities struggling with numerous resource deficits (Psyk-Piotrowska, Kretek-Kamińska 2013), which makes it difficult for them to function continuously and therefore to cooperate with public institutions.

The specificity of a post-socialist country, in which the state authorities have discouraged undertaking bottom-up social activity for decades and where public institutions have not been trusted, does not facilitate cooperation between the public sector and nongovernmental organisations and thus the implementation of the principles of the new public governance model (Knieć, Goszczyński 2020). It is true that Polish researchers have noticed that the low level of human and financial resources might limit NGOs' cooperation with public institutions (Kretek-Kamińska, Zajda 2018). However, there is still no answer to the question of whether public institutions are primarily interested in cooperation with NGOs with the highest level of human and financial resources.

3. Methods

3.1 Procedure

To answer the research questions, an internet survey with representatives of public institutions and one-to-one interviews with representatives of NGOs were carried out.

The internet survey was conducted in 2018 with a sample of 330 randomly selected rural gminas (each rural gmina was a sampling unit, Fig. 1). A representative sample was drawn from a collection of 1,559 rural gminas (assuming a confidence level of $\alpha = 0.95$ and a maximum error of $p = 0.05$). The one-to-one interviews were conducted in 2018 with randomly selected NGOs located in 239 rural gminas. Gminas where the surveyed public institutions and NGOs were situated are shown on the Fig. 1.

The internet survey was addressed first to gmina offices, as they were determined to be the most important PIs shaping the social and economic development of each rural gmina, and at the same time, they served as the units controlling other PIs, such as gmina social welfare centres. Gmina offices and gmina social welfare centres are closely linked and together are responsible for solving local social problems. If the head or secretary of the gmina office did not express his or her willingness to take part in the survey and if he or she did not designate another employee and willing participant of the gmina office whose professional duties were directly concerned with solving local social problems, the survey was sent

[5] The right to freely establish associations and foundations was one of the basic demands of the opposition, which fought against the regime and whose struggle led to its overthrow in 1989.

[6] Rural housewives' associations can act as associations registered in the National Court Register. From 2018 (in connection with the adoption of the Act on Rural Housewives' Associations), they can also obtain legal personality by entering the National Register of Rural Housewives' Associations.

to the head of the gmina social welfare centre. Therefore, one respondent from each selected public institution completed the survey.

