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Article

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Public participation in local development in the opinion of local governments and social economy entities

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Abstract: The aim of the article is to assess the role and the level of social participation in local development in the light of the opinions of local governments and entities of social economy. In the new paradigm of territorial development, an important role is attributed to the cooperation of local government units with society, considered as a vital factor in local development. This cooperation is determined, among others, by engaging citizens in local matters, including through social economy entities. Local authorities and social economy entities perceive and evaluate this activity in a slightly different way, which is not conducive to the development of cooperation and the region itself. Therefore, it is important to identify these discrepancies in order to take appropriate pro-development measures. The following methods were used in the study: literature analysis, comparative analysis of the results of surveys carried out in the communes of the West Pomeranian Voivodeship and among social economy entities operating in this province (the research was carried out in 2017-2018), inference and plus evaluations. Consequently, they enabled (1) to make a synthetic assessment of the role and the level of social involvement in local development and to indicate differences in its perception by the surveyed entities, as well as (2) to formulate recommendations for improving cooperation between local governments and society and social economy entities.

Keywords: local development, public participation, local self-government

JEL codes: 043, R11, R59

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1. Introduction

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In the last 18 years, the conditions of regional development programming have changed entirely. The methods of advancing a regional development policy have been reinterpreted, introducing a new paradigm of territorial development policy, which assumes that it is the processes at the local level that may be a chance for economic growth and building a competitive advantage of individual areas and the whole country. They are even considered to be leverage for a new economy subject on mechanisms of global competitiveness, based on knowledge, creativity and innovation (Hełpa-Liszkowska, 2013: 6-7; Ababio, 2004: 272-289). A special role in the development process is attributed to endogenous factors,[1] especially soft factors, having its source within the community, including broadly understood public participation, in which social economy entities are of significant importance (Andre et all, 2006). Since this participation is so important for the development of local and territorial development policy, it is worth verifying what local authorities and social economy entities think about it, how they perceive and evaluate it. Discrepancies in the perception of the role and social involvement make it difficult for local governments to cooperate with the public and, consequently, also adversely affect local development. The greatest convergence of views would be beneficial to all actors and local development. Thus, the aim of the article is to assess the role and the level of public participation in local development in the light of opinions of local governments and entities of social economy. It has largely been based on a very synthetic presentation of the role of public participation in local development and a comparison of the results of two surveys on the relevant topic, carried out by the Department of Socio-Economic Policy and European Regional Studies of the University of Szczecin.[2] On this basis, a synthetic assessment of the role and the level of public participation in local development was made, using the positive scale of assessments, which was not applied to the examined issues. This distinguishes the work from others and is its added value.

The differences in the perception of the role and the social involvement in local

[1] Local development factors can be divided into hard (quantitative) and soft (qualitative). The hard ones include: geographic location, communication infrastructure potential, environmental condition, social infrastructure and living conditions. On the other hand, the soft ones are difficult-to-measure factors, including creativity and innovation of human capital of a given local community; intensity, diversity and quality of cultural activities; the offer for recreational and leisure services; the quality of the environment created by man and the natural environment; entrepreneurial and creative climate combined with citizens' engagement in public affairs (local leader and the so-called local actors who should be the elite responsible for local development and development strategies and local community activities); the sense of identification of local societies with the city or region in which they live, based on cultural and historical backgrounds and the development aspirations of citizens (integrated local community); broadly understood participation/social cooperation (Kryk, 2019: 81-92).

[2] In 2017, local government units were examined, and in 2018 – social economy entities.

development which were identified as a result of the research create "What is next?" questions that which individuals are not able to answer. Asking them, however, can initiate a discussion/action aimed at improving the situation.

2. Review of the literature – the role of public participation in local development

The new paradigm of development has not only caused a change in the function and the role of territorial self-governments, but also brought about the need to modify traditional mechanisms of public participation and to enrich them with other forms of activity of citizens, more adapted to the current dimension of life /public needs. Public participation has become a routine and expected feature of public policy-making (Bingham et al., 2005: 547–558).The changes concern also the citizens' awareness of the expected quality of public life and the role that this paradigm created for them – that is, the citizen articulating his will and the rights to co-decide about the place of living (Kryk, 2017: 85-95). These transformations make the cooperation of society with territorial self-government become a very important platform for solving local socio-economic problems (Czaputowicz, 2010: 19-26; Stoker, 1998: 17-28), and therefore also local development. Public participation "involves the direct or indirect involvement of stakeholders in decision-making about policies, plans or programs in which they have an interest" (Quick and Bryson, 2016: 158). It "complements the traditional mechanisms of democracy – creating new methods of involving residents in public life, relations, and strengthening social control" (Kalisiak-Mędelska, 2011: 264). First of all, however, it is a platform for negotiations and arrangements when differences of interest and expectations arise, which should not be eliminated only by administrative decisions or purely market mechanisms (Satorius et al., 2009: 3; Furmankiewicz, 2002: 5-24; Aktan and Ozler, 2008: 165-187). As Kalisiak-Mędelska (2015: 246) wrote, a well-developed participation not only increases the responsibility of the authorities for decisions, but also distributes them to other local actors, makes them more transparent and rational and changes the position of citizens. "They cease to be the addressees of actions of public authorities, and firstly – they become a valuable source of information necessary for the construction of public policies by the authorities, secondly – verifiers of actions taken on their behalf, thirdly – co-creators of concepts, plans, undertakings, solutions, etc. in the area of matters concerning them, and fourthly – their implementers (co-organizers)."

