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Fundacja Rozwoju Demokracji Lokalnej

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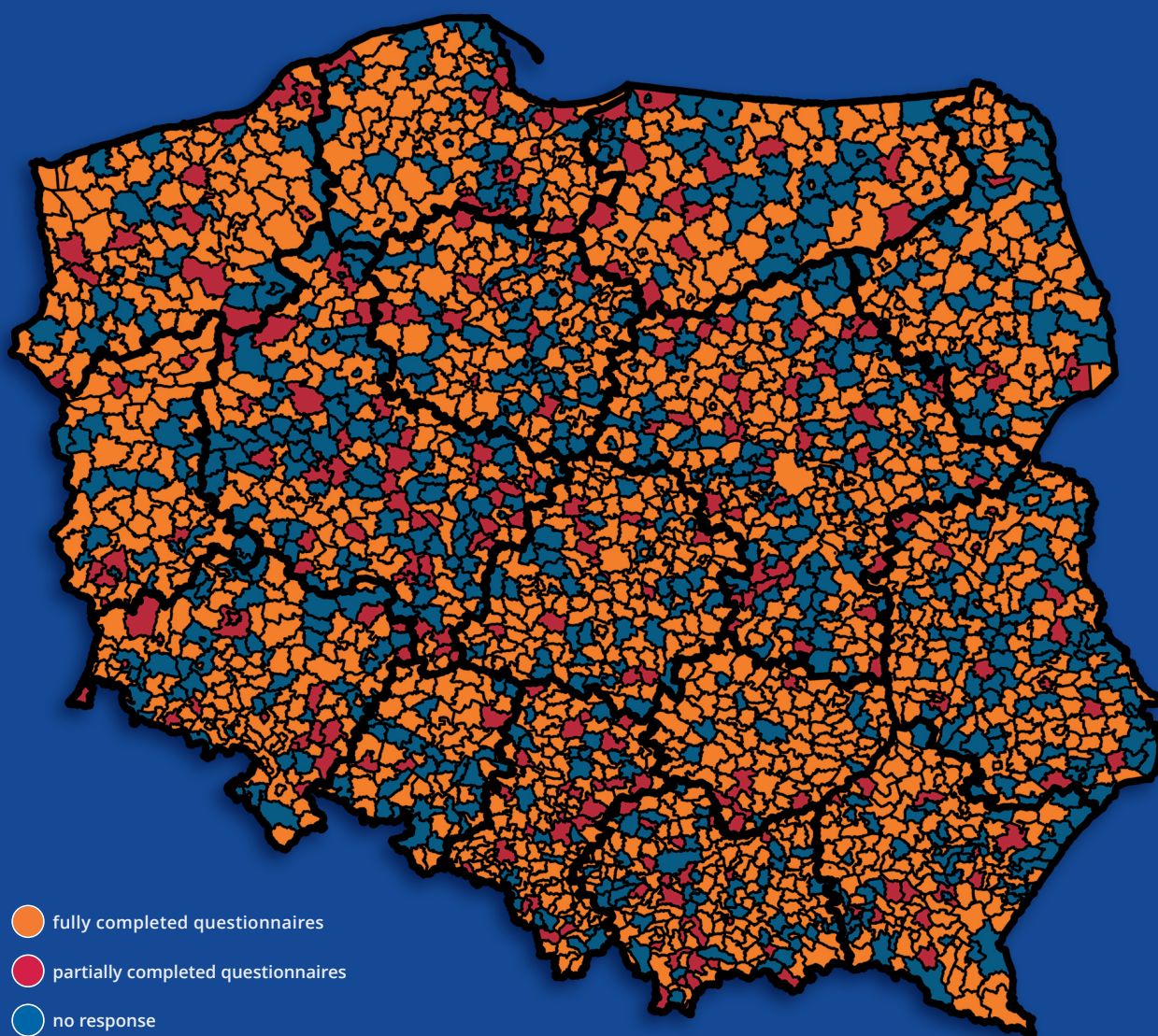# An effective local government office

Developing personnel competence to build efficient local administration

- ● fully completed questionnaires
- ● partially completed questionnaires
- ○ no response

An effective local government office

Developing personnel competence to build efficient local administration

KEY FINDINGS from research conducted by:

the Foundation in Support of Local Democracy

in collaboration with

the Centre of Expertise for Local Government Reform, Council of Europe

Prepared by: Cezary Trutkowski

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1. Introductory comments

The nature of factors which constrain the effective performance of local administration obviously determines the scope and type of efforts which are required to propel institutional development. In order for this process to be effective and efficient, we need prior in-depth analysis of the context in which local administration operates. This kind of analysis should focus on identifying systemic barriers to development, and on assessing the competencies of local government personnel and the resultant training needs.

Among others, this kind of analysis should include the following aspects:

- Legal and institutional framework of local governance, in particular the degree of decentralisation of public authorities as well as legal regulations determining the scope of powers in the hands of local government;

- Consistency of the legal system, possibility for local government bodies to exercise their rights, consistency of legal supervision over the operations of local administration;

- Economic context of the operation of local government;

- Organisational practices applied in local government offices, collaboration between local government units, systems to monitor local governance, to assess efficacy and quality of services provided;

- Status and quality of local government personnel as well as human resources management practices applied.

Any diagnosis of the operation of local government should also incorporate the social perspective: local governments perform a specific range of public tasks, with citizens (members of specific local communities) being their direct addressees. When analysing the operation of local administration, one should not neglect the reflection on the local living conditions, the quality of services provided or the nature of local social needs.

This document attempts to diagnose some of the aforementioned elements. It presents **selected research findings** concerning the context of day-to-day operations of local government offices at the municipal level (Polish: *gmina*). In the survey and interviews conducted with local government leaders considerable attention was paid to the management of competence development among local government personnel, the existing quality assessment tools and factors which determine training needs of local government personnel.

It should be stressed that the research was conducted with the belief that the needs related to development of competencies among local government personnel are not necessarily identical with the training postulates expressed by the respondents. The needs of an organisation (a local government office) as a whole may go beyond the expectations

harboured by individual officials because officials do not always realise the context of specific problems or even the existence of certain problems. This phenomenon was aptly illustrated by Jerzy Regulski in his memoirs:

> '[At the start of the local government reform] *we had a lot of assistance from various sources (…). A very nice man came and helped us actively throughout the year. However, after one year, another man was sent to us and he thought he knew everything but we knew nothing. Instead of discussing things with us and agreeing on an assistance plan, he decided to run a needs assessment. He started travelling around Poland, asking voits and councillors what they didn't know and would like to learn. But, at that time, the people at our local government had not yet reached a level where they knew what they didn't know. That made no sense. If you want to answer that kind of question, you need to be able to determine the scope of knowledge to be acquired, assess what you already know and only then determine what should be learnt.*'[1]

Obviously, the situation looks different at present, more than 25 years later, where the reborn local government has a track record of its work. Leaders have expanded their awareness, officials' competencies have improved and challenges faced by local administration have changed. The development of training services for local government clearly shows that there are training needs and that they are often addressed and met. Nevertheless, training expectations expressed by local government officials do not always correspond with the developmental challenges faced by local government units (LGUs). The efficiency and performance of local administration may deviate from stakeholders' expectations due to many varied external factors (such as the legal and institutional framework, historical background, economic factors etc.) or it may be connected with external considerations such as weaknesses in management of a local government unit[2] or motivating factors (for instance, local government jobs may not be perceived as attractive, or the atmosphere at the office would discourage people from being committed and efficient). Only some of those considerations may be obvious and noticed by the staff of LGUs (or, more broadly, by representatives of local administration). For this reason, we cannot always speak of complete overlap between training expectations and training needs.

In the light of these comments we should point out that a diagnosis of training needs among local government personnel should always be part of an overall analysis of the situation of a specific LGU or a particular local sector of public administration. Overall, it should be accompanied by a summary of legal and institutional considerations in which local administration operates, and a description of the desirable model of this system. In the European context, the key document which lays down the key principles in this regard is the European Charter of Local Self-Government, adopted in Strasbourg in 1985, and ratified by

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[1] Jerzy Regulski 'Życie splecione z historią' [Life intertwined with History]; Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 2014; p. 496.

[2] For instance, wrong work organisation, incompetence of some members of local administration, faulty procedures in local institutions, financial problems related to mismanagement of resources, limited human resources etc.

Poland in full (among few member states of the Council of Europe) on 26 April 1993.[3] One of the key provisions of the Charter is the principle of subsidiarity (Article 4.3): 'Public responsibilities shall generally be exercised, in preference, by those authorities which are closest to the citizen. Allocation of responsibility to another authority should weigh up the extent and nature of the task and requirements of efficiency and economy.'). Moreover, in the context of research findings presented in this document, the following provisions of the Charter are particularly noteworthy:

- 'Local self-government denotes the right and the ability of local authorities, within the limits of the law, to regulate and manage a substantial share of public affairs under their own responsibility and in the interests of the local population.' (Article 3.1)

- 'Where powers are delegated to them by a central or regional authority, local authorities shall, insofar as possible, be allowed discretion in adapting their exercise to local conditions.' (Article 4.5)

- 'The conditions of service of local government employees shall be such as to permit the recruitment of high-quality staff on the basis of merit and competence; to this end adequate training opportunities, remuneration and career prospects shall be provided.' (Article 6.2)

- 'Local authorities shall be entitled, within national economic policy, to adequate financial resources of their own, of which they may dispose freely within the framework of their powers.' (Article 9.1)

- 'Local authorities' financial resources shall be commensurate with the responsibilities provided for by the constitution and the law.' (Article 9.2)

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[3] The Charter became effective on 1 March 1994.

2. Information about the research performed

The research comprised two components:

- A survey among secretaries of local government units at the municipality (*gmina*) level;

- Individual in-depth interviews with local government leaders.

The survey and the interviews were conducted in late 2015 and early 2016 by the Foundation in Support of Local Democracy (FRDL) in collaboration with the Centre of Expertise for Local Government Reform at the Council of Europe. The research methodology and research instruments were developed by Cezary Trutkowski.

A survey among LGU secretaries

The survey was performed using the CAWI technique (*Computer Assisted Web Interviews*), with a questionnaire sent to secretaries of local government units. Invitations to take part in the survey were sent to all municipalities in Poland (a total of 2,479). The questionnaires were opened in 1,914 local offices but not all of them proceeded to complete the survey. Following multiple reminders and an intensive promotional campaign co-ordinated by regional FRDL centres, the following were returned:

- 1,557 fully completed questionnaires, and

- 309 questionnaires at different stages of progress towards completion.

Finally, 1,703 questionnaires were classified for analysis, which represents 68.7% of the population of municipal LGUs in Poland.

Chart 1: Survey completion at LGUs

 fully completed questionnaires

 partially completed questionnaires

 no response
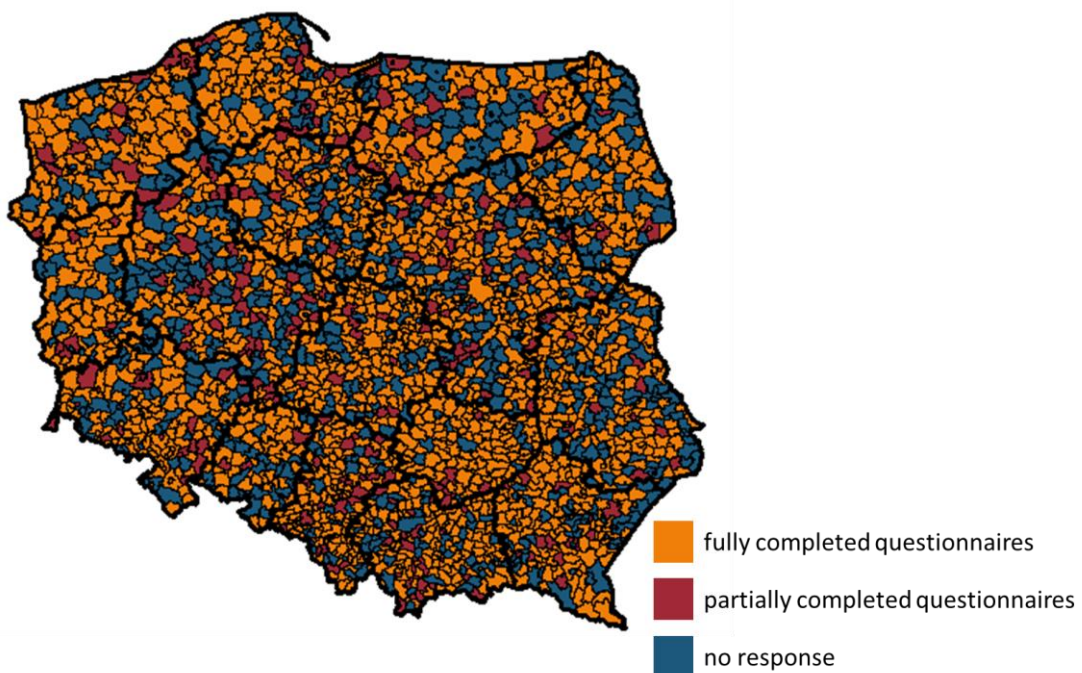
The survey was mostly completed by secretaries of local offices but also a small number of other members of LGU staff were among the respondents, e.g. heads of departments and deputy heads of LGUs.

In-depth interviews with local government leaders

The qualitative component consisted of 15 individual in-depth interviews with local government leaders: voits and mayors (Polish: *wójt, burmistrz/prezydent miasta*). The respondents were selected on the basis of their activities outside their respective units. Therefore, this group included activists of local government organisations, winners of various contests and rankings, and well-known figures of the local government community.

The respondents manage small rural municipalities, medium-sized towns and major urban agglomerations. While working under a similar legal framework, they operate on a various scale, which of course, may influence their perception and assessment of various phenomena. Significant differences in opinions arising from the profile of LGUs headed by the respondents were highlighted in the analytical part of the present document.

Obviously, respondents' comments quoted below are not representative for the entire population of local government leaders in Poland. Nevertheless, this does not undermine the value of these research findings since in-depth interviews do not aim at collecting representative opinions but, rather, at reconstructing assessments, ways of thinking and views existing among a specific social group. Some of the presented statements may seem controversial. However, it is important to bear in mind that their authors have considerable local government experience and high managerial competencies.

The respondents' statements have been anonymised as a precondition to hold open, sincere and truly in-depth interviews.

3. The summary of 25 years – overall assessment of local government activities

Local government leaders who took part in the study expressed **very high opinions on the development of local government, which experienced a revival after 1990**. They believe that the local government reforms are among the most successful and most important reforms introduced in the so-called 'Third Polish Republic' (a term used to refer to post-communist Poland after 1989).

> *'Poland underwent many important economic and political transformations, and changes to the political and social system but I have no doubts that most changes occurred thanks to local government, when we look at things that surround any citizen of Poland in any city or town.' (Mayor of a city)*

> *'Let me repeat it with force, this was a wise reform and today it has reached the peak of its effectiveness. (…) You can argue that more could have been done, in better ways. However, I think that people's potential and legal possibilities have been used very well in the course of those 25 years.' (Voit).*

The respondents who have worked for the local government for at least a few terms of office get somewhat sentimental when recalling the pioneering 1990s, when local government operated on the basis of a relatively small pool of regulations (especially in contrast with today's situation) and the central government gave a lot of leeway to local authorities in many aspects of life.

> *'Actually, really dynamic growth of local government took place in the first three terms of office, starting from 1990. Back then, those central governments perhaps didn't offer an awful lot of money but at least they didn't require us to do tasks without any funds. And this is when a huge leap happened. Later on, poor times followed, but then the EU funds came so people who got ready for it were able to move forward and achieve growth.' (Mayor).*

3.1. Strengths – successes of local government

The respondents mentioned a number of activities, reforms and achievements to justify the opinion that the local government reform was among the most effective changes in the last quarter of a century. In particular, they highlighted the following facts:

- **Local government units propelled Poland's economic and social growth**: as one voit said, *'they were an important flywheel and generated fantastic results for the central budget, and they performed really well.'* Firstly, local government units managed the social and economic development process by creating conducive conditions. Secondly, they stimulated growth via economic investments based on funds they raised. And they also stimulated social development by executing tasks under various public policies. In most cases, they turned out to be effective and efficient.

- The local government reform **empowered the residents**, who *'began to feel like hosts and they could indeed have some influence on developing the local community.'* (Voit). When the corset of central administration and party-operated control was lifted and replaced with democratically elected authorities, residents gained a sense of influence and responsibility for their place of residence. Decisions about citizens' immediate environment were no longer made by officials from Warsaw or by local party activists. Instead, matters were decided by

residents and their elected representatives. As a result, *'towns and villages got a host, someone who genuinely takes care of them and is interested. Someone who could go to any lengths to succeed. Those things had not existed before that time.' (Mayor of a city)*.

At this point, it is interesting to invoke the results of nation-wide surveys conducted by CBOS for many years. The respondents believe that proximity of local government boosts civic activity and shapes a sense of citizenship in people. The residents have a stronger sense of influence in activities at the local level, which is why they are more willing to vote in elections and get involved in the life of local communities. Since the very start of the transformation, Poles developed an ever stronger sense of influence on local affairs. According to CBOS data,[4] in recent years, the number of people certain of their possibility to influence the affairs of their city/town or municipality became equal to the number of people who do not see such opportunities (in 1992, only 16% of positive answers to this question were recorded).