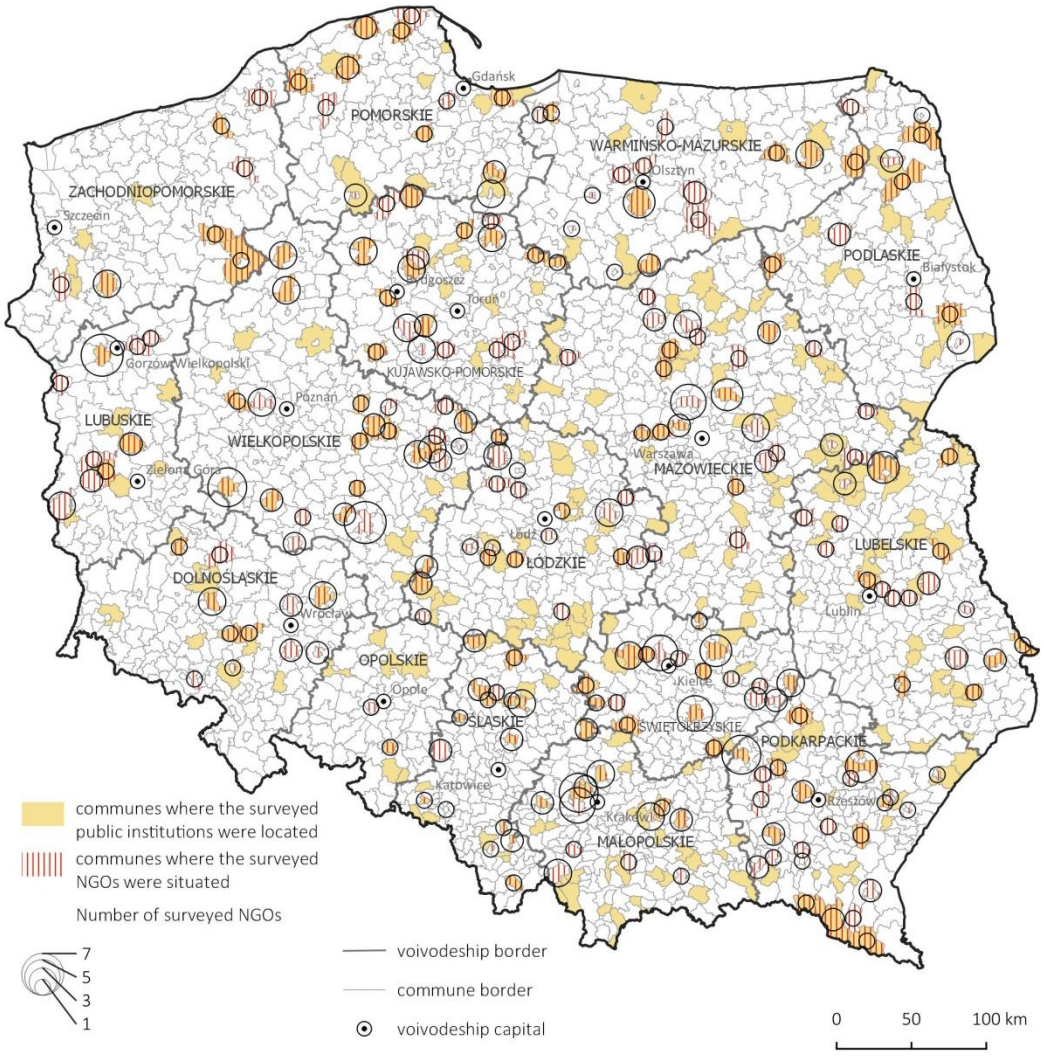


Fig 1. Selected communes (gminas) where the surveyed public institutions and NGOs were situated. Source: own elaboration

The one-to-one interviews with leaders of NGOs working in rural gminas to solve local social problems were conducted. To be able to make a random selection of a sample of organisations, it was necessary to prepare their complete list. Data obtained from the Central Statistical Office were used. The list only included those 330 rural gmina organisations randomly selected for the research that had a publicly available address and telephone number. If there was no new NGO ready to participate in the research in the selected rural gmina, an organisation from another randomly selected rural gmina from the same administered area (voivodeship) was examined. During the four weeks preceding the survey, the relevant list was verified, aiming to determine the number of organisations working to solve the social problems of residents of rural gminas. Each of the NGOs was contacted (three calls were made to the organisation on different days and times). The list includes 817 NGOs, and 400 participated in the research.

The collected data was analysed statistically with SPSS Statistics 24.0. Cronbach's alpha estimated above 5.0 was considered acceptable, and above 0.70 was considered high. The discriminatory power of the position above 0.20 was considered acceptable. The statistical significance of the results was assumed to be $\alpha = 0.05$. The level of each constructed variable was determined by converting the raw result on a scale of 0–100 according to the following formula:

$$WP = \frac{WS}{MAX} \times 100$$

where:

WP = converted result

WS = raw result

MAX = maximum score to obtain

The converted result was categorised according to the decile scale by dividing the results into five equal parts. It has been assumed that the range of 0–20 was a very low result, 21–40 was a low result, 41–60 was a mean result, 61–80 was a high result, and 81–100 was a very high result.

Data analysis was performed first using the nonparametric Mann–Whitney U test (the Shapiro–Wolf test showed that the distribution of the tested variable—PIs cooperation with NGOs (RWNGOs)—was not consistent with the normal distribution). Second, a cartographic method was used to analyse the obtained results spacially. The results are shown on the map. The method was used to illustrate the exact value of the variable: the cooperation of public institutions with local nongovernmental organisations (RWNGOs) and the exact value of the variable: human and financial resources of non-governmental organisations (IPE). This method is characterised by a high degree of smoothing of the spatial image, which allows us to capture tendencies or clusters of repair points with similar values. To perform this analysis, only a group of selected gminas, whose centroids were used to make an isoline map are taken into account. This means that the results should be read considering only selected gminas. The values of the individual intervals are generated from the calculation of averages within a radius of 70 km from each centroid. Therefore, average values for a given area are generated, which in effect translates into an abstract image that does not correspond to the values at a given repair point. The areas between these points do not have the actual values that the isoline map shows, so it should only be treated as a model for a specific set of gminas for the analysis of a sample of data in space.

3.2 Tools

To obtain information about whether a public institution implemented social innovations, their representatives were asked the question, “To solve social problems affecting the residents of the commune (gmina), did the institution carry out any activities that could be described as unusual, nonstandard, or different from the practices commonly applied in the area of this gmina for solving social problems?” Representatives of public institutions were also asked the question: ‘Did the institution (within the last three years) cooperate (formally or informally) with a local non-governmental organisation?’. Cooperation was defined as actions taken jointly in the context of shared objectives. In this case, cooperation refers to the formal and informal contact between PIs and NGOs from the gmina area. Bearing in mind how Polish legislation has defined[7], inter alia, there were three possible forms of cooperation between the PIs and NGOs (Act of 24 April 2003 on Public Benefit Activity and Volunteering):

A. Creation of joint teams of an advisory and initiating character;

B. Joint provision of social services in projects established exclusively by a PI;

C. Co-construction and co-production of social services within the framework of the implemented projects.

Therefore, the variable PI cooperation with NGOs (RWNGOs) was built from the following three variables:

A. Creation (within the last three years) of joint teams of an advisory;

B. Joint provision (within the last three years) of social services within the framework of projects created exclusively by a PI;

[7] Examples of cooperation between the public sector and NGOs listed in the Act of 24 April 2003 on Public Benefit Activity and Volunteering include consulting draft normative acts with NGOs, creation of joint teams of an advisory and initiating character, joint identification of needs and joint planning of actions to meet those needs, and outsourcing public tasks to NGOs.