The issue of cooperation between Local Government Units (LGUs) and society, that is

public participation in decision-making processes related to local development, is widely described in the relevant source literature. The term itself has many meanings.[3] In the most general way, it is an expression of citizens' participation in law-making and decision-taking. In other words, it is a social process, as a result of which citizens or specific social groups consciously engage in dealing with matters important to them (in various forms), share their experience and views, and even directly participate in implementation of public services (e.g. through non-governmental organizations/social economy institutions) and work undertaken to solve problems or to design new solutions. In this way they gain influence and indirectly control over decisions of public authorities that affect their interests and provision of public services that they use (Długosz and Wygnański, 2005: 11; Madzivhandila, 2014: 652-657). This activity involves both the participation of residents and their organisations as well as influential community leaders. Participation provides an opportunity for participants to enhance their own capacities to engage in democratic citizenship (Pateman, 1970; Mansbridge 1999), produces lasting achievements of public value (Nabatchi 2010; Boyte 2011), helps articulate what the "public" interest is (Reich 1990) and provides the basis for broadly based social learning (Ansell 2011). The cooperation can also be treated as a synonym of information sharing – communication with the community, often identified with consultations that offer citizens the opportunity to express opinions on activities, enterprises or decisions proposed or undertaken by local authorities (Wojciechowski et al., 2014: 23-27). In addition, participants can contribute to decisions through providing new information, different ways of seeing an issue and motivation to address problems (Renn et al. 1993), sometimes helping government decision-makers and the public to become more informed and develop an enlarged view of issues (Fung 2007).

Regardless of the way in which public participation is defined, it contributes to an increase in public acceptance of public undertakings and elimination of these unsuccessful, to activation and better use of local material and intangible resources, which results in a sustainable increase in the quality of citizens' lives of and the economic potential. Public participation determines the effectiveness and efficiency of partner governance of LGUs and local socio-economic

[3] Previously, the term 'citizen participation' was used. The term excludes many participants, though, who do not have formal citizenship status and also neglects numerous other types of public or civic participation and engagement, therefore the term "public participation" is now used (Arnstein, 1969: 216-224; International Association for Public Participation, 2014; Nabatchi, 2010: 376-399; Nabatchi, 2012: 699-708).

development. However, such a cooperation is not easy, it will not appear by itself. It requires willingness of parties, knowledge, but mainly awareness of the benefits that all local actors (participants) can achieve (Ababio, 2007: 614-621). Local authorities should ensure the right motivation of citizens to use their resources (knowledge, skills, experience, time) for the common good, create conditions for cooperation, while society and social entities, including the social economy, should actively use their rights and tools of local governance.

Public participation is most visible at the local level, where all the most important public tasks directly related to local communities have been transferred. Their implementation requires not only interest on the part of the authorities as responsible for this process, but also on the part of their main recipients – the society. This interest should not only concern public services, but all possible areas related to the functioning of a given local government unit, and therefore its development (Kalisiak-Mędelska, 2015: 246; Blanusa, 2013: 123-128).

In the context of the above, it is interesting to compare the opinions of representatives of LGUs and those of social economy entities concerning public participation for two reasons: (1) to find out how these two groups of entities perceive and assess the role of society in the local development process, (2) to obtain information on how to improve cooperation between local governments and society.

3. Research methodology and research sample

The first survey was conducted between 10 January and 10 March 2017, using the questionnaire entitled "Success factors in local development", which was sent out to all 114 municipalities of the West Pomeranian Voivodeship, counties (*poviats*) (18) and cities with county (*poviat*) rights (3). The questionnaire contained 20 questions, including 18 closed-ended questions with answer choices, 2 open questions and a specification. Filled questionnaires were returned by 69 local government units (LGUs), which constituted 51% of all the respondents in the voivodship. Among the LGUs surveyed, there were 27 urban-rural municipalities (39.1% of the respondents), 21 – rural (30.5%), 9 – urban (13%), 9 counties (13%) and 3 cities with county rights (4.4%).

The second study on the role of social economy sector entities and public participation in local development was carried out in February and – due to the lack of response from respondents – again at the turn of May and June 2018. Survey forms were sent by post, e-mail and distributed

to representatives of social economy entities during the "Great Picnic of Passion under Plane trees" – a meeting of the third sector organizations presenting their achievements, which took place on 27 May in Szczecin.[4] Despite the sincere involvement of the research team in the distribution of the survey questionnaires, only over 31 responses were received out of over 200 forms sent, which means that this study can only be considered as a pilot one. A small percentage of the returned completed forms is mainly due to the small interest of social economy entities in the subject of the research, as well as a lack of time, employees able to complete the survey and willingness to cooperate with the researchers.[5] The questionnaire form contained a total of 37 questions arranged in four parts. One of these parts in both questionnaires was directly related to public participation.

Due to the limited size of the present publication, the article uses only synthetic responses to questions related to the subject of the article,[6] which both the representatives of LGUs and social economy entities were asked, enabling the achievement of the set goal. First, the responses received were analysed using percentages, methods of comparative analysis, deduction and statistical inference. Next, a synthetic assessment of the role and the level of public participation in local development was made, using a positive scale of assessments.

4. Research results

Understanding the opinions of the surveyed entities on the involvement of members of society in local development was based on both directly and indirectly related questions. To start with, the respondents were asked to indicate the most important factors determining local economic development according to them (Table 1).