Chart 2: Social sense of influence on local affairs (CBOS data)

'Do people like yourself have an influence on the affairs of their city/town or municipality?'
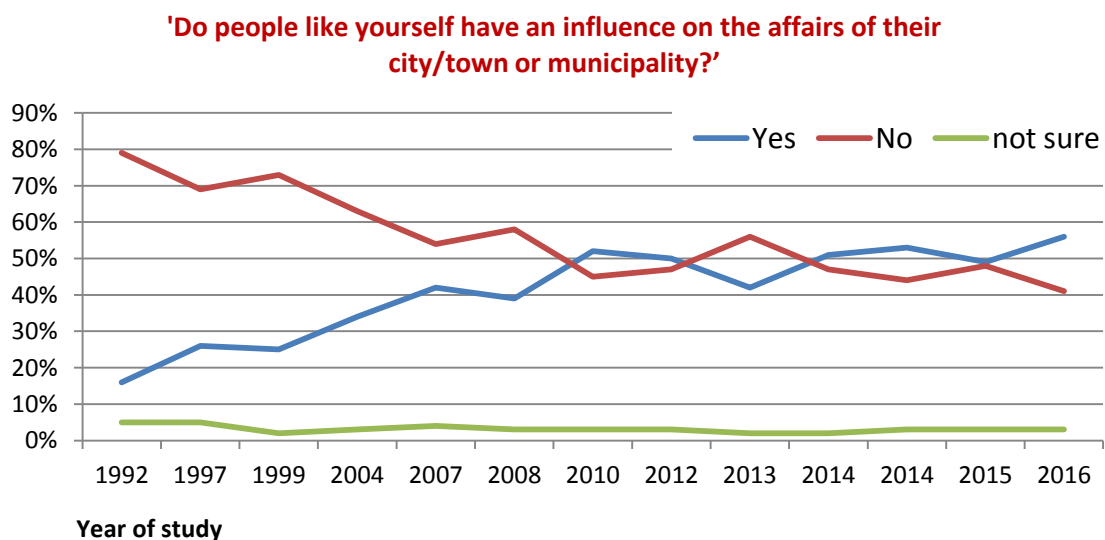
- Local government institutions enabled **more rational management, better suited to residents' expectations**. Local authorities, which became closer to citizens, were able to recognise local needs and identify opportunities, thus ensuring more efficient management of social and economic change.

> *'Financial resources are spent better in this way, in comparison with central steering. Local needs are diagnosed in a better way.' (Voit).*

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[4] Of course, there are discrepancies between findings from research conducted by various providers (CBOS, Pracownia Stocznia, Chancellery of the President of the Republic of Poland). One possible interpretation (especially with regard to the link between a sense of influence and the size of domicile) is related with the local policy of openness to citizens' initiatives and the tradition of citizens' participation prevalent in particular local government units.

- **Local government has become a key investor**: local government raises funding for local communities. As one respondent said: *'the vast majority of investments, perhaps four fifths, are the ones which have been made by local government'* (Mayor of a city). Firstly, this involved efforts to attract investors and create a friendly atmosphere for entrepreneurs. After Poland's EU accession, EU funding became crucial an it equipped local government with tools to carry out major infrastructural and social investments.

  > *'I think that after 25 years of self-governance local governments have demonstrated that they can work very well, for instance in areas like spending money or meeting local needs.' (Mayor).*

- **The quality of life in local communities has improved:** above all, this results from the leap associated with to the emergence of essential infrastructure, even though changes in other spheres of social life are also important.

  > *'Overall, the changes which happened in Poland in the last 25 years in key spheres of life, such as improved living standards as a result of the restructured environmental infrastructure, as well as education, culture and sports… Well, such topics started to surface in recent years. For instance, much more attention is now being given to mothers, women with children, young children, construction of crèches and day care facilities for children who reach the age of 30 months or so.' (Mayor).*

- **The appearance of cities, towns and villages has changed.** One voit proudly commented: *'Poland has been growing ever more beautiful, day after day. The way Poland looks today is owed mostly to that reform.'* The following changes are commonly appreciated: construction of new roads, revitalisation of urban space, care about cleanliness and the environment. Those efforts have changed the appearance of many Polish cities, towns and villages. This change also reflects a more profound shift in Poles' attitudes towards public space: the changes are no longer focused on building things, making them work or making life easier. What comes to the fore is the aesthetic value of public spaces, which fills local residents with pride about the place where they live.

- The interviewed respondents tend to ascribe the **entrepreneurial spirit, which 'exploded' in early 1990s**, to the activities of local authorities, at least to a certain extent. The systemic transition in Poland changed the relations between the government and the citizens. What was not legally forbidden, was allowed. Naturally, this brought about the *'activity, which was released.'* This activity was demonstrated in various fields and, obviously, did not always contribute to the common good. Nevertheless, the overall balance of the transformations is very positive.

The new empowerment, economic and social growth, and improved aesthetics of public spaces – all these factors have gradually built the **identity of local communities**. While this process is long lasting and hard to measure, the respondents from local government units do see that their activities and the operations of the LGUs translate into how people see themselves, who they are and how they want to be perceived by others. As one respondent put it:

> *'I think we gradually see practical local communities being built, people are beginning to identify with their town or city, or village. Identification is weakest in cities, though.' (Mayor of a city).*

In the light of social research conducted in Poland, we should note that the very positive opinions quoted above are confirmed in views expressed by the vast majority of citizens. The public perception of transformations connected with the activity of local government is generally positive, even though this assessment is not unambiguous. A study conducted in May 2013 by the Association of Polish Towns and Cities (ZMP) on a nation-wide sample of adult Poles[5] showed that two thirds of Poles (62.4%) believe that local governments are '*good hosts for local affairs*.' This finding reflects the overall positive assessment of the activities undertaken by the local government, yet it is also important to bear in mind that 1/3 of the respondents hold a negative view on the subject.

The overall perception of local government activities revealed by the ZMP survey is confirmed in the long-term analysis conducted by CBOS: for many years, over a half of the respondents have been consistently positive about the activities of their local authorities.[6]

Chart 3: Evaluation of the performance of local government (source: CBOS)

Date of survey (month 'year)
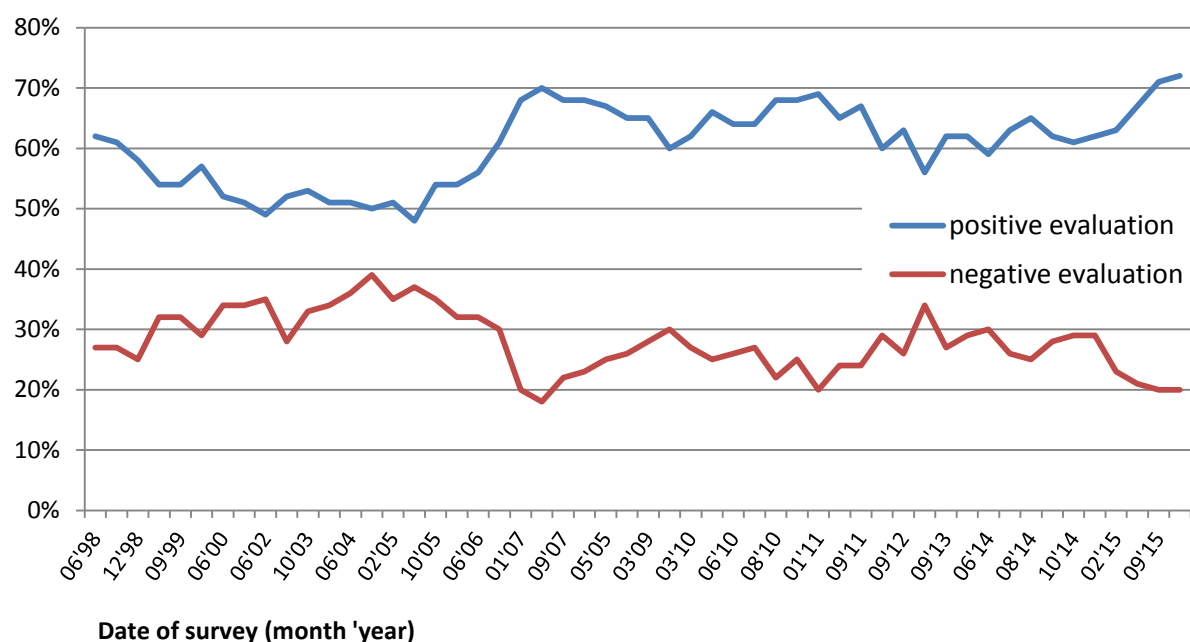
The generalised positive assessments of the activities of local government given presented by the respondents in nation-wide surveys are reflected in the opinions expressed by local government officials themselves. Based on the results of research conducted by the FRDL, we can note relatively high satisfaction with the quality of life in local communities, both among local leaders as well as secretaries of offices.

3.2. Weaknesses of local government – failures of local government reforms

Even though the respondents consider local governance to be among the greatest successes of Poland's democracy, there were also critical voices, pointing to various weaknesses of local governance or failures suffered in the last 25 years. In terms of quantity, failures outnumber

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[5] A study on performance assessment and finances of local government, conducted by PBS for the Association of Polish Towns and Cities (ZMP) on a nation-wide random-quota sample of 1,600 adult Poles: www.zmp.poznan.pl/aktualnosc-8-757-konferencja_prasowa_organizacji.html– accessed 28 May 2013

[6] CBOS communique No. BS/44/2013 'Evaluation of Public Institutions', April 2013.

strengths nearly four times. However, the analysis of negative aspects of local governance presented below should not be viewed as a sign of respondents' disappointment with the idea of local governance. The advantage of critical voices over positive ones results from their care about the idea which they hold close to their hearts and from the obvious fact that memory tends to focus on issues that cause concerns.

Notably, **two factors which build the position of local government as an effective policy tool** come to the fore among local government leaders. Those are, firstly, autonomy of operations and, secondly, EU funding available via competitions, regardless of the current political situation. These two factors deserve attention at this point since they reflect important criteria applied to assess the performance of local government: **organisational independence and financial independence as key principles which enable local governments to pursue their own visions of local development**. From this perspective, **the key problem of local government occurs when their autonomous activities are constrained and when tasks are imposed by central authorities without the necessary financial resources**. In this vein, one mayor gave a diagnosis of Poland's local governance, describing it as a backlash: *'going back from the idea of local governance towards centralisation.' (Mayor)*.

Below mentioned are the most important problematic spheres related to the activities of local authorities, as seen by the respondents.

Financial shortages and problems

Most respondents point to **financial shortages** affecting local governments, even though the respondents want to highlight the fact but also realise that most problems cannot be reduced to financial shortages.

> *'Barriers, well, if I didn't mention the financial barrier, my colleagues would bite me to death because this is the key argument in any discussion on local government: no money.' (Mayor of a city).*

The respondents do not view financial constraints as the main source of problems for the local government. Rather, this is a source of management problems, sometimes very serious ones. The financial theme is mentioned in most statements concerning the weaknesses of local government, yet none of the voits or mayors said that problems would disappear if they had enough financial resources on the bank account.

> *'The government (…) often gives us public tasks to carry out without adequate financial resources, which means that some competencies and responsibilities of the local government become 'empty phrases'. There is a format, there is a general provision but there is no possibility to carry them out, or our possibilities are limited, and this simply stems from the fact that local budgets are underestimated and the responsibilities, which are described in such a broad way, cannot be fulfilled to the level expected by the residents of our municipality.' (Mayor of a city)*

At this point, it is useful to quote the calculations made by the Association of Polish Towns and Cities: the operating surplus of all LGUs in Poland in 2015 amounted to PLN 17.9 billion (9.2% of LGU revenues, totalling PLN 196 billion). However, once the debt instalments falling in 2015 were paid back, the surplus shrank to merely PLN 9.4 billion, or 4.8% of the LGU revenues. The latter amount is available to local government units for their future development goals (own contribution in EU

projects, own investments). This figure does not include any new debts or revenues from selling assets. This 'disposable operating surplus' is distributed very unevenly among LGUs in Poland.'[7] At the same time, the progressing financial burdens shifted onto local governments leave ever less room for the implementation of flexible and independent development policies.

> *'As of today, Poland has over 700 municipalities which do not generate any operating surplus. What is an 'operating surplus'? Well, their running costs of operation are higher than their proceeds.' (Mayor).*

When asked about recommended changes in the sphere of local finances, the survey participants postulated … **a completely new act of law**, which would provide that local finances are based on local revenues of LGUs and that such funds can be freely used.

> *'If there is an amendment to the legislation on local government and the relations between the central budget and local budgets, this may lead to total stagnation. If we consider the financial condition of local governments today, it's really on the verge of bursting. And now, when we have the 2016–2020 perspective in mind, where we need to show our own financial resources to file an application, this is becoming problematic because municipalities have a certain level of debt. The capital expenditures which have been incurred have not yet brought a return.' (Voit)*

No partner-like relations with central authorities

The difficult relations with central authorities (understood as the central government, the legislature, ministries and other bodies, all of them generally described as 'Warsaw') are a complex topic which is often mentioned in critical comments on the operation of local government. The respondents' statements focused around two key themes: excessive and irrational burdens imposed on local governments under the so-called 'commissioned tasks', coupled with mistrust and central authorities' antagonistic attitude towards local governments.

What comes to the fore is **the problem that central authorities delegate tasks onto local authorities without providing adequate financial resources**. Nearly all the respondents mentioned this problem, often in the context of different public policies. Based on those opinions, instead of delegating tasks into local government with adequate resources and freedom in governance, central authorities irresponsibly delegate an increasing number of tasks under the label of 'commissioned tasks'.

> *'This reduces local government to the role of someone who just executes central tasks, and this really contradicts the idea of self-government.' (Mayor).*

This policy pursued by central government contradicts the idea of self-governance: local governments become just performers of tasks and have no influence on those tasks and no financial resources to perform them. This situation goes against the respondents' sense of justice. Moreover, they are outraged by the fact that nobody consults the changes with the local government and, in addition, such tasks are all too often poorly prepared and introduced hastily.

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[7] 'Współpraca jednostek samorządu terytorialnego narzędziem wsparcia polskiej polityki rozwoju' [Collaboration of Territorial Government Units as a Tool to Support Poland's Development Policy], a collective volume edited by Tomasz Potkański, PhD, published by ZMP 2016; page 120.

> *'It's like you would decide how much my staff should earn but I am supposed to find money to pay them. This is what we have in the education system.' (Voit)*

Many respondents believe that such a chaotic and short-sighted policy of the central government has existed for years, no matter which party was at power. The burdens shifted onto local governments are usually not connected with essential, carefully designed reforms. Instead, they result from fragmented, ad hoc modifications to existing solutions: tasks are being shifted, calculation of various ratios changes, or regulations are slightly amended. When summed up, those incremental changes create barriers which hinder local development.

One crucial issue is the **trust of central authorities in the local administration**. One might think that in the face of numerous developmental successes enabled by local governments and their operation, this issue should not be debatable at all. The respondents believe that, with few exceptions, local governments have proven their effectiveness and the ability to pursue development policies. Meanwhile, while the central government formally delegates the responsibility for some tasks, it significantly constrains the decision-making powers of local bodies in those areas. Therefore, the idea that local governments should have more independence and real decision-making power has become disputable in many cases.

> *'The state should not disturb local governments, the state should have more trust in them and delegate even more competencies to them, mostly in the sphere of social welfare and education. The same money will be available but let the local council decide locally on how to spend it. There is enough money but it's spent in a wrong way.' (Mayor)*

The respondents stressed, with regret, that central institutions offer no support in situations which are critical for local development. This affects, in particular, major cities which face challenges connected with major investments, or negotiations with corporations or multinationals. In particular, large local government units often grapple with problems which would necessitate the involvement of central administration. However, as the respondents said, central administration is sluggish and the decision-making mechanisms are not transparent. For this reason, local government activists are forced to resort to lobbying. In their effort to get something done, local government officials would *'walk around, ask around, explain things. Whenever there some allies, we would send letters (…). We waste a lot of time and energy on such things which could have been done more easily if competencies were handed over to regions, poviats or municipalities. The stronger the centralisation, the harder it is because decisions are made somewhere up there, higher up.' (Mayor)*.

Local government officials, especially those from major cities, expect **a more dialogue-based approach from 'Warsaw' and a joint search for solutions instead of being told what to do**.

> *'If someone commands that there should be a change, well, they should manage it wisely, they should create an opportunity to prepare for that process to help us achieve goals. If we see that decisions are wise, we will prepare for them. And we won't be building monuments of misunderstanding showing that Warsaw doesn't understand local Poland (…) This is not about a magic wand, a miracle or a sack of cash. It's about processes that require awareness of changes, partnership, participation, dialogue, conversation, a search of good solutions. And this is when those changes will bring positive results.' (Mayor of a city).*

Faulty legal solutions and overregulation of the local government system

The interviewed local government leaders believe that the **newly introduced laws and regulations usually have poor quality and are often irrelevant for the needs of citizens or capabilities of local governments**. Worse still, clearly bad regulations are not improved, or they are improved too slowly. The respondents described various cases of interventions at the voivodship or central level: sometimes they meet with understanding but, as a rule, nobody wants to assume the responsibility for faulty regulations. There is no courage to act or simply no political will to implement the required changes. The respondents unanimously stressed that centrally adopted laws often leave no possibility to incorporate regional or local background in the implementation of public tasks. In the respondents' opinion, this deprives local administration of the possibility to adapt the implementation of tasks to local needs. In a way, this has an incapacitating effect for the local government. One should also state that the practices of central institutions grossly contradict the principle of subsidiarity.

> *'Today, some ministries write laws which specify the number of officials to carry out a task at a municipality level. (…) Well, isn't it the local government which is supposed to decide how many people to employ and how to solve a problem? It is supposed to get money and tasks and find ways to solve those problems, because this is the nature of self-government.' (Voit)*

Overregulation is another sphere of difficult relations between local government and central authorities. Local government leaders commonly believe that the central government and the parliament currently regulate an increasing extent of various social policies and areas of life which do not require such regulation. For incomprehensible reasons, *'the legislators try to regulate everything, trying to unify this framework, which often leads to totally absurd situations because many regulations concerning big cities are totally inadequate for small municipalities; moreover, this often leads to situations where better practices and procedures, implemented for years, are being replaced with more expensive ones imposed by the state.' (Mayor of a city)*. The new **regulations unnecessarily complicate the decision-making process** in matters which used to be handled efficiently. This makes citizens' lives more difficult and exposes local authorities to undeserved criticism.

Local government leaders postulate **that the legal system should be streamlined, starting from the way it is adopted, through execution, up to the judiciary**. While many expectations are voiced in the context of legal reforms, two specific postulates are strongly put to the fore: **to eliminate unnecessary regulations and to simplify procedures**.

> *'One should abandon the overregulation, which would give us more flexibility and a sense that the goals are clear but methods should be sought in various places, with different culture and tradition; Poland is a country with varied traditions and expectations towards public authorities.' (Mayor of a city)*

Inconsistent or ineffective development policy at the central level

What should be added to the aforementioned negative phenomena is the **absence of consistent development policies which would make public activities predictable.** Various reforms are introduced by surprise, adopted plans are not implemented, and individual changes are made on an

ad hoc basis, depending on the current political situation. There is a lack of basic stability, enabling local authorities to plan local development rationally.