C. Joint creation and joint delivery by a PI and NGO (within the last three years) of social services within the framework of the implemented projects.

The reliability of the variable was confirmed, and the value of Cronbach's alpha was high at 0.84.

The study obtained information from representatives of non-governmental organisations about the human and financial resources at their disposal. The variable human and financial resources of the organisation (IPE) includes the following items:

1. Number of active members of the organisation
2. Number of volunteers involved in the activities of the organisation
3. Number of employees employed under an employment contract
4. Number of employees employed under a civil law contract
5. Funds obtained from the EU
6. Organisation budget

The reliability of the variable was confirmed, and the value of Cronbach's alpha was 0.60.

3.3 Participants

The survey was administered to 330 representatives of rural public institutions. Of the respondents, 76.5% were women, and 20.6% were men. The study also involved 400 NGOs. Among respondents (leaders of the organisations), 66.67% were women and 33.33% were men.

4. Results

Cooperation between public institutions and NGOs can be undertaken in various forms.

Public institutions may outsource the performance of public tasks to NGOs. The manner of their implementation is determined by the public institution alone or in cooperation (formal or informal) with NGOs. Services can be provided by NGOs independently but in accordance with the competition criteria defined by the gmina office or in cooperation with a public institution. This is facilitated by the fact that very often, the leaders of NGOs are people associated with a public institution. For example, the leader of an association may also be the head of a local school for which the governing body is the local public institution. Institutions and NGOs may also set up joint teams to solve social problems.

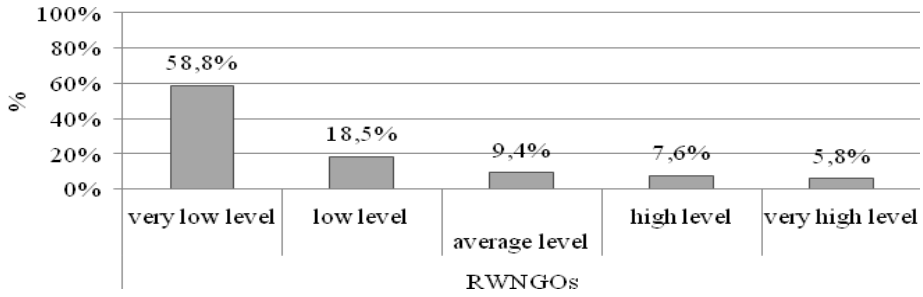


Fig 2. The level of the variable: Public institutions cooperation with NGO. Source: own elaboration

In light of the research, a high and very high level of cooperation with NGOs was characteristic of 13.4% of PIs.

The surveyed public institutions most often cooperated with NGOs to create and implement projects in which both entities participated; for example, where the public institution and a non-governmental organisation jointly worked out (often in an informal way) the scope of a public task, and then the NGO took part in a bidding process for the implementation of the task.