Table 1. The most important factors influencing the local economic development by Local Government Units and social economy entities

Description	LGU	Social Economy Entities
	Percentage of responses	Percentage of responses

[4] The questionnaire was sent to all the social economy entities registered in the Marshal's Office of the West Pomeranian Voivodeship.
[5] Contrary to the expectations, conducting surveys among social economy entities was not easy, although it concerned them. It was easier to obtain opinions from LGU officials, because they feel obliged to cooperate with the world of science and various reporting institutions.
[6] Questions on a given topic included in both questionnaires were used.

a) Education and professional qualifications of the inhabitants	27.5	25.8
b) Entrepreneurship of the inhabitants	75.4	45.2
c) Cooperation with authorities, representatives of local inhabitants	20.3	6.5
d) Trust	2.9	0
e) Marketing and promotion	13.0	0
f) Social infrastructure (e.g. educational and cultural offer)	13.0	0
g) Technical infrastructure (e.g. roads, Internet access)	68.1	16.1
h) Raising EU funds	60.9	6.5
i) Other	0.0	6.5

Source: results of questionnaire survey.

According to the LGU respondents, the most important factors of the local development – according to the number of indications and order of importance – are: entrepreneurship of residents (75.4% of the total responses), technical infrastructure (68.1% of the responses) and obtaining EU funds (60.9%), while the least important are: trust (about 3% of the indications), marketing and promotion, and social infrastructure, which gained 13% indications. The answers which were provided indicate that LGUs are actually starting to appreciate the role of soft endogenous factors in local development, because (in terms of the number of indications) entrepreneurship was mentioned in the first place (it should be added that it was associated with the economy), and only two more hard factors. However, the percentage of indications of the importance of the factors directly related to participation (cooperation of citizens' representatives with the authorities as well as citizens' education and professional qualifications in the development process) was 2 to 3 times lower than the percentage of the hard factors. It can be said that LGUs recognize the importance of public participation in local development, but they still do not treat it equally with hard factors.

The rates of responses provided by representatives of social economy entities were slightly different, which could be expected. First of all, they indicated the entrepreneurship of citizens (45.2% of the total number of responses), but secondly – the education and professional qualifications of citizens (25.8), and only thirdly – the technical infrastructure (16.1%). They equally treated the cooperation of representatives of citizens with the authorities, obtaining EU funds and other factors (6.5% of the responses), among which the following were listed: grassroots initiative resulting from social involvement and willingness to participate in the development of the municipality (i.e. soft factors of development) and proximity of larger centres, owned natural resources or natural values (hard development factors). On the basis of these answers, it can be said

that social economy entities, due to the specificity of their actions, intuitively attribute greater or equal importance to the soft factors of local development, including public participation, in relation to the hard factors – in line with the paradigm of the new territorial development policy.

The question that was complementary to the above discussed one was the request to indicate the main barriers to local development (Table 2). The representatives of LGUs counted (by the number of indications and validity) the following into the main obstacles to local development: a lack of funds (82.6% of the indications), insufficient/bad road infrastructure (46.4%) and bad location (33.3%).The lack of trust in the community (17.4%) and other (7.2%) were identified as the weakest hurdles, including the lack of land in the municipality, where companies could be established and the lack of residential housing, barriers connected with Natura 2000 sites and lack of staff. Therefore, as regards LGUs, more importance and more emphasis was placed on hard-than-soft barriers linked to human capital and public participation. The high percentage of indications for low qualifications of inhabitants (30.4%), as well as the inability to cooperate (31.9%), suggests an increase in the awareness of the increasing role of these determinants in the development of the new paradigm of territorial development. A specific proof of the increased importance of these factors is that in the previous question the most important factors in the development of the response (a – education) and (c - cooperation) produced a similar level of responses, which is a confirmation of the appreciation of the importance of the factors related to public participation, but to an unsuitable extent.