> *'[What is missing] is the stabilisation in long-term activities, for instance those concerning education. There is no single direction in which education should develop. This is what happens now. We did one reform and we're going to do another reform in a moment, and this is not protected from the formal and legal point of view. On the one hand, there is no consensus in policy work and, on the other hand, there are no regulations and conditions in the law itself. We don't want a situation where the central government simply comes and says, well, the current things are bad, let's do a new reform.' (Mayor).*

Some respondents, particularly those representing smaller centres, stressed the inefficiency of the existing regional development model. They emphasised that the current success of the diffusive development model[8] adopted by the Civic Platform government polarised the country. This situation has been observed for several years and, as a result, different areas of Poland have developed unevenly. Of course, one may presume that this model could produce some outcomes in the long run.[9] However, this prospect often seems too distant for people living in less developed areas. Some respondents felt that the distribution of funds between urban and rural areas was unfair, to the detriment of the latter.

> *'Regional operational programmes offer money but mostly for towns and cities which have been growing nicely. However, the rural development fund has been quite insufficient given the existing needs.' (Voit).*

And, finally, local government leaders very often complained about **the central authorities' lack of will to cooperate with local government associations**: *'There are discrepancies between the central and local government and you can see them particularly clearly in some local government associations, such as the Association of Polish Towns and Cities, or the Association of Silesian Municipalities.' (Mayor)*. The respondents directly speak about *'the state functioning poorly' (Mayor of a city)*, which gives rise to mutual distrust and *'considerably constrains development opportunities because public authorities behave unfairly towards one another.' (Mayor of a city)*. *'Theoretically, local governments should work together with Members of Parliament. But, let's face it: there is no such co-operation. We asked for it many times but there's none…' (Mayor)*. Local government leaders feel excluded from decision-making processes which affect their activities. For this reason, **it is essential to reinforce dialogue between representatives of local communities and the central government**.

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[8] Cf. report: '*Polska 2030. Wyzwania rozwojowe'* [Poland 2030. Developmental Challenges] (https://mac.gov.pl/files/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/Strategia-DSRK-PL2030-RM.pdf - accessed on 12 April 2016).

[9] This is emphasised by the authors of the 'Poland 2030…' report. They write: 'if the polarisation-diffusion model is chosen, the consequence is that 'development leaders' are strongly supported in their growth and the uneven pace of development is accepted', pp. 119–120.

Limited possibility to develop strategic plans for local development

When criticising the central government for the absence of strategic development planning, the respondents also admit that the problem lies on their part, too: **strategic thinking and strategic actions are not always a strength of local administration**.

The need for improvement in strategic management in Polish local government units is strongly emphasised by various communities and is beyond dispute. In the light of studies and expert opinions, **strategies adopted by municipalities often have little in common with effective and efficient strategic thinking.**[10]

Based on survey results, a current development strategy is available in nearly 70% municipal units. This rate differs, depending on the size and type of unit: a general strategic document is most commonly available in urban municipalities (75.8%) and is much more common in major centres (83.6% of LGUs from 10K to 100K residents and 100% of major LGUs) in comparison with small municipalities (57.8% of municipalities up to 5K residents).

The widespread practice of developing strategic documents may be highly misleading. One mayor made a sceptical comment in this respect: '*What's the point of developing strategies for all LGUs if they are not implemented in practice?*' Strategies rarely represent a consistent set of measures aimed at the development of the local community. In many a case, those documents are written 'by administration for administration' and help LGUs to meet formal requirements when applying for external funding. Sometimes, such documents serve promotional purposes. Some of the interviewed leaders thought that there was no need to develop comprehensive strategic programmes for small LGUs. In their view, smaller rural municipalities should pay more attention to common sense and flexible approach instead of strategies. On the other hand, one cannot govern large cities without a long-term plan and a strategy, just relying on common sense.

> '*You can discuss strategic thinking, this varies a lot from one municipality to another (…) [I am not sure] if this should be reduced to the level of municipal government.*' (Voit)

Ineffective structure of local government

Another issue which was critically discussed by the interviewed leaders concerns the structure of local government. The three levels, a large number of municipalities and weak poviats – all these factors reflect the **fragmentation of local government in Poland**. As one respondent observed, a large number of small municipalities is positive since it enables even small communities to have their representatives. However, when '*local government is too dispersed, this isn't quite good, there are serious disproportions.*' (Mayor). As a result, a small rural municipality and a large city can, formally speaking, be seen as identical in the local government structure.

Firstly, the three levels of local government give rise to the problem of **fragmented responsibilities.** One example is the management of roads. '*The entities responsible for roads have multiplied around the poviat. There are municipal roads, poviat roads, neighbourhood roads, voivodship roads, national and private roads, quite a lot of them.*' (Mayor). A similar situation occurs in spheres such as

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[10] Cf. numerous publications on this topic, e.g. Kłosowski and Warda 2001, Kopyściański and Ignacy 2006, Gawroński 2010, Górniak and Mazur 2012, Strategicznie dla… 2011 [Strategically for… 2011], Barometr rozwoju… 2013 [Development Barometer… 2013].

education, health care or welfare. Secondly, fragmented responsibilities mean that it is not clear who is responsible for what.

> *'I must admit that linking things with the level of competence and figuring out who is responsible is complicated in Poland; and sometimes even ourselves, at the local government, we struggle to figure out who is responsible for what and who we should approach with an intervention.' (Mayor).*

Many critical comments were made by the respondents (i.e. leaders of municipal units) about poviats. Generally speaking, they believe that **the distribution of responsibilities between various levels of local government has been poorly designed.**

> *'This is because poviats carry out certain tasks which, by their very nature, go beyond municipalities, or beyond a single municipality; this was a good idea but was it necessary to establish such a complicated structure? Was it necessary to create a big council? Was it really necessary to establish the poviat board, the office and all those other institutions, the family support centres etc.? Why multiply some responsibilities of the municipalities at the level of poviats? I'm really not so sure. (Voit)*

When speaking about major problems related to the operations of poviats, the respondents mentioned, above all, the reduced competencies (many were taken away from poviats in the last fifteen years), absence of own revenues and insufficient financing of the tasks entrusted to poviats.

Regardless of the postulated solutions, nearly all the respondents agreed that the current situation cannot continue and must be changed. Some did not take any specific position, just formulating the postulate to reform the existing system in some way.

> *'So it's about increasing the role of poviats, increasing the financial resources, or liquidating them.' (Voit)*

> *'Well, certainly, when we're talking about poviats, it's disastrous; they should either be liquidated and those responsibilities should be handed over to the municipalities, or poviats should receive the competencies from the voivodship and the central government, giving them an extra burden.' (Mayor)*

Poor collaboration between LGUs

Considering the dispersion of local government and the imperfections in strategic management, the **lack of co-operation between various LGUs becomes ever more problematic**.

Firstly, collaboration between municipalities in Poland is still not widespread. While the data show that a total of 319 municipal associations have been registered in Poland since 1990 (313 inter-municipality associations and 6 poviat associations), yet only 145 of them send reports to the Ministry of Finance, which may be seen as a token of active work.[11]

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[11] Porawski A., T. Potkański, J.M. Czajkowski, J.Szewczuk 'Ogólna charakterystyka stanu i uwarunkowań współpracy jednostek samorządu w Polsce' [Overall Characteristics of the Condition and Background of Collaboration between Local Government Units in Poland' in: T. Potkański (ed.) 'Współpraca jednostek ....' [Collaboration of Local Government Units…], p. 29.

> *'This has failed. Local governments at the municipal level don't know how to work together.'* (Voit)

> *'We should help each other. I mean, local government people. We should work together instead of creating problems for one another, which is often the case.'* (Mayor).

Secondly, collaboration often boils down to joint implementation of project-related responsibilities. The results of research conducted by the ZMP[12] indicate that the vast majority of local government partnerships (82%) emerge primarily in order to obtain external financing for specific undertakings. Only a half of them were created as a result of a needs diagnosis, and a half did not reflect on needs until a formal partnership was established. The most important problems of partnerships include the asymmetry of power between strong and weak partners (33% of responses), passivity of partners (27% of responses), isolation of closed groups and 'power games' within partnerships (23%).

Cooperation between municipalities could be an effective way to strengthen the capacity of LGUs, particularly small ones. Further on, cooperation can be worthwhile in a short run because of the possibility to implement EU-funded projects jointly. In the long run, potential benefits may include the coordination of public policies, rationalisation of services offered, improvement in the quality and efficiency of services and, thus improvement in the financial situation of municipalities.

> *'They* [municipalities] *must work together. They must get united, work in municipal associations. To make sure that different municipalities are not separated with the Great Wall in China.'* (Voit)

Problems in the implementation of selected public policies

One of the most commonly mentioned problems faced by the local government is the activity of education establishments. The essence of the problem does not relate to the need to manage schools (nobody complained about that) but the very limited opportunities to shape educational policy within a local government unit.

> *'[This is] a gigantic problem. (…) Voits just hardly manage. If a voit is not an authority and a strong personality to convince people, they're doomed to failure. They have no chances of winning the battle with teachers. Teachers get through to parents directly and they have the final say. Education is absolutely the number one problem.'* (Mayor).

Under current conditions, while local governments formally are the 'managing authorities' of schools, the vast majority of decisions related to the functioning of schools are reserved for central administration. Local government is responsible for most activities of schools while having only a limited influence. The costs of operation of local educational facilities are charged to local budgets whereas the results of their work have an effect on many local issues. On the other hand, local government often have only illusory possibilities to shape long-term education policy at the local level.

Another problematic area mentioned by some respondents is the implementation of social policies. As a result of reforms conducted in Poland in 1990s, local government became largely responsible for this sphere. A complicated network of institutions emerged, with various scopes of responsibilities,

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[12] Ibidem: T. Potkański (ed.) „Współpraca jednostek ….' [Collaboration of Local Government Units…].

tasks and financial resources. As a result, the implementation of policies in spheres such as employment, housing, health care, social welfare or child care depends largely on the collaboration between institutions at the municipality, poviat and voivodship levels. This collaboration is partially regulated by the law and partially dependent on decisions made by various institutions, such as employment councils or regional social policy centres. This system is not always effective: various studies have shown that locally implemented social policies often lacks consistency and coherence. One way to improve the coordination of social policies would be to adopt prospective planning, coupled with identification of local problems and prioritisation of tasks. As a result, a few strategic documents are created at each level of local government. By definition, those documents should set goals and help to coordinate activities of various institutions. In many places, however, this is not the case. This largely stems from the fact that **powers of local authorities in the sphere of local social policy are limited by the powers of central ministries**. Some respondents stressed, for instance, that there is no possibility to adapt assistance instruments in a flexible way to pursue social policy goals at the local level.

> *'Possibly also social welfare issues. Those are not easy things because it is sometimes hard to explain things to people who need assistance in basic survival; and there is always an impression that some people have been wronged; yet many things are a consequence of legal regulations and they cannot always be bypassed.' (Mayor)*

In consequence, local authorities pursue their planned activities (goals) but are unable to resolve the dominant problems. Therefore, they seek other solutions such as projects financed from subsidies and EU assistance programmes. What is missing, however, are local, future-oriented activities aimed at improving the social situation at the local level.

Studies conducted by the FRDL[13] also indicate that **many municipalities have hardly any conscious cultural policy or one related development**. What happens is that the local office provides some habitual organisational and financial support for activities pursued by institutions or NGOs in the sphere of culture yet the authorities do not position themselves as creators of cultural policy, less so as initiators of cultural activities. One common practice is to delegate the responsibility for cultural events onto individuals who hold managerial positions in institutions reporting to the local government, with limited interest in the daily activities of those institutions. Presumably, this state of affairs exists due to the absence of widespread reflection on the outcomes of activities undertaken by cultural institutions and their role in shaping the local identity and building social capital. This is also reflected in the results of national research conducted in late 2014 and early 2015 among local government leaders.[14] In that research, only 15.2% of the respondents mentioned integration of residents as an element which reflects a success of a municipality or a city/town.

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[13] C. Trutkowski 'Lokalna Polityka Kulturalna. Wpływ inwestycji w infrastrukturę instytucji kultury na jakość życia w społecznościach lokalnych' [Local Cultural Policy. The Impact of Investments in Cultural Infrastructure on the Quality of Life in Local Communities], FRDL 2016.
(http://www.frdl.org.pl/pliki/frdl/image/marta/polityka%20kulturalna.pdf)

[14] A study entitled 'Bilans kadencji 2010–2014' [Summary of the 2010–2014 Term of Office] conducted by Cezary Trutkowski, in collaboration with Anna Kurniewicz, for FRDL, among voits and mayors of local government units.

Chart 4: Tokens of success of municipalities/towns and cities (a FRDL study 'Summary of the 2010–2014 Term of Office'; answers from local government leaders (voits and mayors)

Development of municipal infrastructure — 72,0%

Amounts of EU funding raised — 49,1%

Fulfilment of residents' expectations / representing voters' interests — 41,3%

Residents' satisfaction with public services provided/co-ordinated by the LGU — 35,1%

Favourable economic ratios (e.g. low unemployment rate, number of economic agents) — 26,4%

Residents' involvement in planning and shaping local development — 17,4%

Social integration of residents — 15,2%

High level of own revenues — 14,3%

Two independent nation-wide studies conducted by FRDL (a study with LGU secretaries and LGU leaders)[15] found that the support of cultural institutions was considered to be a priority for municipalities only by 4.8% of the secretaries and 6.7% of the leaders.

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[15] Studies reported in this document entitled 'Zarządzanie rozwojem kadr samorządowych' [Management of the Development of Local Government Personnel] conducted under the supervision of C. Trutkowski by the FRDL in late 2015 and early 2016 in 1703 LGUs, and the aforementioned study 'The Summary of the 2010–2014 Term of Office'.

Which areas should be particularly SUPPORTED in the specific situation of the local government unit?

Area	LGU secretaries (N=1679)	Local government leaders (N=627)
road infrastructure	70,9%	64,3%
education and pre-school facilities	67,9%	65,2%
water supply and sewage system	50,9%	45,1%
social assistance and municipal housing	31,3%	22,5%
public security	20,5%	17,7%
health care and prevention	14,1%	10,8%
support for NGOs	5,2%	6,9%
cleanliness in the streets and public areas	5,0%	7,3%
cultural institutions	4,8%	6,7%
extracurricular classes for children	4,1%	3,2%
sport and leisure	3,7%	6,5%
green areas	1,3%	5,6%
another sphere	0,9%	0,3%

Spatial chaos

The local spatial policy is in deep crisis. Experts indicate that urban structures in Poland 'spill out' into open areas, which creates spatial chaos on a scale unseen in other European countries. According to the data presented in the report entitled *'On Economic Losses and Social Costs of Uncontrolled Urbanisation in Poland',*[16] the adopted urban planning studies and directions include 3.3 million ha of planned housing areas with a demographic capacity of 230 million residents (with a total population of 38 million people in Poland). At the same time, local plans enable the settlement of 62 million people, with the absorptive power of the planned residential areas in some municipalities exceeding the current population nearly ten times. The expansion of settlement areas throughout Poland is accompanied by a decline in the population figures, which generates unjustified financial liabilities

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[16] Cf. Kowalewski, A., J. Mordasewicz, J. Osiatyński, J. Regulski, J. Stępień, P. Śleszyński 'Raport o ekonomicznych stratach i społecznych kosztach niekontrolowanej urbanizacji w Polsce' [Report on Economic Losses and Social Costs of Uncontrolled Urbanisation in Poland']; FRDL & IGiPZ PAN, 2013. (http://www.frdl.org.pl/pliki/frdl/document/zalaczniki_artykuly/Raport%20Ekonomiczny%2029.10.2013%20cal osc.pdf)

for the state and local governments and, moreover, deteriorates the living conditions for the residents.

The participants often talked about the absence of corresponding instruments that would enable the implementation and enforcement of zoning plans. Again, as in the case of education, the essence of the problem consists in limiting the competencies of the municipalities in that sphere.

> *'A municipality has the right to create a zoning plan but has no right to enforce it. I am not party to proceedings when someone acts completely against the law.' (Voit).*

Politicisation of poviat and voivodship-level local government

The respondents fairly rarely mentioned the influence of political parties on the operation of local government units. If at all, they stressed negative phenomena related to the politicisation of authorities in major cities and of regional authorities.

> *'Local governments in voivodships and major cities are heavily politicised, which is really a pity (…) Rural or rural-urban local governments are hardly ever politicised and this is valuable, from the perspective of local government.' (Voit).*

Analysis of the results of most recent elections (2014) largely confirms those observations. The data indicate that there is a clear rule in this regard: **as the category of LGUs rises, so does the share of candidates backed up by party committees.** In voivodship parliaments, candidates from party-endorsed committees or party coalitions represented 74% of all those running in the local elections. The respective percentage in poviat councils was 53%, with 31% in municipal councils.

A similar regularity can be observed in the elections of voits and mayors. In small municipalities (up to 5K residents), the percentage of non-party candidates has remained high (approx. 74%), whereas in larger municipalities (over 100K residents), much like in 2010, it was slightly over 46% (after a visible decline between 2002 and 2006, from 60% to 40%). The highest share of those running from party-supported lists can be seen among candidates for mayors of major cities (nearly 50%). For this reason, **if we compare the election results in 2010 and 2014, we cannot conclude that political parties have reinforced their positions at the municipal level**. This is reflected, above all, in the nearly unchanged percentage of non-party voits (82.1%), mayors of smaller centres (82.9%) and mayors of major cities (62.3%). Of course, these data only reflect official affiliations.

Internal conflicts in local authorities

One respondent raised the issue **of conflicts between the local government and the council**. The introduction of direct elections to the posts of voits and mayors was in line with the society's expectations. At the same time, it triggered an institutional problem: an elected official may have the local government council against him/herself.

> *'That system (…) largely blocks the possibility of proper functioning. And this is something to discuss, certainly. I cannot tell you what kind of solution should be adopted.' (Voit)*

The problem of conflicts between representatives of executive power (voits and mayors) and the local council or some councillors is not common. The results of the study entitled 'The Summary of the 2010–2014 Term of Office' indicate that it affects approx. 10% of LGUs. Nevertheless, the

occurrence of such conflicts has a considerable negative effect on the day-to-day management of the LGUs and on the social perception of local government as such. If we juxtapose the results of the study with the outcomes of local elections, we will see that **a leader's success in the elections is largely conditional upon the frequency of conflicts in local government bodies:** in those LGUs where stormy relations were diagnosed, the leader was much more likely to lose his/her position in the first round of the elections.