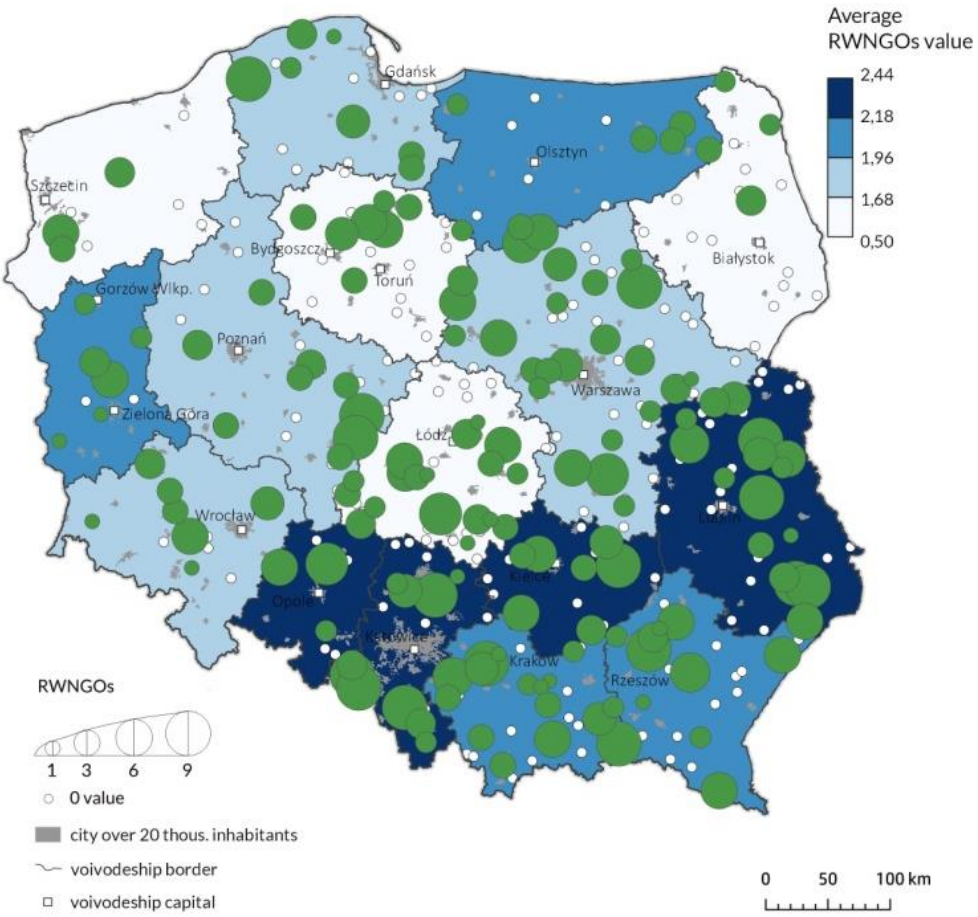


Fig 3. Spatial distribution of the index of cooperation between PIs and NGOs (RWNGOs) and the mean value of this index. Source: own elaboration

Slightly less often, public institutions cooperated with NGOs, entrusting them with the performance of public functions, the creation of which the organisations did not participate. For example, organisations taking part in competitive bidding announced by a public institution performed a public task based on the assumptions of a project they did not help create.

The rarest form of cooperation was the creation by public institutions and NGOs of a joint advisory and initiative team (Table 1).

Tab 1. Descriptive statistics of the number of NGOs from the gmina with which public institutions have cooperated in the last 3 years. Source: own elaboration

Form of cooperation	*n*	*M*	*SD*	*Min*	*Max*
Creation of joint teams of an advisory and initiating character	330	0.80	1.55	0.00	7.00
Joint provision of social services in projects established exclusively by a PI	330	0.91	1.68	0.00	10.00
Coconstruction, and co-production of social services within the framework of the implemented projects	330	0.95	1.68	0.00	8.00

n– number; *M* – mean, *SD* – standard deviation, *Min/Max* – minimum/maximum

The PIs most active in undertaking various forms of cooperation with NGOs were those from rural gminas established in the Opolskie, Śląskie, Świętokrzyskie and Lubelskie voivodships. The least active in this area were public institutions from rural gminas located in the Zachodniopomorskie, Kujawsko-Pomorskie, Łódź and Podlaskie voivodships.

It may be helpful in interpreting the spatial distribution of this phenomenon to distinguish the reasons for public institutions to cooperate with NGOs. Particularly, this cooperation can be undertaken first, with the most active local NGOs, which are characterised by a higher (compared to the others) level of human and financial resources. Thus, it is believed that the organisation will reliably and effectively carry out a public task to solve local social problems, and if it participates in the work of a joint advisory or consultative team, it will demonstrate knowledge and competence.

Secondly, this cooperation can be undertaken with NGOs not so much characterised by the highest level of human and financial resources but with those that have remained with the local authority in informal agreements based on personal contacts. Polish researchers also draw attention to the negative attitude of leaders of public institutions to leaders of non-governmental organisations who have stood as candidates or intend to stand for election in local elections, perceiving them as competitors for power. Cooperation with such organisations may not be undertaken at all. They also note that NGOs are not interested in engaging in this cooperation if they are critical of the actions of their leaders (Cierniak-Szóstak 2011).

Spatial analysis of the level of human and financial resources of NGOs from rural gminas has shown that the voivodeships with the best-endowed NGOs do not coincide with those where public institutions from rural gminas most often cooperate with local NGOs. This indicates the existence of both motives for cooperation between public institutions and local NGOs.

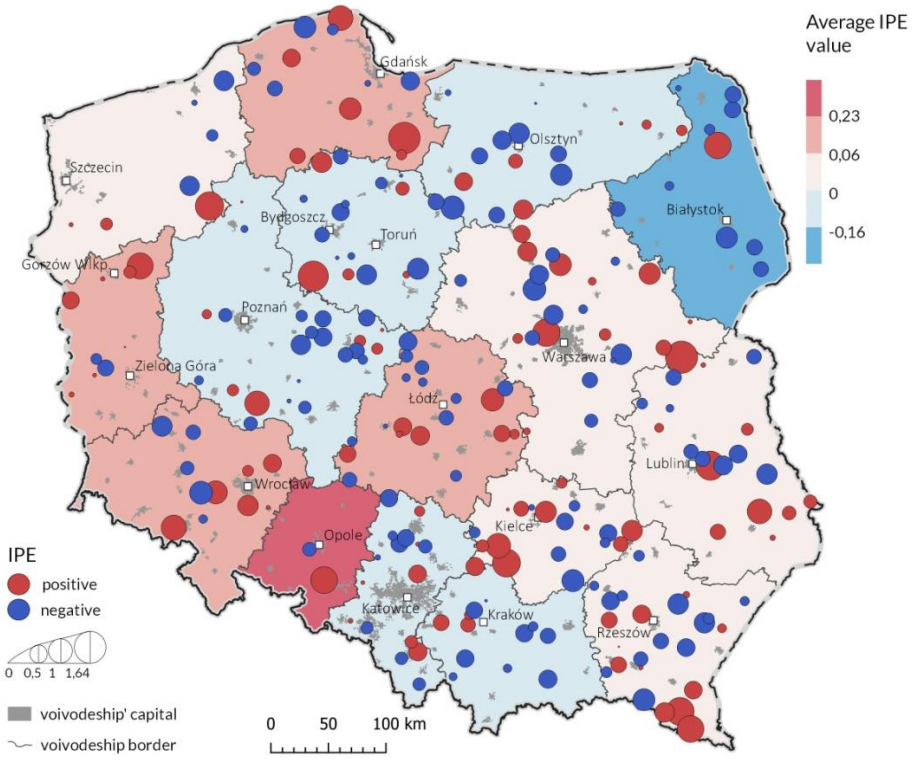


Fig 4. Spatial distribution of the index of professionalization and economization of non-governmental organizations (IPE) and the mean value of this index. Source: own elaboration