Table 2. Main development barriers for local development

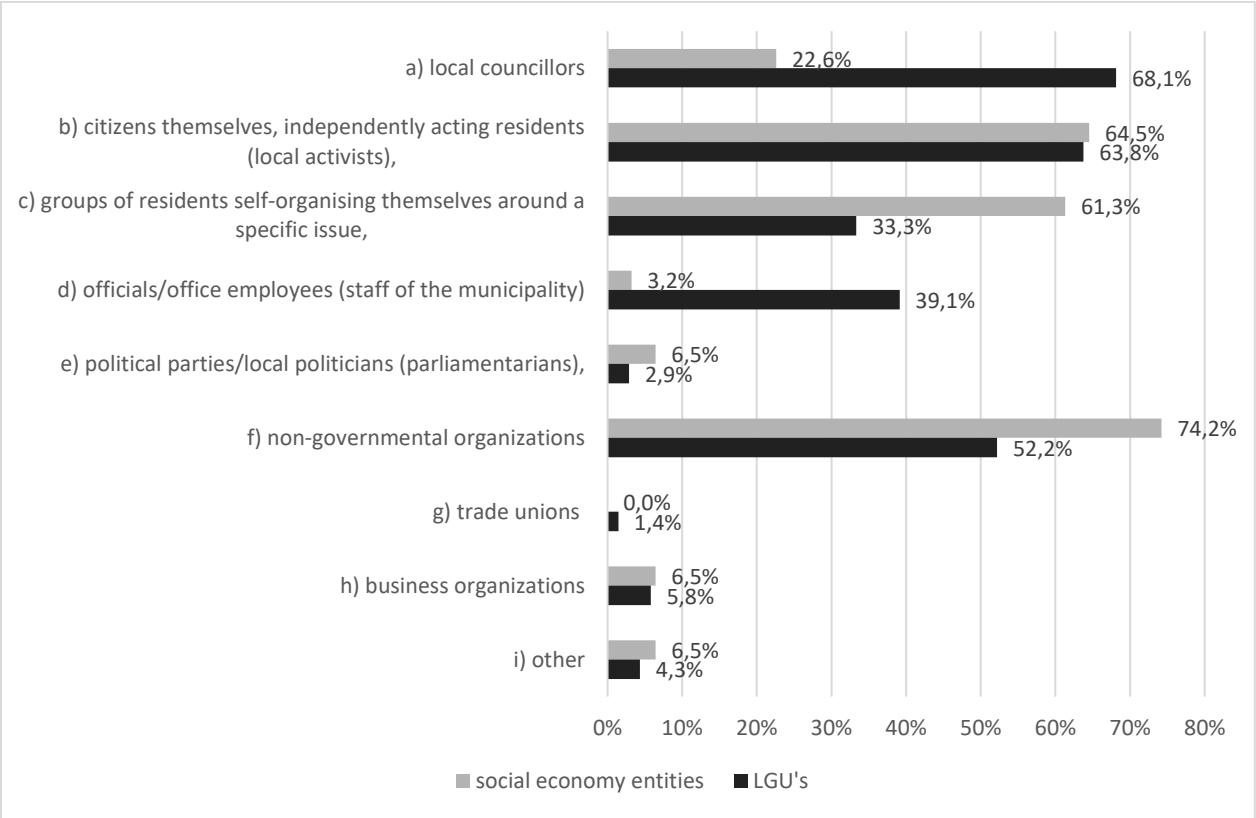
Description	LGU	Social Economy Entities
	Percentage of responses	Percentage of responses
a) Lack of funds	82.6	35.5
b) Inadequate/bad road infrastructure	46.4	3.2
c) Bad location	33.3	6.5
d) No companies	37.7	22.6
e) Low qualifications of the inhabitants	30.4	6.0
f) Lack of trust in society	17.4	25.8
g) Inability to co-operate	31.9	22.6
h) Other/which?	7.2	6.5

Source: as above.

The representatives of social economy entities, similarly to those representing LGUs, considered the lack of financial resources to be the most important barrier to local development (over 35%). It should be noted, however, that the percentage of indications of this barrier by the former was more than twice lower than that by the latter. In the second place, they indicated a lack of trust in society, which means that it may not be the most important factor in local development, but its lack may become its major obstacle. In the third place, however, they indicated *ex aequo*: a lack of companies and inability to cooperate (22.6% of the indications). The insufficient/poor road infrastructure was considered the weakest disadvantage (3.2% of the responses). Considering the total percentage of the indications for the hard barriers (67.8% – a, b, c, d) and soft (60.9% – e, f, g, h – of the social character), it can be said that representatives of economic entities attribute almost equal importance to them.

The degree of public involvement in local development was also measured by answers to the question "Who in an LGU represents best the interests of people in public matters?" Regarding the LGUs, the majority of respondents – as one might suppose – indicated the answer (a) councillors (over 68%), who are formal representatives of society in the offices of local authorities. Then, in terms of the number of indications, the following responses were given: (b) citizens themselves – almost 64% and (f) non-governmental organisations – over 52%, and following them – (d) officials (39.1%) The least popular answers were: (g) trade unions (1.14%), (e) parties (2.9%), and (i) others (4.3%) (Figure 1). Thus, it can be said that officials themselves recognize the large role of society in representing public affairs, but their views are not always reflected in the practice of cooperation with citizens or their representatives in the form of social economy entities. This prompts to ask the question – Why is this happening?