Leadership in local government, communication with residents

The creation and development of citizens' co-responsibility for the local community is immensely important in the process of building self-governance. As Jerzy Regulski admitted, 'it is easiest to amend the law, it is more difficult to transform institutions and it is most difficult to change people's mentality and habits.'[17] Decentralisation of the state is not only about changing the sphere of law. Decentralisation also entails a change in citizens' mentality: they change their understanding of the local community and its tasks, and the role of residents and the local government in that community. The experience of many countries shows that such a change in the world outlook usually takes much longer than the introduction of legal amendments, however complicated they might be. Presumably, the reason lies in Poland's communist heritage. For many years, local governance hardly existed at all in former communist countries. Local affairs were decided centrally and citizens had hardly any influence on decisions which were being made.[18] As Regulski notices, 'people often do not realise what local self-governance really involves. They do not realise they are allowed to make their independent decisions and, moreover, that they are actually expected to do so; they can decide about their own local affairs and it depends on themselves how those affairs will be solved.'[19]

This is exactly the spirit in which many local government leaders spoke, indicating that human mentality often obstructs effective governance in selected spheres of local life. They pointed out that some citizens cannot find their place in democratic procedures and adapt to democratic decisions.

> *'Overall, the most difficult thing to change is the human mentality because all the social changes are more difficult than anything. Any change, even an obviously positive one, is met with reluctance. Everything is accepted with reluctance until some positive effects of change can be seen.' (Mayor).*

The respondents' comments also reflect lack of patience, at least among some local government leaders, about people who have no knowledge or competence.

> *'You know, if I had to tell you intuitively, well, this would reflect my inclination towards my own perception of the world and this job, a somewhat authoritarian perception. I would say I have to accept compromises with fools. I'm not talking about the residents but about politicians who are fools. You know, local freaks, and there are lots of them in local government.' (Mayor of a city).*

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[17] Regulski, J., (2000), 'Samorząd III Rzeczypospolitej. Koncepcje i realizacja' [Local Government of the Third Polish Republic. Concepts and Implementation] , Warszawa, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN; p. 388.

[18] Cf. Trutkowski C., Mandes S., 'Kapitał społeczny w małych miastach' [Social Capital in Small Towns], Warszawa: Scholar 2005; p.259.

[19] Regulski, J., (2007), 'Reformowanie Państwa. Moje doświadczenia' [Reforming the State. My Experience], Szczecin: FRDL and WSAP Szczecin; p. 70.

In that situation, the leader holds an important key to success of a municipality. The leader should demonstrate the ability to provide the right diagnosis of the local situation, be able to identify strengths and weaknesses of their units, have a convincing idea of how to develop their LGU and, finally, have the right people who will be able to fulfil those plans. Institutional factors related to the management of the local government office will be mentioned later on in this report. What is worth stressing here is that local government derives its strength from the leaders and from the competences of people who consistently implement their vision of development. As mentioned earlier, the respondents admitted that local government lacks strategic thinking, with the collaboration between key actors of local life often being inefficient.

3.3. Does local government need reforms?

The aforementioned summary of key systemic problems mentioned by the respondents may lead to various conclusions and generate a variety of ideas for reforms. Many were mentioned directly: the need to develop new regulations on local finances, the need to develop a new model to structure the local authorities, improved consistency in central policies regarding local tasks, the need to make a radical change in the rules of spatial management or the reversal of centralisation processes, and the restoration of the subsidiarity principle. Of course, this is not an exhaustive list. For instance, it does not include spheres where local governance is failing because leaders do not take the right actions, there is some neglect in governance or lack of awareness of developmental challenges or needs of local communities. Nevertheless, one should clearly stress that local government leaders hardly talked about their expectations to undertake radical reforms. The respondents felt that **changes were necessary but should be gradual and evolutionary**.

> *'The state does not work properly on many levels and does not come up to the challenge. Local government does. And that's it. We can improve it. It doesn't call for a great breakthrough but we need to reform the local government. We need to improve certain mechanisms which can, and should, work better. That's the point.' (Mayor).*

Some respondents felt that reforms should actually restore the status quo from 1990s. As mentioned earlier, this period of local governance in Poland tends to be idealised.

> *'I think we don't need any great revolutions today or any great changes but, instead, we need something I would call 'going back to basics'; we need to restore that spirit of trust between the central authorities, the government, the parliament, and the local authorities. What lies at the heart is the belief that we exercise public governance from those two levels (…) and that both those authorities must feel co-responsible for building the quality of life on the one hand (…), and, on the other hand, there must be understanding that local government is a partner rather than an outsider; that local government is part of public authorities where the goals and tasks build the reality of the entire country and, as such, they reinforce the state.' (Mayor of a city).*

4. Local development priorities and difficulties in managing LGUs

Essential administrative activities of local governments aside, one important challenge is to shape local development. For this reason, one of the goals of the studies was to identify the priorities of local governments in this regard. As a rule, such priorities entail a specific type of activities which require the right kinds of competences from people who are responsible for achieving them. A similar regularity can be expected when it comes to identifying the difficulties in managing LGUs. Once we exclude systemic problems, such difficulties may indicate insufficient competencies among officials, or a lack of mechanisms or skills to ensure effective governance at the local level.

4.1. Development priorities of LGUs

When asked about major tasks faced by their units, the interviewed local leaders mentioned various activities. The following categories of tasks were mentioned:

- Infrastructural investments – mostly the implementation of road projects and investments in technical infrastructure (construction of sewage systems);

- Revitalisation and modernisation of centres and special facilities (e.g. a railway station, historical monuments etc.) as well as architectural development:

    'We develop the city in terms of urban space, we are facing a really serious challenge: building a new centre of the city.' (Mayor of a city)

- Preparing areas for investments: land reinforcement, construction of access roads etc.

    'We will want to obtain land and try to lay all the utilities there (…) We want to do it perhaps not on a large area but something to suit a specific investor… This is a challenge that we would like to …' (Voit)

- Creating new jobs;

- Developing public transport;

- Improving the housing infrastructure, investments in municipal housing;

- Activities in the sphere of education – measures to improve the quality of teaching, reforming vocational education etc.

    'Education is an absolute priority because, well, we can wait and lay a sewage pipe tomorrow but we cannot catch up with today's education later on. We believe that our policy is absolutely right because we are investing in the young generation.' (Voit)

- Development of projects in areas such as culture, leisure, sports and entertainment: constructing playgrounds, outdoor workout places, revitalisation of green areas, construction of sports facilities, bicycle paths etc.

    'We put a strong emphasis on looking for new projects at the verge of culture. In actual fact, this is a path to innovation, development, economic stimulation… Today, a modern city cannot exist without exciting events or interesting cultural activities.' (Mayor of a city)

- Solving social problems, fighting exclusion

  'We want to do projects related to exclusion, this time it was digital exclusion but we are approaching other things as well, and we want to fight social exclusion, and run social programmes, too.' (Mayor)

- Fighting depopulation, combating external migration

  'Fighting depopulation has become a priority for me. I'll let others build a road or something. I'm dealing with somewhat difficult and unobvious mechanisms to stop depopulation because this requires intuition, creativity, psychological skills.' (Mayor of a city)

- Undertaking promotional activities

  'Creating a modern brand of the city; the brand is built because we want to create the quality, to have a place which is a source of inspiration.' (Mayor of a city)

The aforementioned responses given during individual in-depth interviews do not offer a closed list or an exhaustive catalogue. However, they can be viewed as an illustration of the changing perception of local development. Changes evoked by civilisation, as well as social and demographic transformations have brought a new perspective on tasks and challenges of local government. Therefore, the **actions undertaken by local government are not determined only by the development of key infrastructure and the improvement of living conditions but, increasingly, local governments speak of a more long-term perspective in context-based strategic thinking**.

'The time for simple recipes, such as making sure that a road is straight, is long gone. We have exchanged all the lamps and we have lights everywhere (…). In a moment, everyone will have a toilet facility in their buildings, which is quite an advancement [in our town] and everyone has running water. We will have a waste sorting plant and nearly everyone who wants to work has a job; if people die, they die in very decent conditions, in a hospice, which we have expanded and so on.' (Mayor of a city).

Of course, this relates to the views of a very specific, narrow group of the respondents. The interviews (as mentioned at the beginning) were not representative. Nevertheless, they indicate at least how some local government leaders define various phenomena.

On the other hand, representative data were obtained from two independent quantitative surveys conducted among LGU secretaries as well as voits and mayors (the study was entitled 'The Summary of the 2010–2014 Term of Office'). Their findings reveal the dominance of the traditional hierarchy of developmental priorities. When it comes to challenges faced by Polish municipalities, infrastructural investments take a strong lead. When interpreting the results presented in the chart below, it is important to remember that the local government leaders were asked about the priorities of the past term of office whereas secretaries were asked about the priorities in the current term of office. In this context, it is worth noting that the importance of investment projects has fallen slightly whereas the frequency of mentions for 'stabilisation of the municipality/town budget' has gone up.

Chart 6: Development priorities in LGUs, as seen by secretaries and leaders

Bar chart data:

infrastructural investments
- 76,7% (LGU secretaries)
- 86,4% (LGU leaders)

improving the quality of public/municipal services
- 31,6% (LGU secretaries)
- 31,3% (LGU leaders)

stabilisation of municipal/town budget
- 31,3% (LGU secretaries)
- 24,2% (LGU leaders)

social issues, e.g. solving social problems, resident integration
- 21,1% (LGU secretaries)
- 16,6% (LGU leaders)

ongoing management, responding to problems as they arise
- 15,4% (LGU secretaries)
- 15,2% (LGU leaders)

social activation of residents
- 14,7% (LGU secretaries)
- 15,8% (LGU leaders)

another issue of local importance
- 0,4% (LGU secretaries)
- 1,3% (LGU leaders)

■ LGU secretaries (priorities in this term of office) - N=1703

■ LGU leaders (priorities in the 2010-2014 term of office) - N=627

4.2. Sources of difficulty in day-to-day local governance

The opinions expressed by local government leaders with regard to major problems in the operations of local authorities are confirmed by the results of the surveys. Below presented are comparisons between opinions expressed by LGU leaders and secretaries, obtained from two independent surveys. Worth noting are the relatively small differences in the presented perspectives. When interpreting the findings, it is good to remember that respondents' opinions were influenced by the situation in their respective local government units. Whereas the comments made in the previous chapter largely refer to generalised perception of the local government system in Poland, the data presented on the chart below reflect a hierarchy of various problems at the local level.

Chart 7: Hierarchy of problem sources in local government, as seen by LGU secretaries and leaders

What are the sources of the GREATEST difficulties in day-to-day management of your local government unit?
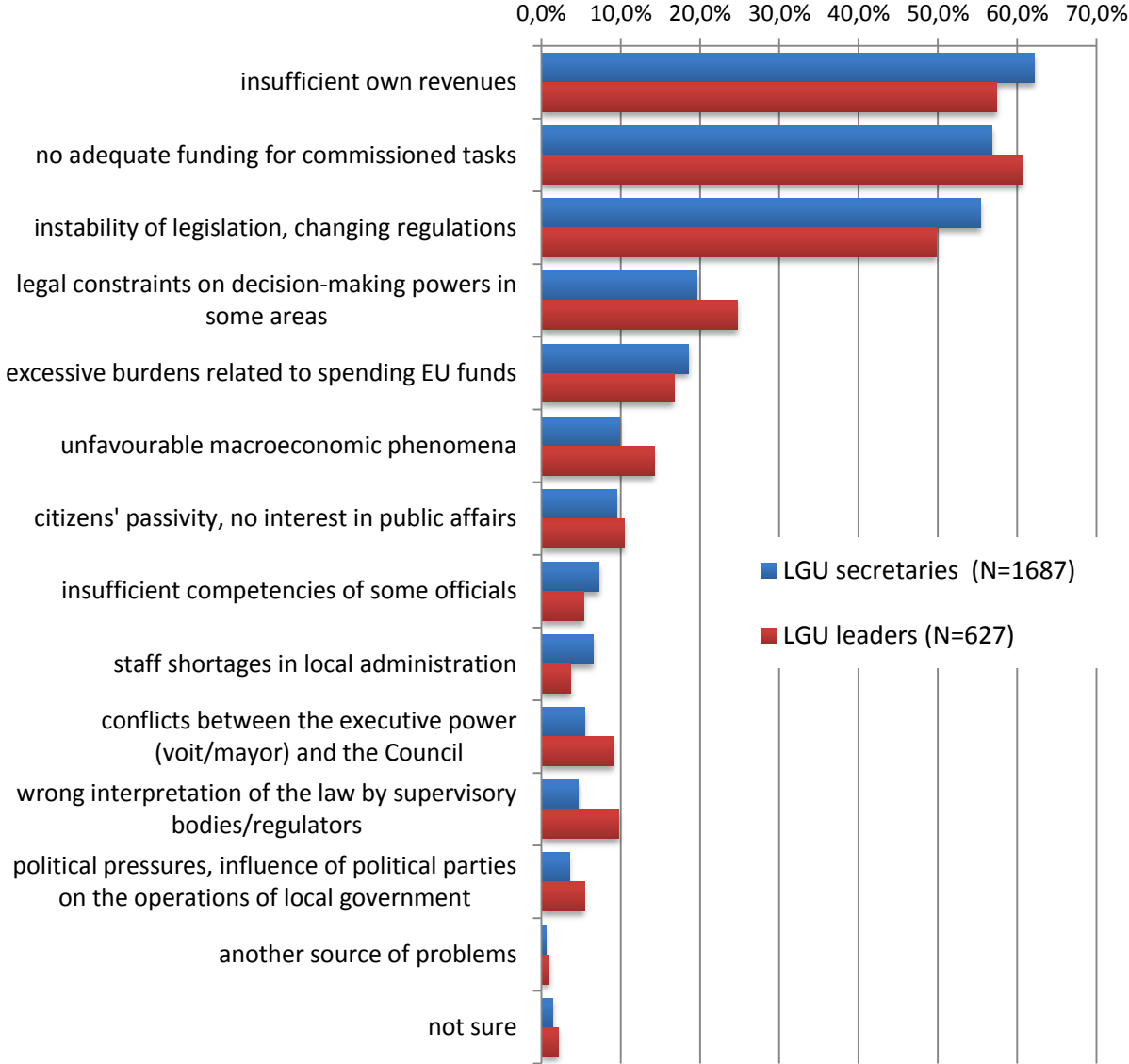
Analysis has shown that problems have a varied impact on the perceived efficiency of performance in LGUs. On the one hand, the data show that **'insufficient competencies of some officials' are potentially the greatest burden for the effective operation of some offices** (even though this concerns a relatively small group of LGUs). On the other hand, **'insufficient own revenues' are the most commonly mentioned source of problems**. This means that competence-related problems are not mentioned as the most common constraint, at least LGU secretaries, even though that have potentially the highest significance.

The respondents' declarations indicate that **the quality of life in local communities is most undermined by problems arising from insufficient own income generated by LGUs** (at the same time, the largest number of secretaries consider this issue to be particularly important). On the other

hand, sources of problems such as 'an excessive burden related to the spending of EU funds', 'improper interpretations of legislation by regulators', 'lack of adequate financing for commissioned tasks', 'legal constraints on decision-making at the local level in some areas' or 'instability of the law, changing legislation', which are identified as important sources of problems, do not have a particularly negative impact on operations in the broader sense. In other words, they do not translate into lower quality of life in the local community.

5. Managing the work of a local government office

Information obtained in the course of interviews conducted with local government leaders and the analysis of survey data indicate that the operations of local offices and the outcomes of their activity are influenced by three categories of factors (alongside external factors discussed in the first part of this document): (1) work organisation at the office, the approach to quality monitoring and analysis of outcomes, (2) competencies of officials and their attitudes towards work, and (3) relations between supervisors and subordinates, leaders' attitude towards subordinates.

However, before we proceed to discussing those factors, we would like to draw readers' attention to practices followed by leaders in their management of local administration, quality assurance methods applied at the offices, as well as methods to verify the attainment of results.

5.1. Management practices in local administration

Firstly, interviews conducted with local government leaders indicate that **there is no one-size-fits-all solution leading to a success in local administration**: it is impossible to identify a single issue or a group of factors which would inevitably improve the performance of a local government office. The freedom in shaping organisational structures of local government means that we are dealing with highly varied management philosophies and diverse solutions. Interestingly enough, the size of the office does not seem to play much of a role here. What is decisive, however, is the leader or, to be more precise, his/her personality.

Secondly, **based on the interviews we cannot conclude that locally adopted organisational solutions are backed up by in-depth reflection in the sphere of management**. Above all, a local office reflects the beliefs, experience, and intentions of the local authorities (or, at least, this is the conclusion from the interviews). As a result, we often deal with a 'colourful meadow' rather than a carefully designed garden, i.e. flexible reactions rather than rigorous implementation of a management model adapted to the economic or social background of the LGU concerned. Notably, this situation cannot be assessed unambiguously: one cannot validly claim that self-governing communities are unified in any way.

The existing legal regulations (above all, the Act on Municipal Self-Government, but also other regulations) leave **considerable freedom to local offices in shaping their structure.** Local officials are happy to exercise that freedom when implementing both general management concepts as well as specific solutions, in line with their idea of organising the work of their subordinates. As a result, a local government office is, to some extent, an emanation of the leader's beliefs and ideas. The

interviews indicate that leaders perceive themselves and their working style to be highly influential. One can identify at least four general principles which, according to the respondents, characterise them as managers and influence the performance of 'their' administrative structures.

First and foremost, leaders highlight their **openness towards subordinates**, and this brings positive results. This attitude is well reflected in a statement made by one mayor of a big city: *'you just need to trust people and listen to them, that's important in management.'*

Another respondent pointed out that it was crucial to **be fair and play by the rules when managing a local office**. In that vision, the local leader is a guard and a guarantor of rules which regulate various requirements and rewards. If violated, even in minor ways, they may upset the entire system.