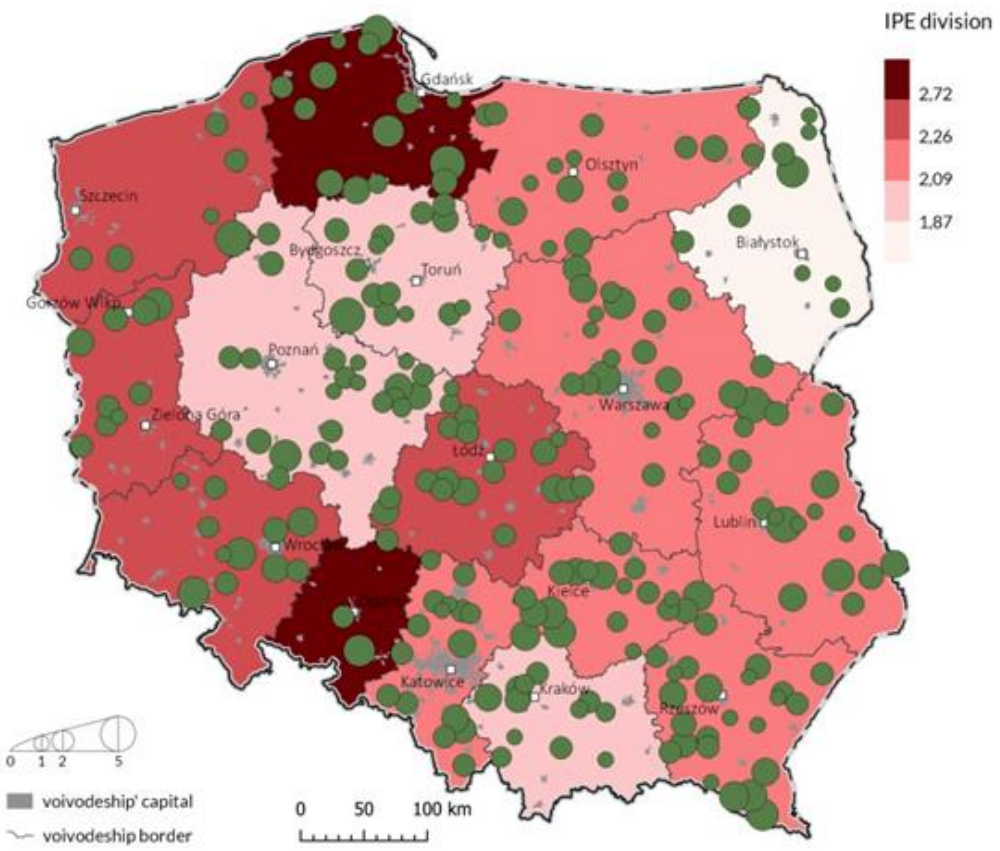


Fig 5. Spatial distribution of the index of professionalization and economization of non-governmental organizations – division (IPE division) and the mean value of this index. Source: own elaboration

Therefore, the study indicates that the level of human and financial resources is not the only factor affecting the readiness of a public institution to cooperate with local NGOs (located in the same gmina).

It should be noted that, in general, the level of human and financial resources of rural NGOs is low. Slightly more than 40% of the surveyed organisations used the help of volunteers. A much smaller percentage of them had staff employed with an employment contract (14.75%) or a civil law contract[8] (11.5%). The average number of people showing continuous activity was 6. Non-governmental organisations most often did not apply for funding from the European Union (58%) and had budgets less than PLN 50,000 per year (82%), of which the largest percentage were organisations with a budget of up to PLN 5,000 (29%) (approximately 1,000 euro). The high and very high level of these resources was characterised by only 9.11% of NGOs from rural gminas.

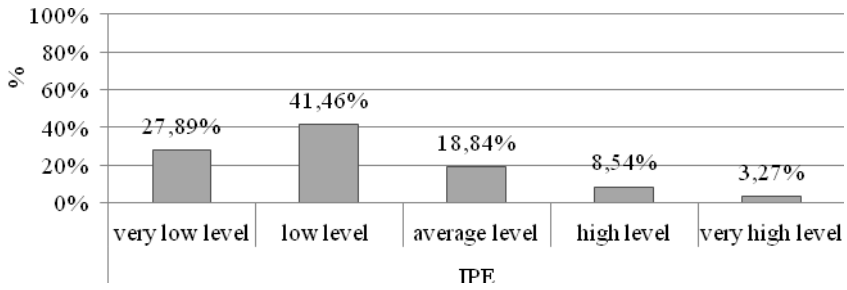


Fig 6. The level of the variable: Human and financial resources of NGOs. Source: own elaboration

[8] An NGO may employ paid staff, which does not preclude the use of volunteers. In other words, the organisation can use the help of volunteers and paid staff at the same time.