Figure 1. The best representatives of people in public affairs



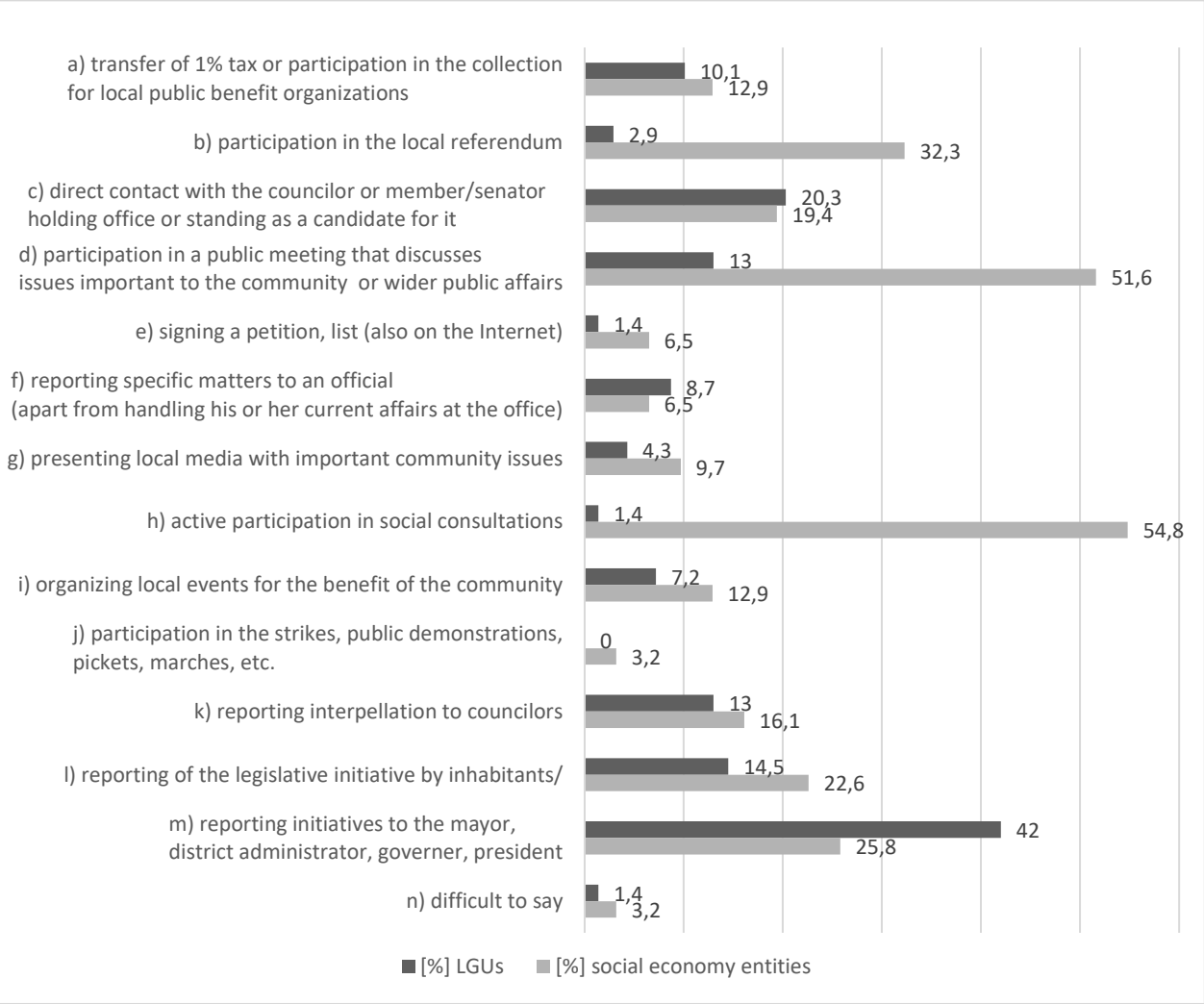
Source: as above.

From the point of view of social economy entities, non-governmental organizations are the best representatives of people in public matters (74.2% of the total responses). The second place was occupied by local activists (64.5%), and the third – by groups of residents self-organizing around some important points (61.3%). Councillors were selected by almost every fourth responder, which is three times less frequently than in the case of answers provided by LGUs. The remaining answers were rarely selected. Thus, it can be noted that despite the difference in the indication of the first best-in-command representative caused by the subject's response, the remaining responses with relatively high percentages of factors related to public participation (in different forms – responses b, c) in representing public affairs they confirm the recognition by respondents of both groups of entities of its great importance in local development. This shows quite well their awareness of the role of public participation in local development in the context of the new paradigm, and also with reference to the fact that in order to achieve success in this area, one should become involved in local issues or cooperate with non-governmental organizations.

Relying only on officials, trade unions, employers' organizations, parties or political parties is not sufficient to achieve a satisfactory level of LGUs development.

The next questions concerned actions or tools with which the citizens could – in the most effective way – influence the functioning of LGU. Answers are presented in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Activities or tools of influence of inhabitants on the situation / matters in Local Government Units



Source: as above.

In response to this question, in the local government offices the majority of respondents chose the answer (m) reporting initiatives to head of municipality, mayor, head of county, president

(42% of the indications) and (c) direct contact with the councillor (20.3% of the total), or (l) legislative initiative taken by citizens (14.5% of the indications). The least frequently chosen answers were: (e) signing the petition, (h) active participation in public consultations and (n) it is difficult to say – 1.4% of the responses, and (b) participation in the local referendum and (g) presenting local issues in the local media by the community – respectively 2.9% and 4.3% of the total number of indications. None of the respondents indicated answer (j). The answers reveal that the representatives of local government units prefer activities/tools including formal impact of citizens on the situation through officials/persons associated with local government administration – that is, actually, what is to be expected from them. On the other hand, they paid less attention to other types of participatory activities based more on cooperation with society, in which it is treated as an equal partner. Thus, officials are aware of the role of public participation in local development, but this awareness has not yet translated into their actual approach or behaviour. This may indicate that they have rather developed an indifferent assessment of the impact of citizens hold on local development (Kryk 2017: 85-95).

Completely different answers were obtained from representatives of social economy entities. They preferred: (h) participation in public consultations (54.8% of the responses) and (d) in public meetings, where issues important for the local community are discussed (51.6%) or (b) participation in a local referendum (32.3%). This means that according to them, the most effective tools are based on dialogue and cooperation between citizens and local government authorities, which officials do not appreciate. The next important activities were: (m) reporting the initiative to the head of municipality, mayor or president of the city (25.8%), (l) legislative initiative taken by the residents (22.6%), and (c) direct contact with a councillor or a deputy (19.4%). The remaining activities were less important according to the respondents. The most similar view – expressed in the percentage of persons indicating the tool/action – was held by the representatives of both groups of entities with respect to answer (a) transferring 1% of the tax or participating in rebounds for the benefit of a local public benefit organisation. In the context of the above, it can be said that social economy entities attribute greater importance than officials to participative activities based on a more open/direct interaction with society. This is a kind of suggestion for local authorities, what actions/tools should be more appreciated and used more often.