> *'If you select human resources professionals and trust them, things will work. But this depends on the mayor. If the mayor gets out of his role and begins to meddle with HR issues, even occasionally, he would ruin the system. It is not important how many new hires are admitted against the rules, it might not be significant in the overall figure. But it's enough to have one or two cases and people will know that they have no possibility to take decisions independently. In that case, they will apply self-censorship and constrain themselves, and things won't work any more. One must not allow precedents.' (Mayor of a city).*

Another management style mentioned by the respondents consisted in **setting goals and leaving the freedom to select the right methods** to achieve those goals. Officials are accountable for effectiveness and the leader does not inquire who achieved the goal and how, as long as the goal has been achieved.

> *'I give a lot of leeway to my staff. They might have ideas, I don't intervene. I only intervene when something begins to go wrong or when something collapses. And any official must be responsible for what they do. And once they understood that, they must do some thinking instead of doing things automatically. They need to think. What helps is that I never exert any pressure or anything like that.' (Voit).*

A completely different philosophy was adopted by another respondent, who sees **improvisation as a key to success**. Presumably (even though the respondent does not mention it explicitly), all relevant decisions in this approach are made by the leader.

> *'Overall, the operations of the office and the management are largely based on improvisation, as in a company (…), one cannot really arrange it neatly (…). [Things would be different] if we knew how much money we have, how many tasks we have and if we could arrange everything to make it work like a Swiss watch; [that] perhaps in some rich countries, [in] poor countries like Poland, and even more so like [our town], we need some room for improvisation.' (Mayor).*

5.2. Monitoring the quality of operations

It would seem that the organisation of the office should draw attention of those leaders who are interested in improving the performance of their administration. However, this is not the case. There were few comments to that effect in the interviews and those made were fairly superficial. However, quantitative surveys managed to verify the selected practices and implementation of specific organisational solutions.

The collected data indicate that only a small portion of LGUs have formalised, systematically applied mechanisms to monitor the work of their offices and to identify problems affecting their operation. Even if leaders did mention some 'methods', such as 'assessment based on outcomes' or 'assessment by supervisors', the context of the statements indicated that we were not dealing with an effective, pre-planned monitoring mechanism. Most leaders from small towns and rural municipalities believe that it is sufficient to make assessments on the basis of information obtained in an unsystematic manner, directly from their subordinates, and from conversations with residents on various occasions.

Comments from LGU leaders indicate that whenever any monitoring indices are applied to measure the operations, LGUs usually check the number of complaints against the operation of officials, and the number of appeals against decisions issued. In some offices, this indicator is part of the ISO system whereas others apply this tool independently (or at least this is the conclusion from the interviews).

> *'Performance of a public office is best assessed by the number of complaints, appeals against decisions. How many complaints and appeals have been filed.' (Mayor)*

Municipalities and towns occasionally use social research to collect opinions among residents about the operation of their offices. Also in this case there is no precise information about research goals or methodology. However, the findings from 'The Summary of the 2010–2014 Term of Office'[20] indicate that customer satisfaction studies for their offices are conducted by approx. 44% of LGUs whereas satisfaction studies among customers of municipal organisational units are conducted by 22.3% of LGUs.

> *'We do research as regards our operations. We held such a study last year, using one [local] company.' (Voit)*

More than a half (53.3%) of secretaries participating in the survey admitted that their offices had not held any systematic self-assessment of performance. Given the absence of widespread monitoring mechanisms to provide information on the functioning of local government offices, one may wonder how local governments identify threats and problems at their respective units. Interviews with leaders bring only occasional and general answers to this question. Overall, the opinion expressed by one mayor of a major city is fairly typical:

> *'Everyone must feel responsible for what they do. They bear responsibility, also outside the office. In our case, this is based on trust and I presume that everyone works in good faith, being honest, competent and so on. There is so much work, so many decisions and so much is going on that sooner or later such cases would come to light, if they've ever happened. After so many years I can say this model works perfectly.' (Mayor of a city).*

Many leaders consciously accept the absence of well-developed mechanisms to assess the work of the office or reflect on its operations. Many of them do not feel the need to formalise this process.

> *'I trust my intuition and experience from the business sector. Things that work, work well, at least this is my opinion. And things work well when, to be blunt, nobody bothers me, and I don't meddle with other people's things.' (Mayor)*

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[20] Trutkowski C., A. Kurniewicz, *ibidem.*

Therefore, it is not surprising that when asked about the strategy and performance of public administration, the respondents would say: '*I suppose there must be, I think so,' (Voit)*, '*I can't remember but there probably are some,' (Voit)*, '*I think I can't remember that at the moment, there has always been things that public administration should be working better, some slogans, there certainly are some. I can't remember a document, but there certainly are some things.' (Mayor)*.

5.3. Overall assessment of the performance of LGU offices

The collected quantitative data indicate that public administration is rated very high for its performance. Both the overall mean value and the median of responses on a nine-point scale (from 1 – very bad to 9 – very good) was 7. Those ratings are not differentiated by the type of local government units.

Chart 8: Overall assessment of the performance of local administration
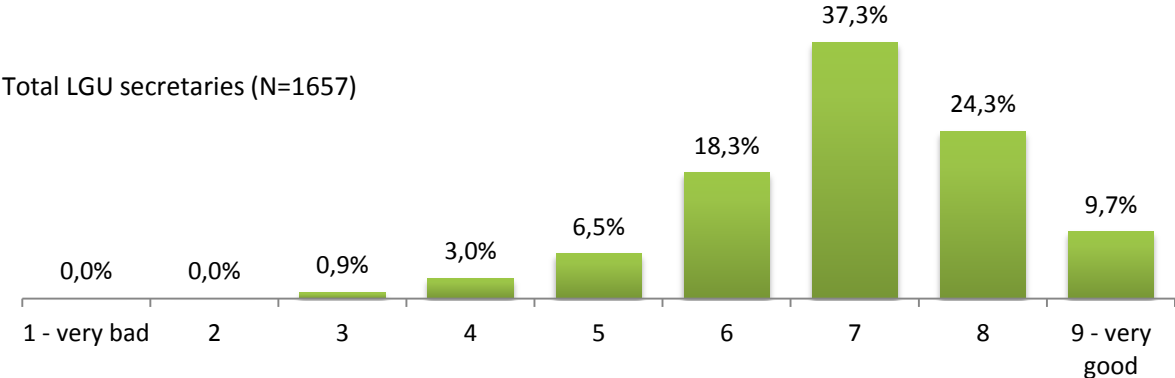
The respondents were asked to assess the effectiveness of various activities by their respective offices. Their answers revealed the following core problems in the operation of local government offices: 'implementation of e-administration and informatisation of the office' and 'public transport and roads'. Further on, one should add at least issues related to environment protection, spatial planning and real property management, external/internal audit and management control, planning and implementation of infrastructural investments, and implementation of educational policies.

Chart 9: Problematic areas of tasks carried out by local government offices (highly or partly) – as seen by LGU secretaries

Task area	partial difficulties	major difficulties
e-government platform and informatisation at the office	45,8%	31,0%
public transport and roads	48,8%	18,9%
external audit, internal audit and management control	47,6%	14,9%
environment protection	51,7%	9,6%
computer & IT training, use of IT tools	46,7%	13,7%
planning and implementation of infrastructural investments	46,8%	11,1%
educational policy at the LGU	45,4%	11,9%
spatial planning and real property management	48,5%	8,7%
building relations with residents, public consultations, collaboration etc.	43,8%	9,9%
social policy, social integration, activities of welfare institutions	45,9%	6,9%
raising, servicing and managing external funding	43,4%	9,0%
team management, team work techniques, conflict resolution etc.	44,2%	8,2%
strategic management at the LGU	45,4%	6,9%
protection of classified information and data protection	41,0%	6,3%
administrative proceedings, procedures, decisions etc.	39,3%	3,3%
collaboration with NGOs	34,0%	6,5%
activities of cultural institutions, implementation of cultural policy	32,3%	7,6%
crisis management	34,6%	4,6%
public procurement and tender procedures	32,3%	3,8%
financial management at LGUs, local fees and taxes, finance and accounting	30,6%	4,0%
HR management, HR policy	31,3%	3,3%
working time management	30,0%	4,0%
organisation of sport events, activities of sport and leisure institutions	26,5%	4,6%
work organisation at the office	28,7%	1,3%
operations of the Council, achievement of tasks by councillors	23,9%	4,3%
registry office and vital statistics	22,0%	4,5%
customer service, organisation of secretary's office, customer service centre etc.	18,2%	1,8%
ethics and prevention of corruption risks	15,7%	1,8%

Data analysis has shown that problems in the implementation of tasks in specific areas mentioned in the questionnaire have different levels of importance for the assessment of the performance of local offices. It turns out that the assessment of the performance related to strategic management, work organisation, HR policy, organisation of officials' work and management control play a crucial role. Among those categories, the greatest difficulties in the implementation are posed by management control. The data show that secretaries assess the performance of local administration mostly on the basis of factors related to the internal organisation of work at the local government office.

5.4. Barriers to institutional development as seen by local government leaders

It should be stressed that the functioning of local government offices was not mentioned spontaneously either in comments about the weaknesses of local government or in comments about problems related to various areas of activities undertaken by LGUs. When asked directly about this issue, the respondents usually reacted with some surprise and assured the interviewers that they were satisfied with the work of their subordinates. When probed, they were able to identify a number of problems that their offices grappled with. Most of them were difficulties shared by rural and urban municipalities, except for two last difficulties mentioned at the end.

Lack of financial resources to remunerate staff properly – this issue was mentioned directly or casually in the context of hiring and motivating staff (see below). One respondent said:

> *'I would like to motivate the staff members who really excel at their work by giving them some extra financial bonuses but, on the other hand, my resources for salaries are limited in the budget.' (Voit).*

The respondents mentioned **legal regulations which do not allow staff to be remunerated in line with their knowledge, competencies or value on the labour market**. The following situations are by no means exceptional:

> *'The best staff are leaving the office. Especially those who have worked at the department which raises EU funding, that's because they were offered more money by private companies. We prepared them, educated them, they got experience and skills and now they've left. (…) Retaining a staff member who is really well-prepared, who is a good professional is a really big problem.' (Voit).*

A slightly different problem with staff recruitment was mentioned by another respondent who was sure that *'people can learn pretty much anything. You can train them. However, a pro-active attitude and creativity are missing. Because such people probably don't come to work at a public office, or few of them do.' (Mayor of a city)*. In his opinion, **local administration scares proactive people off**, i.e. people who are ready to face new challenges and learn new things. This is related to 'clerical mentality':

> *'I was 28 or 29 years old and I was struck by that clerical mentality (…) I mean, people come to work at 8:00 am, leave at 3:59 pm. They need a written document for everything and then they're safe. When they don't get something done but they have a paper, they're not under threat. When an issue comes to the surface, but they can give a refusal just on the basis of legal regulations, they will give a refusal. (…) Officials were not goal-oriented, they were action-oriented. We have action, we circulate documents and that means things are OK.*

> *What if the goal hasn't been achieved? Well, it doesn't have to be. Main thing, there is action!' (Mayor).*

Particular types of problems for the operations of local government offices are caused by inspecting institutions, such as regional accounting chambers of the Supreme Chamber of Control: *'What sometimes chills your engagement is the awareness that in case of any external inspection any doubts will be used against the person who is being inspected.' (Mayor)*. Even if officials feel support from their supervisor, they look at the legal consequences of their decisions and, naturally, take a secure way, in case they will have to face an inspection.

> *'When clerks are at work, the thoughts of inspection and potential consequences of decisions are a bit paralysing and, unfortunately, that makes people very cautious.' (Mayor).*

For this perspective, it is better to gather more signatures and issue a cautious rather than a fair decision. This problem is aggravated by the unpredictability of some inspecting institutions. It may turn out that things which are accepted in one voivodship will be rejected in another. Again, the problem lies in low quality of legislation and non-transparent rules of application.

Another barrier which prevents highly competent people with management skills from working for a public office was mentioned by one respondent who talked about a '**glass ceiling'.**

> *'A glass ceiling in public administration is a real thing, this is not something made up. The promotion process often depends on other people retiring or on your immediate supervisor being promoted. And that often takes ages.'* (2).

From a position of a head of office, people can be promoted to the position of a secretary or deputy director of the unit but this is where the career path ends. In order to achieve another level, that of a voit or a mayor, one must run in general elections, and win, which requires completely different competencies versus those needed for clerical work.

The last two problems are specific to offices in major cities with multiple staff members and many units located in different buildings around the city. Staff members do not meet in the corridor and might not know one another at all. Such public offices face two problems. Firstly, the problem of **co-operation**:

> *'There are actions which also have such attributes that are related to work in a large administrative structure, you need to teach people how to co-operate horizontally, you need to create task forces which go beyond and across the normal operations in an organisational structure, which is not always simple. You need to teach project-oriented thinking.' (Mayor of a city).*

Secondly, there is a problem of **supervision over different units** operating within separate public policies, often physically located in different buildings.

> *'We are not really able to check the activities of all units which operate, say, under the social welfare legislation. If I wanted to control it as a mayor, I would need to establish another institution inside my office. There is an entity tasked with this, and it works. From time to time we run functional inspections but I cannot clearly say whether they perform all the tasks which the residents would expect them to.' (5).*

In the survey, LGU secretaries were asked about their opinions concerning different ways to streamline the work of their office. From among nine different categories, the largest number of

mentions was given to 'increasing staff's competencies' and 'increasing staff's salaries'. In rural municipalities, staffing shortages play a particularly important role.

However, when we juxtapose respondents' beliefs with their assessment of performance of their respective offices, they provide varied recipes to improve the 'health' of those offices. Essential issues concerning the working conditions (increasing salaries, increasing staff count), which could indicate that there is a shortage of funding to cover human resources (poorly paid and overloaded officials) were mentioned by those secretaries who rated the performance of their offices more positively! In other words, **in units which are perceived to perform smoothly (and which, presumably, are well managed) the only ways to improve the performance, as seen by secretaries, were related to pay rises or increased staff count** (and it is not clear if this is an actual reflection of the needs in those offices or simply a reflection of the secretaries' wishes).

On the other hand, and this is very important in the context of the leaders' opinions presented above, **the main need in offices which received lower ratings is to enhance management, improve interpersonal relations and develop staff's competencies**. Therefore, there is a risk that lack of well-defined management goals or lack of effective active management practices will reinforce the stagnation in poorly performing offices.

Of course, one can ask why these issues should be seen as important (i.e. management practices, enhanced potential of local administration, staff's motivation, staff's satisfaction with work, level of commitment etc.). The answer is probably both trivial and significant. **The quality of management (or at least the way it is viewed by the respondents) remains connected with the perception of the local quality of life.** Data indicate that the areas which are particularly important in this context are related to the quality of management and influences on local development. Of course, one must always bear in mind that we are speaking of patterns which emerge from opinions and beliefs expressed by LGU secretaries.

5.5. Appeal of employment and officials' motivation to work for LGUs

In the light of the research results, a question arises about the underlying causes of difficulties in the management of the aforementioned areas in local offices. At this point, we skip the systemic, social and managerial issues (which have been discussed earlier) and will draw readers' attention to the secretaries' assessment of local officials working for their respective entities. First and foremost, one should note that this assessment is generally very positive. All aspects of the assessment included in the survey questionnaire (except innovativeness in solving problems) were rated high in over 50% of the offices. In more than 80% of the entities, particularly favourable opinions were expressed about the quality of work performed by officials, their professional knowledge, quality of customer service and honesty in carrying out their job responsibilities.

Chart 10: Assessment of local officials on various aspects (accumulated 'very good' and 'good' responses)

Aspect	Value
honesty in executing their job responsibilities	92,6%
quality of customer service	92,2%
officials' knowledge related to their job responsibilities	84,3%
quality of work performed by officials	83,6%
efficacy in solving problems as they arise	68,7%
ability to work in a team	66,4%
officials' commitment and motivation to work	63,8%
degree of independence within job responsibilities	62,1%
motivation to improve their professional qualifications	53,1%
innovativeness in solving problems	40,6%

■ Total (n=1645)

The data presented in the chart above indicate that while the secretaries' assessment of the staff's performance is largely positive, **the poorest ratings were given to issues related to professional development: innovativeness, motivation to improve professional qualifications, degree of independence in executing job responsibilities as well as commitment and motivation**.

Secretaries perceive local government jobs as fairly attractive: on a scale from 1 to 9 (definitely unattractive vs. very attractive), the mean value was 6.58, with the median amounting to 7. While the data do not indicate any significant differentiation in the perception of attractiveness across different types of LGUs, one should nevertheless notice that the appeal of local government jobs was somewhat less likely to be appreciated in rural municipalities.

Chart 11: Perceived attractiveness of working for local government (LGU secretaries)

In your personal opinion, is a local government job ATTRACTIVE or UNATTRACTIVE in comparison with other available employment opportunities?

N=1648

Scale	Value
1 - definitely unattractive	0,1%
2	0,5%
3	2,2%
4	6,7%
5	14,0%
6	20,8%
7	26,8%
8	18,1%
9 - very attractive	10,7%
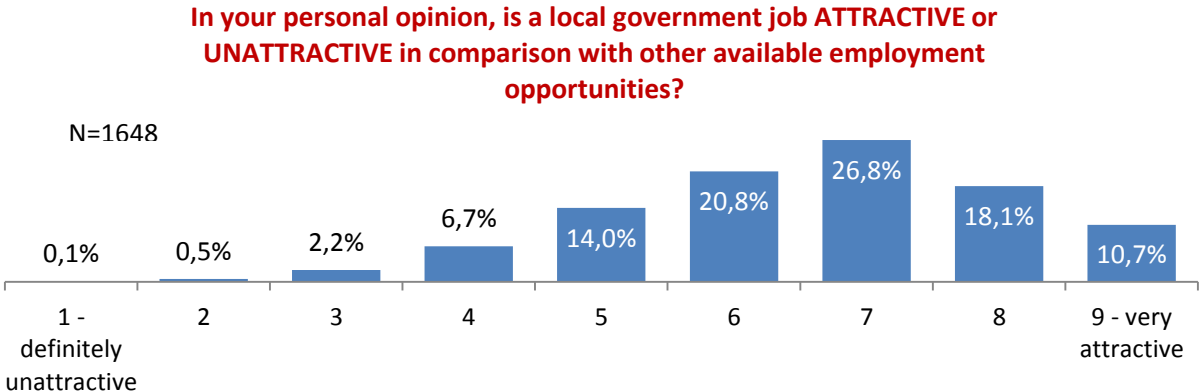
From the perspective of LGU secretaries, the main factors which determine the appeal of a local government job include 'job stability' and 'levels of salaries'. The respondents were less likely to mention aspects such as 'opportunities to improve one's competencies', 'proximity of work and place

of residence,'[21] 'employer's good reputation' or 'the possibility to reconcile work and private life'. Worth noting is that the respondents attached relatively lowest importance to aspects such as 'opportunities for attractive bonuses and pay rises', 'variety in tasks and responsibilities' or 'autonomy at work'.