The cooperation of public institutions with local NGOs did not distinguish those that implemented social innovations. In other words, the cooperation of public institutions with local NGOs did not necessarily support their implementation of SI projects.

Tab 2. Social innovation implementation by public institutions and their cooperation with local NGOs. Source: Own elaboration

	Implementation of social innovation				Significance of differences	
	No *n* = 273		Yes *n* = 57			
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*U*	*p*
Cooperation of public institutions with NGOs (RWNGOs)	1.83	2.62	2.26	2.64	6927.00	0.16

n - number, M - mean, SD - standard deviation, U - Mann–Whitney U test statistics, p - significance

This proves that public institutions did not make decisions to implement social innovations, drawing on the resources of NGOs. Undertaking this cooperation did not make them more likely to implement SI than other PIs that did not engage in cooperation with NGOs.

5. Discussion and conclusions

Social innovation is an alternative to existing forms of social practices that aims to solve or reduce social problems. Its implementation is risky to some extent. Public institutions are less likely than NGOs to be interested in such activities, but this does not mean that they are completely uninterested in them.

Considering that new types of NGOs have only been in existence since the 1980s, Poland's rural NGO sector is quite new. It is constantly shaping and redefining itself. In addition to organisations with few members and low budgets, there are organisations that increase the level of their human and financial resources by undergoing professionalisation and economisation processes. However, research has shown that having a higher level of human and financial resources does not mean that they will cooperate with public institutions more frequently. In other words, human and financial resources are not the only factors that influence this cooperation. There could be other significant factors, such as private contacts with the leaders of the organisation, viewing them as competitors for power, or leaders of the local opposition criticising the activities of a public institution.

How is it that the cooperation of a rural public institution with local NGOs does not affect their decision to implement social innovation? The literature on the subject emphasizes that combining the resources of various institutions and organisations helps to achieve the implementation of social innovations (Krasnopolskaya and Meijs, 2019). Although public institutions have more financial resources than NGOs, they can use the human resources of NGOs. Hiring employees, engaging volunteers and having many active members increase the organisation's human capital, including knowledge resources. They can be valuable to public institutions. They could be about hidden knowledge regarding the specificity of local social problems. Public institutions can use the experience of NGOs. Meanwhile, research has shown that this is not the case. The reason for this appears to be to downplay the importance of NGOs' resources as tools that can assist in the implementation of social innovations. Public institutions in post-socialist Poland continue to pit themselves against other social actors who can help solve local social problems. They undervalue their resources, even if they are aware that they exist. They put themselves in the role of the entity with more valuable resources. Thus, they are admonished to use the resources of other entities, including those of NGOs, which exemplifies the lack of a cooperative culture among them. In other words, in post-socialist countries such as Poland, cooperation is first limited because of the specificity of the relationship between public institutions and NGOs; secondly, it is not solely dependent on the level of human and financial resources of NGOs; and thirdly, it does not support the implementation of social innovations.

Acknowledgements

The paper presents selected results of a study carried out in 2018 as part of the grant "Local systems of social innovations in rural areas" financed by the National Science Centre (research project reference no.: 015/19/D/HS6/00690, DEC-2015/19/D/HS6/00690, contract no UMO-2015/19/D/HS6/00690).

Academic references

[1] Anheier, H. K., Krlev, G., Preuss, S., Mildenberger, G. & Bekkers, R. (2014). *Social innovation as impact of the third sector. Impact of the Third Sector as Social Innovation* (ITSSOIN), European Commission – 7th Framework Programme, Brussels: European Commission, DG Research.

[2] Ayob, N., Teasdale, S. & Fagan, K. (2016). How social innovation ''came to be'': Tracing the evolution of a contested concept. *Journal of Social Policy*, 45(4), 635–653. DOI: 10.1017/S004727941600009X.

[3] Bekkers, V., Tummers, L. G., Stuijfzand, B. G. & Voorberg, W. (2013). Social innovation in the public sector: An integrative framework. *LIPSE working papers (no. 1).* Rotterdam: Erasmus University Rotterdam.

[4] Bendowska, E., Borawska, M., Jankowski, Ł., Kalski, J., Lech, I., Medolińska, K., Pytalska, A., Stawikowska, M., Wielechowska, K. & Zych, M. (2020). *Rural areas in Poland 2018*. Warszawa-Olsztyn: Statistical Office in Olsztyn.

[5] Bock, B. (2016). Rural marginalisation and the role of social innovation: a turn towards nexogenous development and rural reconnection. *Sociologia Ruralis*, *56*(4), 552–573. DOI: 10.1111/soru.12119.