The involvement of the public in Local Government Units' matters also provided for the functioning of the Council of Public Benefit Activities. In the meantime, according to LGU, such

advice only works in ¼ of the units surveyed; the other ¾ do not have such authority. Of the 17 affirmative responses, 12 respondents rated the Council's activities, including one half positively, ¼ negative, and the others stated that it was too short a period to be evaluated. Failure to perceive the need to appoint such a body in most of the surveyed entities indicates that this instrument of public participation in the development and management of the region is underestimated. On the other hand, among the respondents from economy entities, almost 42% – despite their activity in a given sector – did not know if such a body was created, and every tenth respondent gave a negative answer. In the situation where the initiation of the Council's appointment belongs to non-governmental organisations it may be testified not so much to the ignorance of their rights to influence decisions of local authorities, but rather to avoiding engaging in activities not directly related to the entity (usually due to the insufficient number of staff in relation to the scope of tasks and responsibilities) and for poor cooperation between them to jointly appear on social issues at the local forum. Therefore, it can be said that the possibilities of influencing social economy entities on local issues through the Public Benefit Council are not sufficiently perceived or used by them. However, too little involvement of society in local affairs cannot be blamed only on local government units or social economy entities. It is also important to interest the local community (residents) in cooperation with the authorities of the given unit. Hence, their representatives were asked about the level of interest on the part of the residents in the matters of their own commune/county/city? (Table 3).

Table 3. The level of citizens' interest in local matters

Description	Percentage of indications by LGUs	Percentage of indications by social economy entities
Very high	0.0	0.0
High	41.0	19.4
Low	42.0	38.7
Very low	7.0	38.7
Not interested at all	1.0	3.2
Hard to tell	9.0	0.0

Source: as above.

According to LGUs, the total percentage of people with little or no interest in matters of their place of living (59%) exceeded the percentage of those interested in them (41%). The

assessments of social economy entities were even more pessimistic – according to them 80.6% of the population show little or no interest in local matters, and only 19.4% express such interest. Such a social attitude may discourage local authorities from engaging in activating citizens and considering them a factor of local development and partners in managing LGUs, as well as social economy entities to make efforts – at least representing the wider interests of the local community in the Council of Public Benefit – in the case of citizens' passivity regarding local matters and the their demanding attitude towards satisfying their needs.

To determine the level of social activity was also used to answer the question whether in the commune/city/county there are people undertaking actions for the common good – for the inhabitants (Table 4).

Table 4. People acting for the public interest

Description	**Percentage of indications by LGUs**	**Percentage of indications by social economy entities**
Yes, there are many such people.	29.0	71.0
Yes, there are a few such people.	63.8	19.0
No, actually there are no such people.	2,9	7.0
I don't know.	4.3	3.0

Source: as above.

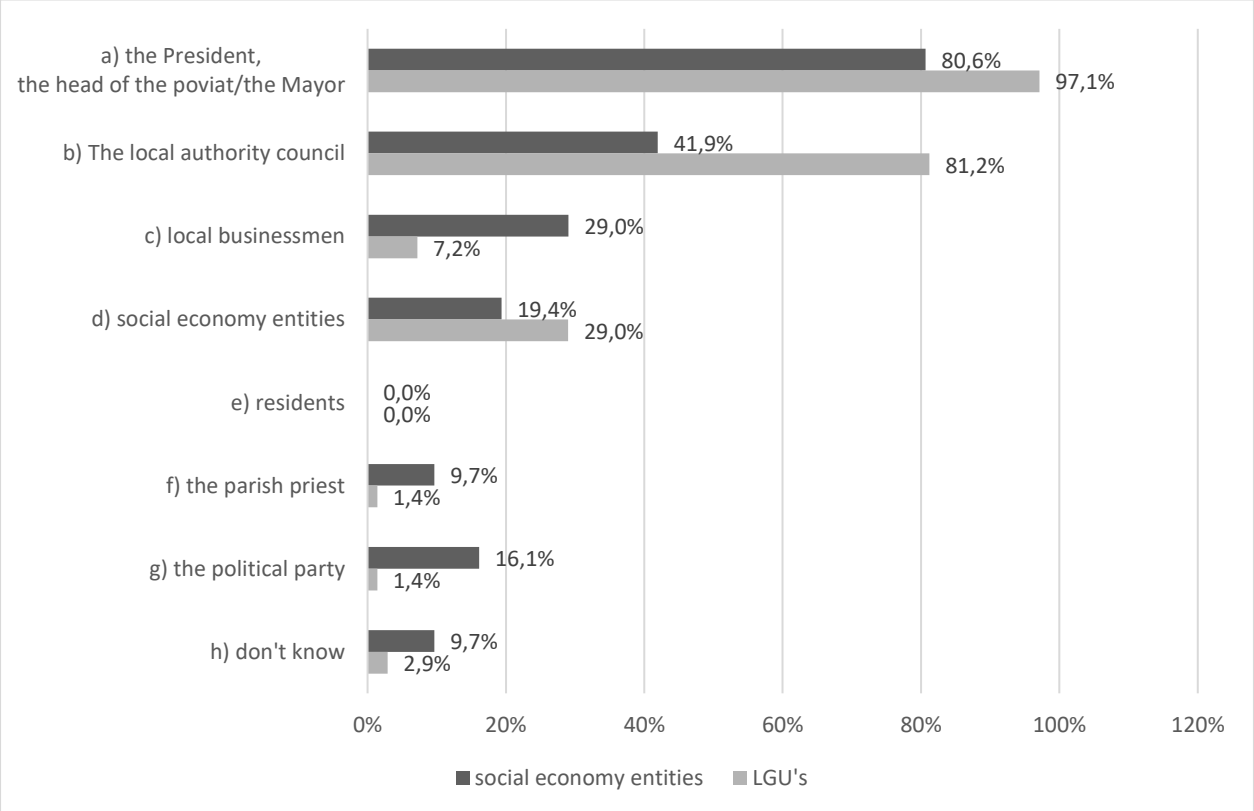
Almost 64% of the respondents from LGUs indicated that there are a few people active in their area. Another 29% of them reported the activity of many such people, while 4.3% did not know about their existence. Only less than 3% answered that there are no civically engaged people in their area. In summary, almost 93% of the surveyed officials confirmed the operation of civically engaged people on their premises, which is a positive manifestation of social activity. Taking into account, however, that there are no such persons in five LGUs, and in the majority there were only a few in relation to the total number of residents, then the existing situation cannot be considered satisfactory. This statement coincides with the results of the nationwide research presented in the report entitled *Diagnoza społeczna* [Social diagnosis] (Czapiński, Panek (eds) 2015: 344-345), which shows that only 15.4% of the respondents in the last two years engaged in "activities for the benefit of the local community (municipalities, housing estates, towns) in the immediate vicinity. Social inactivity, non-inclusion in bottom-up activities and activities for the benefit of others or