Moreover, secretaries' responses indicate that the importance of factors which build the appeal of employment varies from one LGU type to another. In rural municipalities, more importance is attached to issues such as 'job stability' and 'proximity of work and place of residence' whereas in urban municipalities more attention is given to 'interesting challenges at work'.

The surveyed secretaries believe that the most important factors influencing officials' job satisfaction at their respective offices included, above all, issues related to working conditions: 'job stability', 'proximity of work and place of residence' and 'working time (working hours)'. Other issues play a secondary role.

Chart 12: Factors determining the appeal of a local government office as an employer – as seen by secretaries

Factor	Total (n=1631)
job stability	78,6%
proximity of workplace and place of residence	51,1%
working time, working hours	37,7%
attractive salary	25,6%
possibility to maintain a balance between career and private life	22,1%
opportunities to improve one's competencies	17,2%
employer's good reputation	10,7%
interesting challenges at work	9,5%
career and promotion opportunities	9,1%
opportunities for attractive bonuses and pay rises	5,3%
possibility to work with interesting people	4,5%
varied tasks and responsibilities	3,1%
autonomy at work	1,7%
not sure / don't know	1,2%
something else is important	0,6%

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[21] It is important to bear in mind that one third of the secretaries do not live in the municipalities where they work.

Data analysis has confirmed the opposition mentioned earlier, i.e. between officials' focus on satisfactory working conditions and the need to derive satisfaction with activities undertaken at work. While the latter perspective on local government jobs has a much stronger impact on job satisfaction, it is far less popular. **Regretfully, the dominant factors (related to employment conditions) do not enhance officials' satisfaction** (at least in the eyes of secretaries, perhaps being somewhat of a projection). Furthermore, we can assume that **for those staff members who attach importance to the observance of working hours and who are focused on striking a balance between career and private life (in whatever meaning), and who wish to get pay rises, a local government job is not particularly attractive.** Presumably, they treat it as any other job, without reflecting much on the nature of their responsibilities, not seeing them as a mission or a chance to do something for the good of the local community.

In the light of the aforementioned data, it may be somewhat surprising that local government leaders who took part in individual in-depth interviews were generally satisfied with the level of motivation demonstrated by their subordinates. *'My overall opinion is good,' (Mayor)*, *'Some people get really involved, others get less involved but things are generally OK,' (Voit)*. Only one critical voice was recorded: one respondent said that lack of satisfaction with the level of salaries may be causing staff's low commitment: *'I think it's too low, there is little, I have no particular bonuses to offer and this is what I'd like to focus on.' (Mayor)*.

It is difficult to say on which basis those occasional opinions are formed since most offices **have not implemented any systematic staff appraisal mechanisms**. Only one person said that in their office *'people are assessed once in two years, it's self-appraisal, and the direct supervisor, myself, I assess those managers. And staff members express their opinions in questionnaires, and they can also speak directly, but there is also the formal staff appraisal path.' (Mayor)*. The remaining respondents claimed they were satisfied with the indirect knowledge conveyed by the supervisors. Observations from interviews confirm the results of the survey: officials' satisfaction is studied very rarely and such practices are much less common in rural and rural-urban municipalities vis-a-vis towns and cities. For this very reason, the aforementioned results (secretaries' opinions about staff's satisfaction) should be viewed, above all, as a token of their beliefs rather than an account of systematic exploration.

When asked about the factors influencing on their subordinates' motivation and commitment, leaders mentioned mostly two elements, regardless of the size of their respective offices. Firstly, they spoke of the importance of **job stability and good working conditions**.

> *'A stable employer. A public office won't change its seat, won't go bankrupt, it will observe all labour law regulations; and the working hours are fairly predictable.' (Mayor).*

Stability should be understood not only as job security and compliance with Labour Code regulations but also as an opportunity to perform the same, repetitive tasks, without having to face new challenges. This factor sometimes plays a greater role than promotion opportunities or chances for a pay rise.

Leaders believe that the **salary** is another motivating factor for officials. One respondent referred to results of a survey conducted among officials and said that while officials were satisfied with their jobs, they complained about low salaries. Another one, without having such data, projected his own opinions onto his subordinates and said: *'if we asked our staff, they would say that everyone would like to earn more' (Voit)*. Similar opinions, in different variants, were repeated in other statements,

yet were always hedged with *'money, but not only money' (Mayor)*, as if the respondents viewed their staff's desire to earn more as an embarrassing thing.

The views on other motivating factors (apart from stability and money) are varied. Two respondents thought that **officials derived satisfaction from achieving their goals**.

> *'That the job makes sense, that it's needed, that it helps to achieve visible, tangible, concrete goals.' (Voit),*

Another respondent also stressed **the importance of mission and work ethos** of local government officials as an important motivating factor (while detaching this opinion from his own position).

> *'A local government office is a bit of a special institution and in most cases people just have to love that job, and they have it at the back of their head that this is a mission for other people. If they don't feel it, they would leave. You know, either their boss will sack them because they misbehave towards clients, or they will decide by themselves that their work makes no sense. Or they may be disqualified by the residents because residents do write complaints about wrong organisation so such a person has to be fired.' (Mayor)*

Leaders' beliefs are only partly reflected in representative data from surveys conducted with secretaries. Issues such as 'appreciation by the management' (also by the leader) or the salary received do, indeed, come high in the ranking of motivating factors. However, satisfaction with the achieved goals and a sense of doing a meaningful job came at the very end of the list (nearly 18% of mentions, and the respondents could choose any number of factors). As regards the categories presented to the secretaries, this could be largely associated with the sense of influence: 'a possibility to influence the reality'. The situation looks similar in the case of ethos-related motivations. The 'sense of mission of local government' was mentioned by merely 18.5% of the secretaries. In the context of the aforementioned 'glass ceiling problem' and some officials' reluctance to pursue a career, we should also point out that 'promotion opportunities' were mentioned by merely 34.7% of the secretaries among factors that motivate officials to work better.

Chart 13: Factors which build officials' motivation to be committed and work better – as seen by LGU secretaries

Factor	essential (major) motivating factors	important but not essential	fairly unimportant	difficult to say
remuneration-related conditions	75,4%	22,5%		
appreciation by the management of the office	59,5%	33,4%	3,4%	
good atmosphere at the office	52,1%	41,3%	4,6%	
financial and in-kind rewards and prizes	51,1%	39,7%	5,4%	
good collaboration within the office	50,2%	41,6%	5,1%	
good relations with supervisors	47,2%	43,9%	4,4%	
opportunities for growth and experience accumulation	40,0%	47,9%	8,0%	
leader's charisma, respect for the voit/mayor	36,7%	37,6%	14,3%	11,4%
career advancement prospects	34,7%	48,5%	11,6%	
superiors' interest in staff members	33,2%	43,1%	14,5%	9,2%
employer's positive reputation	23,1%	43,3%	20,2%	13,4%
sense of mission of local government	18,5%	31,1%	31,0%	19,3%
sense of influence - impact on reality	17,7%	32,4%	30,0%	19,9%
considerable freedom in performing tasks	11,1%	39,3%	29,4%	20,2%

The array of motivating methods applied in local government offices is not very broad. The **system of rewards and bonuses** is the key mechanism. **Financial rewards** are the prevalent method and, not surprisingly, they are also preferred by subordinates. Differentiation of salaries is a particular case of this mechanism.

> *'We are trying to depart from the policy of pay rises in a standardised and uniform way. Instead, pay rises means that we pay more in order to reward those people whose contribution, work commitment and competencies are higher.' (Mayor of a city)*

As one respondent pointed out, other types of rewards may include: *'appreciation, an interesting job, challenges, travel, training programmes' (Mayor of a city)*. However, he did not specify on which basis such rewards were offered. Another person was more concrete when he said: *'we give them opportunities, and bonuses to motivate them to improve their qualifications. We offer financial support for post-graduate training programmes.' (Mayor)*.
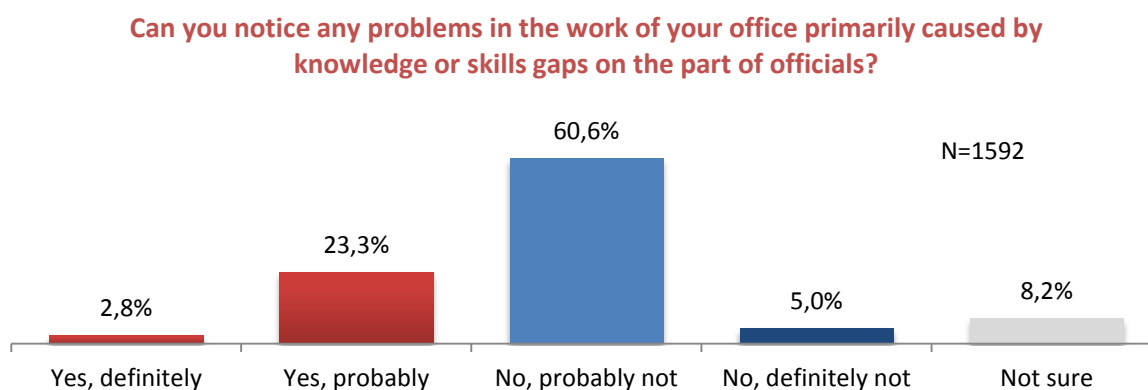
Survey data confirm information obtained from leaders: two key methods applied at local government offices to motivate staff include financial rewards and financial support for study programmes, courses and training events.

6. Training experience and postulates

Above all, one should stress that the **competences of officials were rated as fairly high, both by secretaries (survey data), and local government leaders (findings from in-depth interviews)**. As one mayor said (this statement can be seen as typical for other interviews): *'our staff don't really lack competencies.'* This is not a surprising finding. It is usually the leaders who decide whom to employ and they often start their term of office with replacing some personnel, especially at high-level posts. Incidentally, such practices (exchange of personnel as a result of a change in authorities) were met by some local government leaders with surprise and disapproval, exactly in the context of their opinions on competences.

> *'People have to work for a couple of years to become good officials. And I'm very surprised that people win elections and replace the staff. Those people don't even realise how much it takes to prepare another person to do the same work… Unless this was a bad worker, OK, I can understand that. But if it's a good official, this person is priceless. And this should be respected, those officials should keep their jobs because a lot depends on them.' (Voit)*

Chart 14: Assessment of officials' competencies

Can you notice any problems in the work of your office primarily caused by knowledge or skills gaps on the part of officials?

Yes, definitely	Yes, probably	No, probably not	No, definitely not	Not sure
2,8%	23,3%	60,6%	5,0%	8,2%

N=1592

6.1. Training experience and practices

The interviewed local government leaders unanimously admit that staff training is extremely important. Based on the results of the survey entitled 'The Summary of the 2010–2014 Term of Office', more than 89% of LGUs very frequently or fairly frequently send their staff to training events, and the data do not reveal any significant differences in this regard (frequency of participation) between various types of municipalities.

> *'Education, education, and education again. The most important thing is to equip people with specific competencies. (…) And those who received this offer, I mean, they went to university, took a post-graduate programme.' (Voit)*

How often do staff of your office take part in external training?

	LGU Leaders	LGU Secretaries
very often	19,3%	10,3%
quite often	69,9%	70,2%
quite rarely	7,9%	15,7%
very rarely	1,6%	2,1%
not sure	1,3%	1,6%
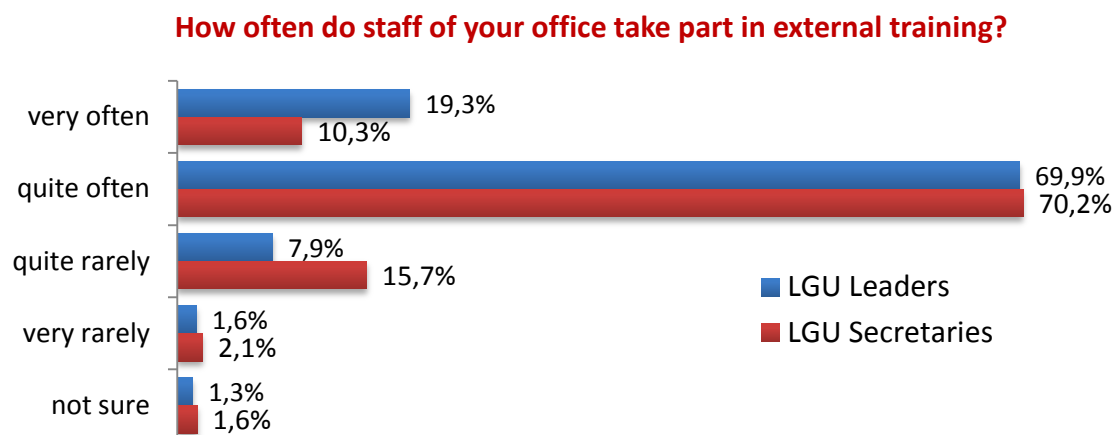
Much like before, when we compare opinions expressed by secretaries and leaders, we should emphasise that the data on the chart above come from two different, independent studies. The data reveal differences in beliefs between secretaries and local government leaders regarding their staff's frequency of participation in training events or programmes. On this basis, we can generally see that leaders are more optimistic in their responses. One statement expressed by a voit may be helpful in interpreting those differences. When asked about staff's participation in training, he wanted to refer the interviewer to the secretary and claimed that *'the secretary is the person responsible for the system of training.'*

Notably, the notions of 'very frequently' and 'fairly frequently' may be understood in various ways by the respondents. For this reason, in order to provide a reliable assessment of training practices, reference to other research data may be helpful. According to secretaries' declarations, representatives of 95.8% of LGU offices took part in various external training events and courses during the last year. Most of those were open, paid-for training programmes organised by external providers for staff of various public offices. The second position was taken by free-of-charge training organised under various projects. The latter were more commonly attended by officials from rural municipalities and those municipalities were also more likely to organise dedicated, closed training events intended for the staff of the office.

Therefore, one should conclude that regardless of some discrepancies in data provided by leaders and secretaries, **local government officials often take part in training**, even though some differentiation was recorded here. Training is more commonly undertaken by people working for town/city offices rather than rural municipalities, and it is mostly undertaken by officials from major local government units.

This information can be supplemented by data indicating that 56.3% of offices organised internal training events last year. Such training was usually organised by urban municipalities (74.6% of offices), and less frequently in rural-urban municipalities (63.2%), with the lowest percentage for rural municipalities (50.6%). Moreover, 83.9% of the secretaries declared that representatives of their offices participated in conferences devoted to local governance issues. Less popular were other forms of education and exchange of experience: meetings of occupational groups, clubs, forums (28% of mentions), distance learning (27.1%) as well as post-graduate programmes (26.3%).

It is difficult to identify a criterion that would help to assess the effectiveness of training among officials or the level of financial resources spent on staff training. On could take a benchmarking perspective and say, for instance, that expenses on staff training in the region of Podkarpacie are nearly twice as low as those in the Zachodniopomorskie voivodship. Another approach would be to say that only slightly above a quarter of the secretaries currently see problems in the work of their offices caused by insufficient competencies of staff whereas 56.5% of them claim that the amount of financing for staff training is adequate (34.1% think that needs are higher, with the largest percentages in Warmińsko-Mazurskie, Lubuskie and Łódzkie voivodships). However, one can also directly source leaders' opinions. When asked about the effectiveness of training, they are often confused, which indicates that this is something they have not thought about earlier! One respondent, trying to get himself out of this question, said vaguely:

> *'Inspections which come, they check the implementation of various things, very varied areas, and they give an answer to the question on whether the training brings any results or not. And whenever there are any serious comments, we can see that the staff member is well-versed with things. And we analyse it in this way: we sit down and analyse it, and there is a post-inspection report, and here we go, he took that training, and this must have been discussed at that training, and he either complied or didn't comply. Or, things have changed here, indeed, we haven't noticed that, our staff didn't attend the training from this field and we can see some gaps.' (Voit).*
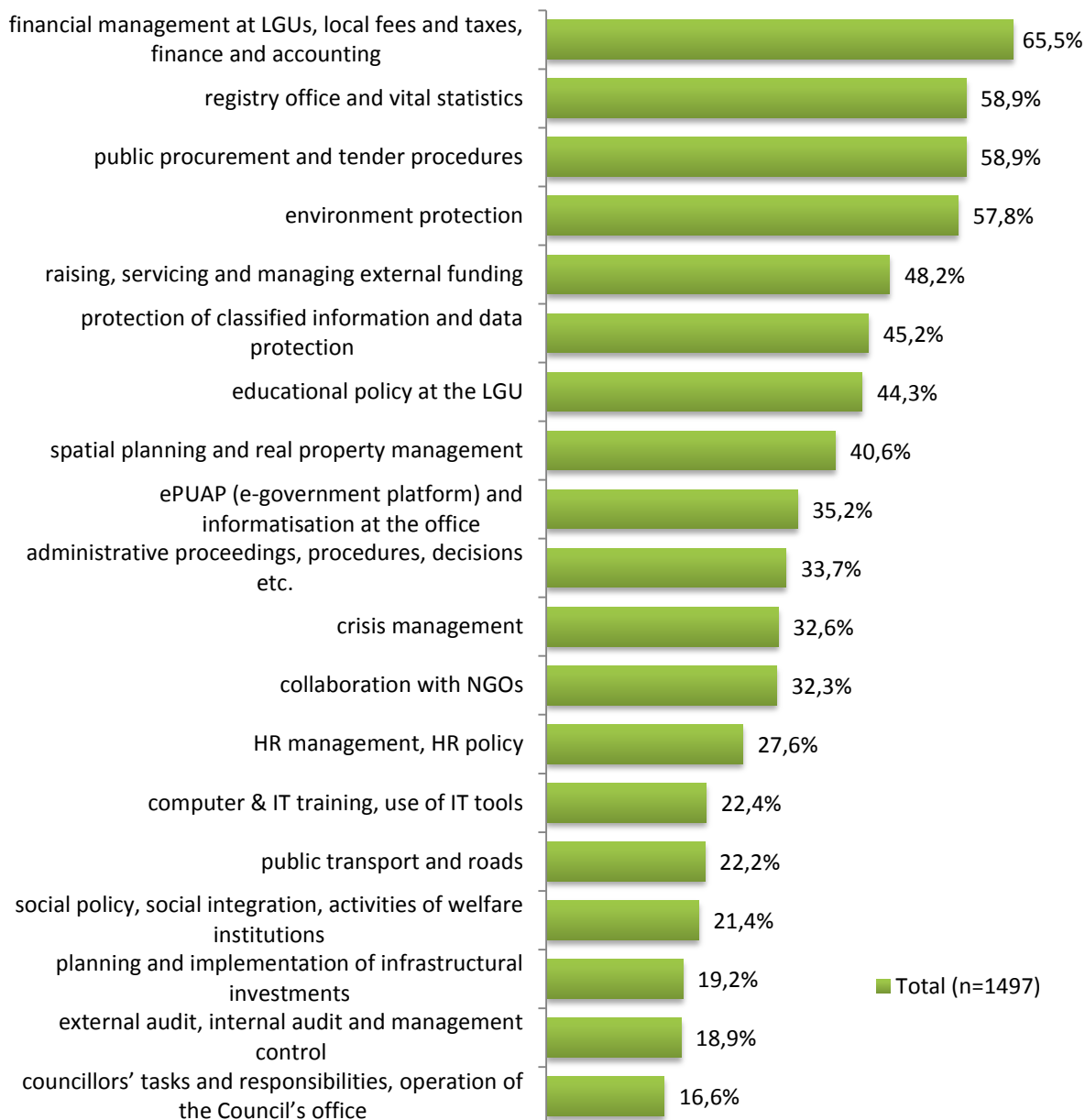
As a rule, the respondents assume good faith among their subordinates. From the sheer fact that staff members decide to undergo training, the respondents conclude that the staff want to gain knowledge and use it in practice. Therefore, the respondents often do not see any need to monitor the efficacy of training. Considering that there are no widespread practices focused on exploring training needs of the staff (less than a half of offices declare having such practices, and mostly in the form of face-to-face conversations with subordinates), we can assume that most LGUs have not developed any consistent and coherent approach to developing competences of their clerical staff. While 54.6% of the secretaries declare that officials in their respective units are formally obligated to improve their qualifications, the most common foundation for this obligation is the Act on Local Government Personnel (which applies to all officials, not only those employed in the 65% of offices whose representatives mentioned this legal basis). **If we disregard the legislators' requirement invoked by the respondents, it will turn out that the obligation for the staff to undergo training (in any format) exists only in 18.3% of local government offices!** In other offices, people either decide that these matters are regulated by the law, or accept the absence of formal requirements in this respect. Of course, this does not mean that LGUs do not train their staff. However, this means that in the vast majority of cases those practices are not regulated or planned in any way.

Regardless of the absence of internal regulations, leaders believe that local government officials are willing to take part in training, albeit the degree of willingness might vary: *'Young people are happy to travel to train, older folks are less willing.' (Voit)*. The respondents also declare that their subordinates usually proactively report the kinds of training they would like to take part in.

> *'They want to learn more, they do, most of our staff are young, and most are women and many of those women have children; they are usually very good workers, many of them have more than one child, sometimes more than two, and this doesn't interfere with their work.' (Mayor).*

The chart below presents the most popular training topics for offices in 2015 (as mentioned by LGU secretaries). This summary clearly shows that the prevailing types of training are those which help officials fill their knowledge gaps on an ad hoc basis, as needed in their everyday work for local administration.

Chart 16: Topics of training undertaken by officials in the course of last year (as mentioned by secretaries, categories over 10%)

Topic	Total (n=1497)
financial management at LGUs, local fees and taxes, finance and accounting	65,5%
registry office and vital statistics	58,9%
public procurement and tender procedures	58,9%
environment protection	57,8%
raising, servicing and managing external funding	48,2%
protection of classified information and data protection	45,2%
educational policy at the LGU	44,3%
spatial planning and real property management	40,6%
ePUAP (e-government platform) and informatisation at the office	35,2%
administrative proceedings, procedures, decisions etc.	33,7%
crisis management	32,6%
collaboration with NGOs	32,3%
HR management, HR policy	27,6%
computer & IT training, use of IT tools	22,4%
public transport and roads	22,2%
social policy, social integration, activities of welfare institutions	21,4%
planning and implementation of infrastructural investments	19,2%
external audit, internal audit and management control	18,9%
councillors' tasks and responsibilities, operation of the Council's office	16,6%

The attitude towards training is reflected in how offices select the staff members to take part in such events. Councillors get training to a very limited extent: in 53.8% of offices no training was financed at all for members of the council in 2015 and further 23.6% reported only one such case. Merely 16.2% of the secretaries confirmed relatively frequent participation in training in the case of councillors. Presumably, apart from legal and formal obstacles related to cost settlements for such training, this approach may stem from a specific perception of training and its usefulness: since

councillors are not responsible for any specific tasks, it is thought that there is no need to train them. For this reason, mostly rank-and-file staff members are trained: low-level officials and, less frequently, heads of organisational units. This results from the belief that since they perform everyday administrative activities, prepare decisions, serve customers, develop draft documents etc., then they should be the ones to have a good grasp of current legislation and regulations and should be able to get that knowledge.

Chart 17: Training participants at LGUs

How often fo the following take part in external training (usually):
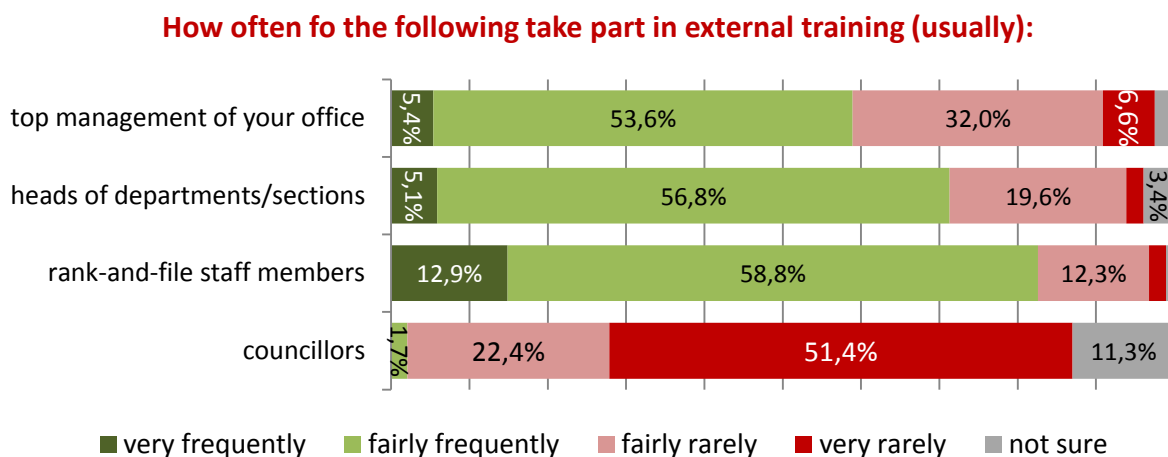
After many years of experience, leaders have a firm opinion on various educational activities targeted at officials and they have ways of selecting them. Since sending an employee to training entails costs and organisational problems, almost all such decisions are taken with care. Importantly, leaders believe that costs are not the decisive factor here: *'We are generous when it comes to spending money on training. But we select companies which really do good training, not ones that just kill the time' (Mayor)*.

The respondents' comments indicate that a few factors should play a decisive role when selecting training offers. They include:

– **Reputation of the trainer** – it is best to have a trainer who has proven to be good, who is recommended by other officials or whose training was attended earlier. The most important strengths of a trainer include specialist knowledge, awareness of local singularities and the training methods applied.

> *'We analyse people who are going to conduct the training. Of course, it's a sectoral analysis. Not just 'let's get some training'. Instead, we analyse it for the sector, and, let's face it, we select people we've had positive experience with.' (Voit)*

– **Reputation of the organiser** – the respondents claimed they were happy to use recognised institutions or offers from **industry organisations**, which have two advantages: they are reliable and cheaper.

> *'I must tell you that my staff have become really picky, I mean, they won't go to just any training, they check who organises it, they check the organiser, they check the lecturer.' (Voit)*

> – **Costs of training,** with quality guaranteed – offers from local government institutions and organisations enjoy popularity since they are credible and cheaper.

> *'We look for cheaper ones, which doesn't mean they're worse; and we use things that are organised at the poviat or voivodship level, from specific ministries and from local government organisations. Associations of municipalities, of poviats, of towns, they carry out various programmes and their training is often free of charge, and our staff use it very often.' (Voit)*

> – **Location of training** – the respondents claimed they preferred training at locations which are not very far from their respective offices.

> *'I really don't like to travel far when it comes to training.' (Voit)*

> *'They want to get trained, but few people would like to travel far so we try to organise things close by.' (Mayor)*

Survey data allow us to assess the importance of various factors which determine the choice of training from a broader perspective. Those data indicate that there is an essential issue which is perhaps skipped by leaders as obvious, i.e. that the topics should be relevant for the current needs of the offices. The aforementioned factors mentioned by heads of LGUs come towards the end of the hierarchy. Partly, this means that **leaders' wishes do not fully overlap with reality: they want substantive training for their staff, conducted by excellent experts, organised by reliable and recognised entities, yet the 'prose of life' means that much more importance has to be given to factors such as costs of training and current challenges faced by their offices.**

In the course of the interviews local government leaders were asked to assess their previous experience with training and to reflect on the most common advantages and disadvantages of educational activities in which officials take part.

The main problem experienced by the respondents concerned low quality of training. The reason was thought to lie, primarily, in the principles of EU funds allocation under the Human Capital Operational Programme where offers were selected mostly on the basis of the lowest price.

> *'The problem of the lowest price, or the price and selection of the training company, and the beneficiary had really no influence on that selection, and the quality of training might really be quite varied.' (Voit)*

> *'There was a rush and there were plenty of EU funds, plenty of free training offers, and once after thirty minutes I was asked what I was doing here. That happens, too.' (Mayor).*

The respondents gave examples of training conducted in attractive locations. Proverbially, Zakopane, Poland's most famous mountain resort, was mentioned here, with a focus on tourist attractions, leisure and good food. However, the respondents often added that *'there might be fewer of those things now, times have changed now' (Mayor).*

Another reason behind poor quality of training is connected with unprepared or incompetent trainers, often resorting to fraudulent practices and offering very low quality in their training.

> *'A guy would come just to collect cash from the clients and read out the text of the law, and that kind of training makes no sense whatsoever.' (Mayor)*

Long-lasting or non-residential training events often give rise to serious problems in day-to-day operations of local government offices: *'When you need to send a staff member to training, someone has to substitute for her, and if she is the only specialist, well, you need to suspend it so there is something missing because of her absence' (Mayor)*. Non-residential training also gives rise to numerous problems in officials' private life.

> *'What often happens that it's quite problematic. You are absent from work and, moreover, you need to leave home. That's not simple or obvious for many adults. Some has to pick up the kids from school, cook dinner, make breakfast or run errands. Unfortunately, going away on training ruins those situations in many ways.' (Mayor of a city)*

Therefore, it is not surprising that, from the perspective of decision-makers, **an ideal training event is organised within their office during working hours, for a group of officials, facilitated by a proven, experienced expert in a selected area of competence, who refers to specific practical examples from the life of local offices** (as a reminder, in 2015, such training events were organised at 56.3% LGUs).
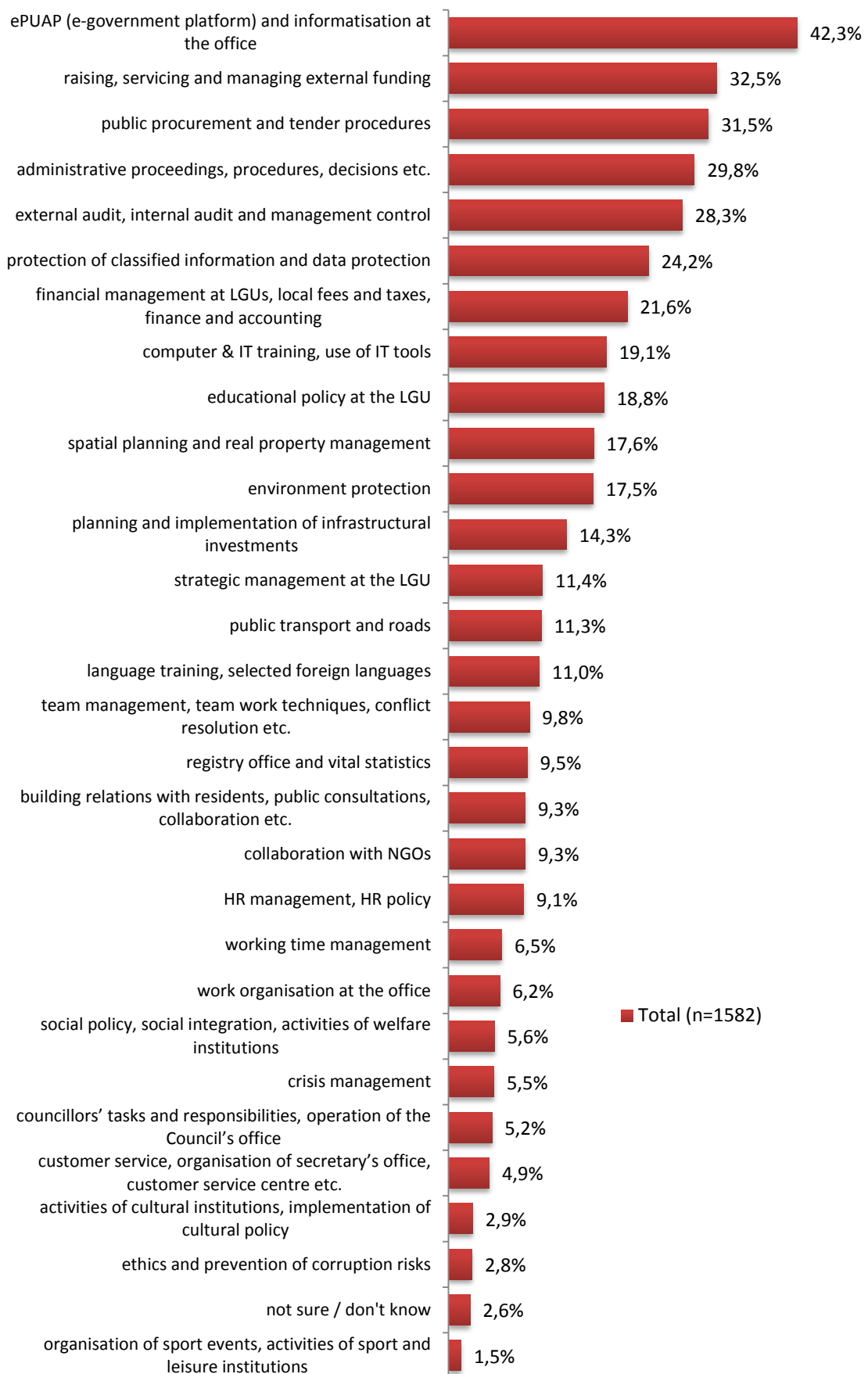
6.2. Training postulates and needs

Local government leaders usually had no precise knowledge of the kinds of competencies that were missing among their subordinates. Consequently, they found it hard to determine the concrete types of training that could be useful in their particular situation. When asked about the knowledge officials needed, the respondents usually gave fairly general answers, referring to the specific nature of particular departments, individual needs of staff or recent changes in legislation.

> *'Each department would have a different thing, when we have a public procurement department or architecture department, each speaks of completely different things. And if you go to the environment department, you will be speaking about other regulations. You know, we cannot say those are these sections or those sections.' (Voit)*

Also the secretaries were asked to assess the training needs. In many cases, secretaries directly supervise the work of specific organisational units and have the best awareness of knowledge gaps or skills gaps among the personnel. Their comments were used to develop a list of training postulates or expectations. What came as a strong winner on the list was the training related to implementation of e-government, followed by issues related to external funding (particularly EU funds), and, thirdly, public procurement and tender procedures. When we analyse the distribution of the respondents' answers presented on the following graph, we should also point out to the least mentioned items: organisation of sporting events, activity of sport and leisure institutions, ethics and prevention of the corruption risks, as well as activities of cultural institutions and implementation of cultural policies. In other words, what we find at the top of the hierarchy are matters related to day-to-day operations of the offices and their administrative responsibilities whereas local development policies come towards the bottom.