[6] Caulier-Grice, J., Davies, A., Patrick, R. & Norman, W. (2012). Social Innovation Overview: A deliverable of the project: "The theoretical, empirical and policy foundations for building social innovation in Europe" (TEPSIE), European Commission – 7 th Framework Programme, Brussels: European Commission, DG Research.

[7] Charycka, B., Gumkowska, M. & Arczewska, M. (2020). *Oblicza lokalności. Organizacje pozarządowe na wsi*. Warszawa: Stowarzyszenie Klon/Jawor.

[8] Chimiak, G. (2016). The growth of non-governmental development organizations in Poland and their cooperation with Polish aid. Warsaw: Institute of Philosophy and Sociology PAN.

[9] Cierniak-Szóstak, E. (2011). Kultura organizacyjna NGO wobec wymagań funduszy strukturalnych, *Ekonomia Społeczna*, 1(2), 41–52.

[10] Coyne, R. (2005). Wicked Problems Revisited. *Design Studies*, 26(1), 5–17. DOI: 10.1016/j.destud.2004.06.005.

[11] Faliszek, K. (2021). *Samorząd gminy jako podmiot lokalnej polityki społecznej. Przypadek małych gmin województwa śląskiego*. Katowice: Uniwersytet Śląski.

[12] Franklin, A., Kovách, I. & Csurgó, B. (2017). Governing social innovation: Exploring the role of "discretionary practice" in the negotiation of shared spaces of community food growing. *Sociologia Ruralis*, *57*(4), 339–458. DOI: 10.1111/soru.12126.

[13] Grimm, R., Fox, Ch., Baines, S. & Albertson, K. (2013). Social Innovation, an Answer to Contemporary Societal Challenges? Locating the Concept in Theory and Practice. *Innovation: The European Journal of Social Science Research*, 26(4), 436–455. DOI: 10.1080/13511610.2013.848163.

[14] Have, R. P. van der & Rubalcaba, L. (2016). Social innovation research: An emerging area of innovation studies? *Research Policy*, 45, 1923–1935. DOI: 10.1016/j.respol.2016.06.010.

[15] Huq, J.-L. (2019). Conditioning a Professional Exchange Field for Social Innovation. *Business & Society*, 58(5), 1047–1082. DOI: 10.1177/0007650318758321.

[16] Kamiński R., Sitek, A. (2019). *Wiejskie organizacje społeczne.* In Halamska, M., Stanny, M., Wiklin, J., eds., *Ciągłość i zmiana. Sto lat rozwoju polskiej wsi* (pp. 421–454). Warszawa: IRWiR PAN.

[17] Knieć, W., Goszczyński, W. (2022). Local Horizons of Governance. Social Conditions for Good Governance in Rural Development in Poland. *European Countryside* 14(1), 27–50. DOI: 10.2478/euco-2022-0002.

[18] Kretek-Kamińska, A., Zajda, K. (2018). Collaboration between local social policy entities and their readiness to implement social innovations. *Research Papers of Wrocław University of Economics*, *510*, 102–110. DOI: 10.15611/pn.2018.510.08.

[19] Maccallum, D., Moulaert, F., Hillier, J. & Vicari-Haddock, S. (2009). *Social Innovation and Territorial Development*. Farnham: Ashgate Publishing.

[20] Magner, M. (2005). Civil Society in Poland after 1989: A Legacy of Socialism? *Canadian Slavonic Papers*, 47(1–2), 49–69. DOI: 10.1080/00085006.2005.11092377.

[21] Marques, P., Morgan, K. & Richardson, R. (2017). Social innovation in question: The theoretical and practical implications of a contested concept. *Environment and Planning C: Politics and Space*, 36(3), 496–512. DOI: 10.1177/2399654417717986.

[22] Milley, P., Szijarto, B., Svensson, K. & Cousins, J. B. (2018). The Evaluation of Social Innovation: A review and integration of the current empirical knowledge base, *Evaluation*, 24(2), 237–258. DOI: 10.1177/1356389018763242.

[23] Morais-da-Silva, R., Segatto, A. & Bezerra-de-Sousa, I. (2020). Connecting Two Sides: A Qualitative Study on Social Innovation Ventures and Poor Communities in an Emerging Economy. Voluntas, 31, 966–980. DOI: 10.1007/s11266-021-00357-3.

[24] Moulaert, F., Mehmood, A., MacCallum, D., Leubolt, B. (2017). *Social Innovation as a Trigger for Transformations – The role of research,* Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

[25] Noack, A. & Federwisch, T. (2019). Social innovation in rural regions: Urban impulses and cross-border constellations of actors. *Sociologia Ruralis*, *59*(1), 92–112. DOI: 10.1111/soru.12216.

[26] Oosterlynck, S. & Cools, P. (2020). Modalities of governing the welfare mix. In Oosterlynck, S., Novy, A. & Kazepov, Y., eds., *Local Social Innovation to Combat Poverty and Exclusion: A Critical Appraisal* (pp. 63–90). Bristol: Policy Press.