social organizations are common in Poland, and among people with primary education social experience occurs several times less frequently than among people with higher education."

Against the background of these results, the answers given by the representatives of social economy entities seem radically different. As many as 71% of them replied that there are many people working for the public good in LGU, 19% – that there are some, and merely 10% indicated the lack of such people. The explanation of this disproportion regarding the answers is simple: most of the representatives of social entities participating in the study had higher education. Such persons – in accordance with the results of the said *Diagnoza społeczna* – constitute a glorious exception to the general public of Poland in engaging in work for the benefit of the public. Cooperating with similar persons, they are convinced that there are many similar activists – but unfortunately it is quite the opposite.

Knowing the views of the surveyed groups of subjects on the role and social involvement in local development, it is worth knowing their opinion on who actually has the greatest impact on decisions taken in the LGU (Figure 3).

Figure 3. People/entities having the biggest influence on decisions made in LGUs (%)



Source: as above.

Analysing the above data, it can be noted that – according to the respondents of both surveyed groups of entities – representatives of local authorities have the greatest influence on decisions taken in LGUs, i.e. the president, mayor, head of the *poviat*, as much as 97.1% of the indications by the LGUs' representatives and 80.6% of those from social economy entities. The local authority council, which was indicated by 81.2% of the officials and 41.9% of the respondents from social economy entities, has slightly less influence on making decisions. The percentage of the latter was almost twice lower than the percentage of the officials' indications. This may indicate that social economy entities do not perceive the city/commune council as a body that strongly represents social interests, as it is seen by the officials. The answers indicating the most important decision makers were predictable from the point of view of the applicable legal provisions. The next places were occupied by social economy entities (indicated in total by 48.4% of the respondents, i.e. 29% from LGUs + 19.4% from social organizations) and local businessmen (in total 36.2%, i.e. 7.2% from LGUs + 29% from social organizations). In the last two cases, it is interesting to note that a greater influence of businessmen on local decisions was indicated by social economy entities rather than by LGUs, while in the case of the assessment of the impact of social organizations it was opposite. Different subjects also assessed the influence of the parish priest and party on shaping local decisions. According to the representatives of LGUs, the impact of these entities on decisions is negligible, as evidenced by the percentage of their responses (1.4% each), and according to the representatives of social economy entities, the impact is greater, which is related to the specificity of their cooperation. In contrast, the respondents from both groups indicated that residents do not have much influence on local decisions. Discrepancies in the opinions about the validity of decision-making entities suggest that the territorial self-government does not sufficiently use the potential of influence inherent in different representatives of society. They should look for ways to better use it for the good of the local community.

It follows from the above considerations that an important manifestation of public participation in local development is, among others, functioning of social organizations, therefore at the end they were asked to assess their potential (economic, organizational, substantive) in the context of performing public tasks (Table 5).

Table 5. Assessment of the potential of social organizations to perform public tasks

Description	Percentage of indications by LGUs	Percentage of indications by social economy entities
Very high	7.2	6.0
High	55.1	42.0
Low	18.8	36.0
Very low	7.2	3.0
No opinion	11.6	13.0

Source: as above.

In total, 62.3% of the LGU respondents assessed the potential (economic, organizational, substantive) of social organizations to perform public tasks in it as high and very high, while the remaining 37.7% as low and very low, which indicates a fairly satisfactory perception of their participation in the development of the region. The potential of social economy entities assessed this potential, as 52% of them awarded low and very low marks, that is by 14.3 percentage points. more people than in LGUs. In turn, high and very high grades were awarded by a total of 48% of them – by 14.3 percentage points less than in the case of the representatives of LGUs. The lower assessment of the potential of social organizations by representatives of a given group of entities in comparison to the LGU assessment is puzzling.

5. Assessment of the role and the level of public participation in local development

The conducted analysis of public participation in the context of the contemporary development paradigm in the case study of local self-government units of the West Pomeranian Voivodeship and social economy entities operating in this province creates the basis for a synthetic assessment of the existing situation in this area. The following rating scale was used for its implementation: unsatisfactory (+), moderately satisfactory (++), quite satisfactory (+++), satisfactory (++++). The studied groups of entities could obtain a total of from 1 to 36 pluses. Rating level: 1-9 – unsatisfactory; 10-18 – moderately satisfactory; 19-27 – quite satisfactory; 28-36 – satisfactory. Table 6 presents the results of a synthetic evaluation of the role and the level of public participation in local development.

Table 6. Synthetic assessment of the role and public participation in local development

Criterion	Grade	
	LGU	Entities of the social economy
The most important factors of local development	++	+++
The main barriers to local development	+	+++
The best representatives of people in public matters	+++	++++
Impact of residents on the situation in LGU	++	+++
Functioning of the Public Benefit Works Council	+	+
The level of interest of citizens in local matters	++	+
People undertaking actions for the public good	+	+++
People/entities having the biggest influence on decisions made in LGUs	++	++
Assessment of the potential of social organizations to perform public tasks	++	+
Total (+)	**16**	**21**

Source: own elaboration.

Social economy entities assess the role and the level of public participation in local development as quite satisfactory, and LGUs judge them worse – as moderately satisfactory.

6. Conclusion

The new territorial development paradigm assigns public participation an important role in local development. For this to happen, certain conducive conditions must appear. All local actors should not only have similar awareness of this, but also should develop and improve cooperation, actively participating in local matters. Meanwhile, the research carried out shows that:

- there are quite large discrepancies in the perception of the most important factors and barriers to development, officials still attach too much importance to hard development factors (e.g. technical infrastructure, obtaining EU funds, geographical location), thus reducing the chances of public participation in local affairs. This problem also applies to the most effective actions /tools of citizens' impact on local issues, officials focus too much on formal activities/tools (e.g. reporting initiatives to local authorities) underestimating those based on dialogue and cooperation with citizens (such as participation in public consultations, a public meeting or participation in a local referendum), which they should use more often;

- in relation to the best representatives of public affairs (such as: councillors, non-governmental organizations, local activists, groups of residents), differences in opinions are not large, but the positive perception of social representatives by officials is not always reflected in the practice of cooperation, which has a deterrent effect on citizens;
- the public does not sufficiently take advantage of opportunities and rights to influence local issues (e.g. residents do not create Public Benefit Boards, do not use instruments that develop cooperation), which results from their low interest. This also affects the insufficient potential of social economy entities to implement social tasks;
- there are slight discrepancies in opinions about the validity of decision-making entities in LGUs (local authorities, social economy entities, local businessmen, parish priests), suggesting which social representatives should be more/more often used for the public good.

Recommendations for improving cooperation between local governments and society and economic and social entities:

- increasing the level of civil servants' awareness of the important role of public participation in local development,
- more frequent and more effective use of cooperation instruments between local government and residents,
- better use of people influencing decision-making in LGUs,
- increasing social involvement in local affairs.

In the context of the above, the following questions arise: (1) How to increase the awareness of LGU officials on the role of public participation in local development? (2) How to ensure effective and successful cooperation between LGUs and the public? (3) What causes discrepancy between some of the officials' positive views on the role of participation and practice? (4) What to do to increase community involvement in local affairs? And many others, to which answers exceed the possibilities of individuals. Various actions are needed at all levels of management to achieve the desired effects.

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Partycypacja społeczna w rozwoju lokalnym w opinii samorządów lokalnych i podmiotów ekonomii społecznej

Streszczenie

Celem artykułu jest ocena roli i poziomu partycypacji publicznej w rozwoju lokalnym w świetle opinii samorządów lokalnych i podmiotów ekonomii-społecznej. W nowym paradygmacie rozwoju terytorialnego istotną rolę przypisuje się współpracy jednostek samorządu terytorialnego ze społeczeństwem, upatrując w niej czynnika rozwoju lokalnego. Współpraca ta jest determinowana m.in. angażowaniem się (aktywnością) obywateli w sprawy lokalne, w tym za pośrednictwem podmiotów ekonomii społecznej. Tą aktywność samorządy lokalne i podmioty ekonomii społecznej postrzegają oraz oceniają nieco odmiennie, co nie sprzyja ani rozwojowi współpracy, ani regionu. Dlatego ważne jest identyfikowanie tych rozbieżności, by móc podjąć odpowiednie działania prorozwojowe. W opracowaniu wykorzystano następujące metody: analizy literatury, analizę porównawczą wyników badań ankietowych przeprowadzonych w gminach województwa zachodniopomorskiego i wśród podmiotów ekonomii społecznej działających na tym obszarze (badania przeprowadzono w latach 2017-2018), wnioskowania oraz ocen plusowych. Umożliwiły one (1) syntetyczną ocenę roli i poziomu zaangażowania społecznego w rozwój lokalny i wskazanie różnic w jego postrzeganiu przez badane podmioty, a także (2) sformułowanie rekomendacji odnośnie polepszenia współpracy między samorządami lokalnymi a społeczeństwem i podmiotami ekonomii-społecznej.

Słowa kluczowe: rozwój lokalny, partycypacja społeczna, samorząd lokalny.