[27] Oosterlynck, S., Novy, A., Leubolt, B. & Weinzierl, C. (2020). Contradictory dynamics of empowerment in social innovation initiatives. In Oosterlynck, S., Novy, A. & Kazepov, Y., eds., *Local Social Innovation to Combat Poverty and Exclusion: A Critical Appraisal* (pp. 113–136). Bristol: Policy Press.

[28] Krasnopolskaya, I. & Meijs, L. (2019). The effect of enabling factors on social innovation in Russian non-profit organisations, *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy*, 39(5/6), 447–463. DOI: 10.1108/IJSSP-09-2018-0140.

[29] Potluka, O., Fanta, P. (2021). Rural Non-profit Leaders and Their (In)formal Role in Local Development. *Voluntary Sector Review*, 12, 13–39. DOI: 10.1332/204080521x16106633884165.

[30] Potluka, O. Svecova, L. & Zarubova, L. (2022). Do voluntary civic engagement and non-profit leadership challenge local political leadership in urban development? *Urban Research & Practice*. DOI: 10.1080/17535069.2021.2023210.

[31] Psyk-Piotrowska, E., Kretek-Kamińska, A. (2013). The role of local action groups in the formation of human, social and economic capital or rural areas. *Wieś i Rolnictwo* 4(161), 45–61.

[32] Richter, R. (2019). Rural social enterprises as embedded intermediaries: the innovative power of connecting rural communities with supra-regional networks. *Journal of Rural Studies*, 70, 179–187. DOI: 10.1016/j.jrurstud.2017.12.005.

[33] Ringdal, K. (2019). Polish civic values in a European context. In: Ringdal, K. & Dośpiał-Borysiak, K., eds., *Civic and Uncivic Values in Poland. Value Transformation, Education, and Culture* (pp. 107–130), Budapest: Central European University.

[34] Rüede, D. & Lurtz, K. (2012). Mapping the Various Meanings of Social Innovation: Towards a differentiated understanding of an emerging concept, *EBS Business School Research Paper Series 12–03*. DOI: 10.2139/ssrn.2091039.

[35] Shier, M. L. & Handy, F. (2016). Cross-sector Partnerships: Factors supporting social innovation by nonprofits, *Human Service Organizations Management*, 40(3), 253–266. DOI: 10.1080/23303131.2015.1117556.

[36] Shockley, G. (2015). Review of 'The International Handbook on Social Innovation: Collective action, social learning and transdisciplinary research, *Journal of Regional Science*, 55(1), 152–154. DOI: 10.1111/jors.12182.

[37] Vercher, N., Barlagne, C., Hewitt, R., Nijnik, M. & Esparcia, J. (2020). Whose Narrative is it Anyway? Narratives of Social Innovation in Rural Areas – A comparative analysis of community-led initiatives in Scotland and Spain, *Sociologia Ruralis*, 61(1), 163–189. DOI: 10.1111/soru.12321.

[38] Waniak-Michalak H., Perica I., Leitoniene, S. & Chojnacka, E. (2020). The Institutional Settings of the Recovery of the NGO Sector in Post-Communist Countries. *Comparative Economic Research. Central and Eastern Europe*, 23(3), 133–154. DOI: 10.18778/1508-2008.23.24.

[39] Waniak-Michalak, H. & Michalak, J. (2016). Corporate and NGOs Voluntary Disclosure on Collaboration. Evidence from Poland. *Inzinerine Ekonomika-Engineering Economics*, 27 (1), 98–108. DOI: 10.5755/j01.ee.27.1.9338.

[40] Zajda, K., Pasikowski, S. & Kretek-Kamińska, A. (2020). The implementation of grassroots product-oriented social innovations by non-governmental organisations: Proposal of a measurement tool. *Innovation: The European Journal of Social Science Research*, 1–15. DOI: 10.1080/13511610.2020.1742668.

[41] Ziegler, R. (2017). Social innovation as a collaborative concept. Innovation: The European Journal of Social Science Research, 30(4), 388–405. DOI: 10.1080/13511610.2017.1348935.

Other sources

[42] *Ustawa z dnia 24 kwietnia 2003 r. o działalności pożytku publicznego i o wolontariacie (Dz. U. 03.96.873)*. Act of 24 April 2003 on Public Benefit Activity and Volunteering (Dz. U. 03.96.873).

[43] *Ustawa z dnia 12 marca 2004 r. o pomocy społecznej (Dz. U. 2004 Nr 64 poz. 593).* The Act of 12 March 2004 on Social Welfare (Dz. U. 2004 Nr 64 poz. 593).

[44] *Ustawa z dnia 26 października 1982 r. o wychowaniu w trzeźwości i przeciwdziałaniu alkoholizmowi (Dz. U. 1982 Nr 35 poz. 230).* The Act of 26 October 1982 on Upbringing in Sobriety and Counteracting Alcoholism (Dz. U. 1982 Nr 35 poz. 230).

[45] *Ustawa z dnia 29 lipca 2005 r. o przeciwdziałaniu przemocy w rodzinie (Dz.U. 2005 Nr 180 poz. 1493).* The Act of 29 July 2005 on Counteracting Domestic Violence (Dz.U. 2005 Nr 180 poz. 1493).