Chart 18: Training postulates – training needed for staff of local government offices (as seen by LGU secretaries)

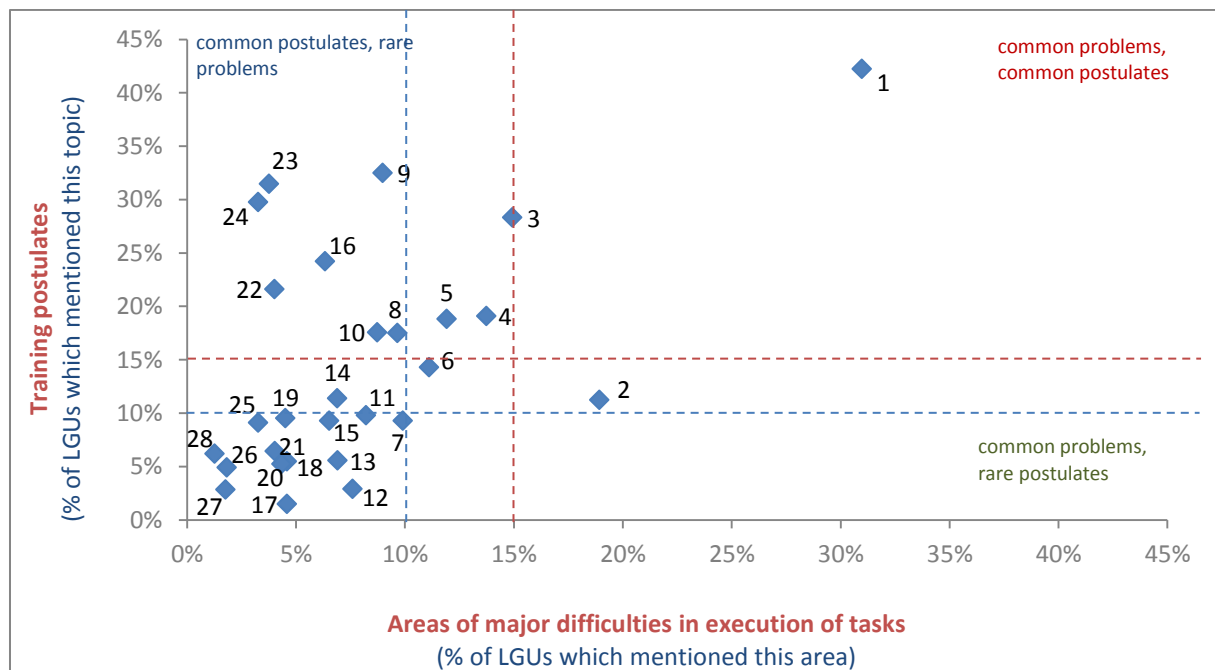| Training topic	Percentage
ePUAP (e-government platform) and informatisation at the office	42,3%
raising, servicing and managing external funding	32,5%
public procurement and tender procedures	31,5%
administrative proceedings, procedures, decisions etc.	29,8%
external audit, internal audit and management control	28,3%
protection of classified information and data protection	24,2%
financial management at LGUs, local fees and taxes, finance and accounting	21,6%
computer & IT training, use of IT tools	19,1%
educational policy at the LGU	18,8%
spatial planning and real property management	17,6%
environment protection	17,5%
planning and implementation of infrastructural investments	14,3%
strategic management at the LGU	11,4%
public transport and roads	11,3%
language training, selected foreign languages	11,0%
team management, team work techniques, conflict resolution etc.	9,8%
registry office and vital statistics	9,5%
building relations with residents, public consultations, collaboration etc.	9,3%
collaboration with NGOs	9,3%
HR management, HR policy	9,1%
working time management	6,5%
work organisation at the office	6,2%
social policy, social integration, activities of welfare institutions	5,6%
crisis management	5,5%
councillors' tasks and responsibilities, operation of the Council's office	5,2%
customer service, organisation of secretary's office, customer service centre etc.	4,9%
activities of cultural institutions, implementation of cultural policy	2,9%
ethics and prevention of corruption risks	2,8%
not sure / don't know	2,6%
organisation of sport events, activities of sport and leisure institutions	1,5%

■ Total (n=1582)

To some extent, the selection of training topics presented on the graph above might seem surprising. The topics which were mentioned quite often corresponded with those spheres of operation which, according to secretaries' declarations, were not a source of problems in day-to-day operations. A question arises then: how should we understand those responses?

It is important to bear in mind that the diagnosis of training needs should help to identify the discrepancies between the current knowledge of potential training participants and the knowledge which is required or desirable for some reason. It turns out that in many cases training expectations and postulates presented by potential training participants deviate from the actual needs. This happens for many reasons, such as lack of awareness that competencies are insufficient, erroneous identification of problem causes, or a stereotypical approach adopted when selecting training topics. Therefore, what is needed for the identification of training needs is the exploration of the causes of problems and identification of those which can be addressed by gaining new knowledge or developing skills. Those should be distinguished from areas which call for other actions or specific modifications. It is also worth remembering that uncritical acceptance of postulates might expose a local government office to unnecessary burdens (financial and organisational) or even lead to unfavourable consequences (when actually required knowledge is not gained).

In relation to the aforementioned comments, the training postulates mentioned by the secretaries were verified in contrast with the problem areas declared as existing in local government offices. Of course, this exercise is not sufficient for an actual needs diagnosis. After all, there are also other factors which influence the operation of offices, such as systemic factors (discussed in the first part of this document), or management practices employed by leaders. However, we cannot neglect the fact that the causes of at least some problems are connected with lack of competencies among the staff of offices represented by the secretaries.

Chart 19: Areas of major difficulties in fulfilling tasks, versus perceived training needs of staff (as mentioned by secretaries)

1 - ePUAP (e-government platform) and informatisation at the office
2 - public transport and roads
3 - external audit, internal audit and management control
4 - computer & IT training, use of IT tools
5 - educational policy at the LGU
6 - planning and implementation of infrastructural investments
7 - building relations with residents, public consultations, collaboration etc.
8 - environment protection
9 - raising, servicing and managing external funding
10 - spatial planning and real property management
11 - team management, team work techniques, conflict resolution etc.
12 - activities of cultural institutions, implementation of cultural policy
13 - social policy, social integration, activities of welfare institutions
14 - strategic management at the LGU
15 - collaboration with NGOs
16 - protection of classified information and data protection
17 - organisation of sport events, activities of sport and leisure institutions
18 - crisis management
19 - registry office and vital statistics
20 - councillors' tasks and responsibilities, operation of the Council's office
21 - working time management
22 - financial management at LGUs, local fees and taxes, finance and accounting
23 - public procurement and tender procedures
24 - administrative proceedings, procedures, decisions etc.
25 - HR management, HR policy
26 - customer service, organisation of secretary's office, customer service centre etc.
27 - ethics and prevention of corruption risks
28 - work organisation at the office

Data analysis has shown that the most important training needs of staff of local government offices (at least in relation to the problems faced by LGUs) relate to areas such as: e-government, public transport and road management, external and internal audit, management control. Secondly, we should mention training related to computer skills and the use of IT tools, education policy at LGUs as well as planning and implementation of infrastructural investments. There is also a group of topics which were often mentioned but are not connected with problems affecting local government offices. Of course, this does not mean that such training postulates voiced by secretaries should be neglected: after all, they reflect the potential intention to train staff in those areas. It is worth remembering, however, that the usability of such training at LGUs is not necessarily very high.

Overlap between problem areas identified in day-to-day operations and training postulates (correlations between responses)

protection of classified information and data protection	0.242
external audit, internal audit and management control	0.242
ePUAP (e-government platform) and informatisation at the office	0.221
computer & IT training, use of IT tools	0.205
councillors' tasks and responsibilities, operation of the Council's office	0.197
working time management	0.195
public procurement and tender procedures	0.189
educational policy at the LGU	0.185
administrative proceedings, procedures, decisions etc.	0.182
spatial planning and real property management	0.172
registry office and vital statistics	0.170
crisis management	0.161
raising, servicing and managing external funding	0.157
ethics and prevention of corruption risks	0.155
collaboration with NGOs	0.146
environment protection	0.146
activities of cultural institutions, implementation of cultural policy	0.144
social policy, social integration, activities of welfare institutions	0.143
team management, team work techniques, conflict resolution etc.	0.141
building relations with residents, public consultations, collaboration etc.	0.138
work organisation at the office	0.138
strategic management at the LGU	0.136
customer service, organisation of secretary's office, customer service centre etc.	0.133
planning and implementation of infrastructural investments	0.132
financial management at LGUs, local fees and taxes, finance and accounting	0.119
public transport and roads	0.116
organisation of sport events, activities of sport and leisure institutions	0.111
HR management, HR policy	0.094

Again, we should emphasise that the list provided above only results from a juxtaposition of declared problems in the operation of local government offices and training postulates voiced. The list does not cover other factors which influence the operation of offices, such as locally adopted strategic development priorities, the regional context, the nature of the locality, or economic, social and systemic constraints.

With regard to training postulates mentioned, there are some interesting variations depending on the type of LGUs. The data indicate that **towns and cities need somewhat different kinds of training**

support than rural municipalities. Secretaries of urban LGUs were more likely to mention such training areas as e-government, computer skills and IT, strategic management, human team management, HR policy, public consultations and outreach activities (building relations with residents). In turn, smaller LGUs were focused on areas related to raising EU funds, data protection and environment protection. This may reflect the different perspectives on the role of local administration and the challenges faced by it. Rural municipalities, which spend less on training their staff (which is why their staff are less likely to participate in training), pay most attention to day-to-day administration, whereas urban offices attach more importance to education of a more strategic profile.

In rural municipalities, the priorities in training needs include: implementation of e-government, management of public transport and road infrastructure and matters related to external/internal audit and management control. Topics which are slightly less significant but nevertheless important include: computer skills, information technologies at the office, educational policy at the LGU, planning and implementation of infrastructural investments, environment protection as well as raising and processing external funding. This summary reflects the primacy of administrative topics related to day-to-day management of local government units.

Secretaries from urban-rural units mentioned areas which are very similar to those listed by rural municipalities. However, notable is a slight increase in the importance of outreach activities and public consultations.
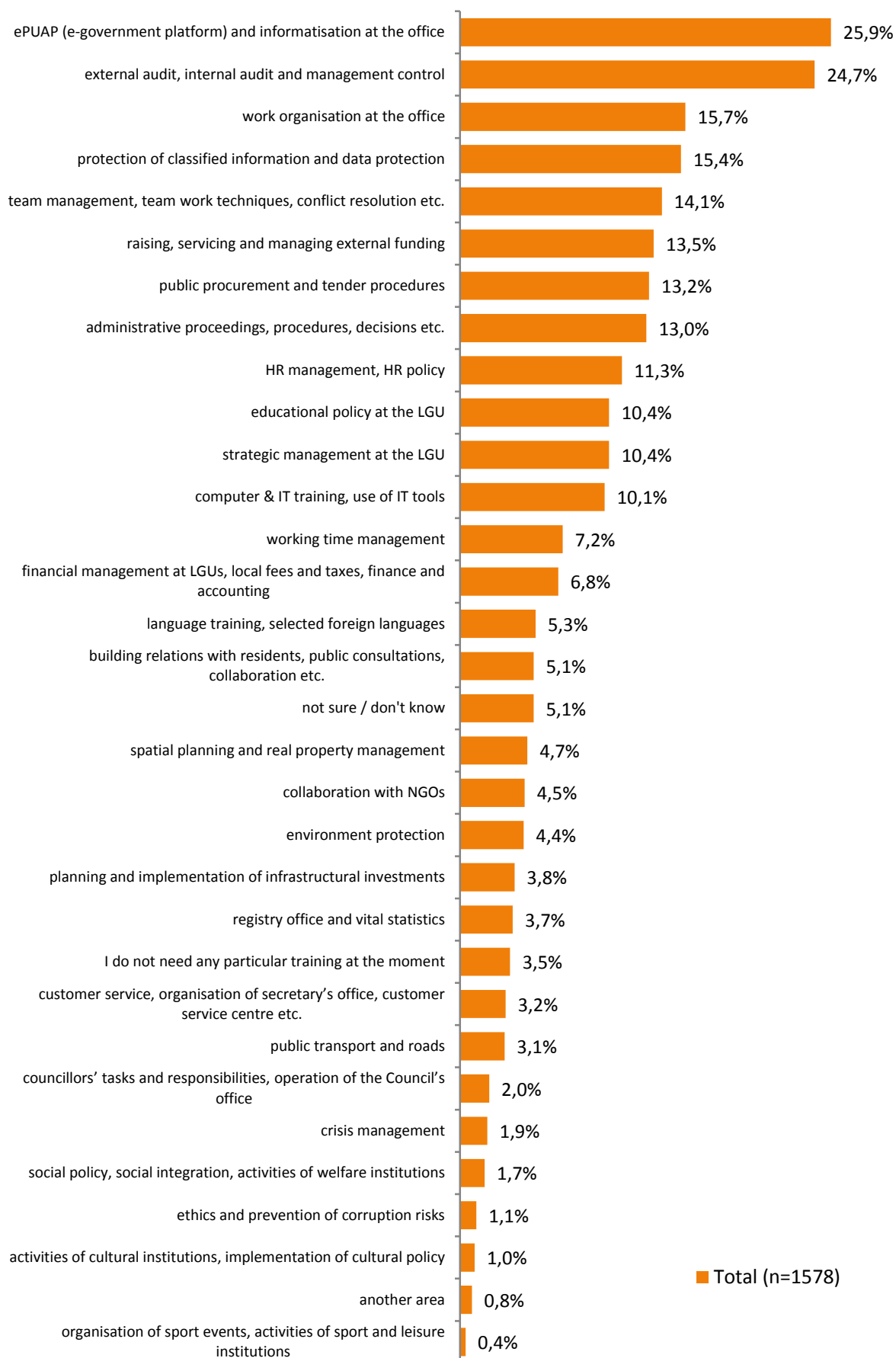
The key training needs in urban municipalities (as declared by their secretaries) are close to the primary answers given by other types of LGUs. However, there is a significant increase in the importance of topics such as: human team management and working time management.

Secretaries of LGUs were also asked about the most important personal preferences in training. In other words, they were asked to identify training which would help them become more efficient in performing their responsibilities. The declarations obtained from this question are given on the next graph. It is easy to notice that the overall percentages of mentions are lower versus questions about staff's training needs. This is partly because secretaries were asked to select only three main categories. However, some priorities are similar to training needs of staff. What tops the list is e-government, external/internal audit and management control. Other leading topics are related to the organisation of work at LGUs (i.e. the actual area of responsibility for secretaries) and management of human teams.

What should be seen as a source of concern is the fact that implementation of public policies, ethics and prevention of corruption risks are not of interest for the interviewed secretaries. The latter were mentioned by some leaders, yet it is important to bear in mind that leaders are rarely involved in their staff's training, usually delegating those matters to secretaries.

> *'There should be some ethics, too. A bit of work ethos, again…, or perhaps for the first time for them. Sensitising them. You know, you need to remind them to treat people like clients, not like supplicants, they are our clients, the residents are. They should be treated like normal people, like partners, you know. Without the bumpkin-like attitude which you sometimes see.'*
> *(Mayor of a city)*

Chart 20: Training preferences reported by LGU secretaries

Training area	Total (n=1578)
ePUAP (e-government platform) and informatisation at the office	25,9%
external audit, internal audit and management control	24,7%
work organisation at the office	15,7%
protection of classified information and data protection	15,4%
team management, team work techniques, conflict resolution etc.	14,1%
raising, servicing and managing external funding	13,5%
public procurement and tender procedures	13,2%
administrative proceedings, procedures, decisions etc.	13,0%
HR management, HR policy	11,3%
educational policy at the LGU	10,4%
strategic management at the LGU	10,4%
computer & IT training, use of IT tools	10,1%
working time management	7,2%
financial management at LGUs, local fees and taxes, finance and accounting	6,8%
language training, selected foreign languages	5,3%
building relations with residents, public consultations, collaboration etc.	5,1%
not sure / don't know	5,1%
spatial planning and real property management	4,7%
collaboration with NGOs	4,5%
environment protection	4,4%
planning and implementation of infrastructural investments	3,8%
registry office and vital statistics	3,7%
I do not need any particular training at the moment	3,5%
customer service, organisation of secretary's office, customer service centre etc.	3,2%
public transport and roads	3,1%
councillors' tasks and responsibilities, operation of the Council's office	2,0%
crisis management	1,9%
social policy, social integration, activities of welfare institutions	1,7%
ethics and prevention of corruption risks	1,1%
activities of cultural institutions, implementation of cultural policy	1,0%
another area	0,8%
organisation of sport events, activities of sport and leisure institutions	0,4%

Finally, it is worth noting that the exploration of training needs at local government offices does not seem to be viewed as a priority. The data show that there is generally lack of reflection over the challenges related to the development of local government personnel. Many offices are reactive in this respect: they provide new knowledge mostly in areas which come to the fore as a result of changing legal regulations. There is little long-term, strategic thinking about developing local government offices as institutions which are not only supposed to administer public tasks but also create growth. Only in a handful of cases proper attention is given to the creation of creative, responsible, conscious and, yes, ethos-based local government organisation.

7. Summary – challenges to the development of local administration

Summing up, it is a good idea to go back to some comments made at the beginning of this report, where it was said that the diagnosis of training needs of local government personnel should always be included as part of an overall analysis of the situation in the national public administration sector and it should be accompanied by a summary description of the legal and institutional framework in which the local administration operates. As mentioned earlier, the regulations of the European Charter of Local Self-Government should be the main point of reference since they represent a constitutive element of a decentralised country. Therefore, it is a good idea to look at the provisions of the Charter in the context of the research findings presented in this document.

'Local self-government denotes the right and the ability of local authorities, within the limits of the law, to regulate and manage a substantial share of public affairs under their own responsibility and in the interests of the local population.' (Article 3.1)

The article quoted above mentions the right of communities to manage their local affairs and the ability to exercise this right. The article also refers to a substantial share of such tasks. The research findings indicate that the portion of affairs left for communities to manage has been increasingly constrained. The respondents commonly mentioned the progressing re-centralisation of tasks, limitation of competencies of local authorities in various areas (primarily in education and social policy but also in organisational freedom of local government, issues related to investment procedures, tender procedures, rules of staff's remuneration etc.).

At this point, it is a good idea to invoke the pivotal principle of the European Charter of Local Self-Government, i.e. subsidiarity. The fairly fragmented system of local administration in Poland, and the operations of central authorities and institutions, have effectively undermined this principle for many years. When competencies are taken away from local authorities in areas of crucial importance for local development (e.g. the aforementioned freedom in shaping some public policies) and, in consequence, local government has limited possibilities to take action to influence the life of local communities, this cannot facilitate the development of an effective local governance system. Poviats, which are historically grounded in Poland's reality and which should be part of the model of a subsidiarity-based state, have become impotent. They have been deprived of tasks and resources they could use to support local development. This is coupled with the unobvious and often counter-productive relations between municipality- and poviat-level authorities.

What should be seen as at least partly problematic is the capability to manage local affairs. First and foremost, attention should be drawn to the fact that communities have a relatively low level of willingness to assume co-responsibility for local development. Based on various data we can conclude that the situation has been gradually improving, that communities have been learning about self-governance, expanding their spheres of activity and sense of influence. Nevertheless, if we invoke the consistently low turnout at the elections, little interest in participation in local activities, and lack of willingness to get actively involved in meeting social needs at the local level, we cannot really speak of actual co-decision practices when it comes to the life of municipalities.

As regards abilities, we should also reflect on the conclusions from the research presented in this document with regard to the professionalization of local administration. While participation in training is common, it is driven by low quality of legislation and frequent amendments to existing regulations. We cannot speak of conscious practices aimed at shaping the competencies of local government personnel or developing officials' awareness of self-governance. Rather, the observed phenomena should be described in terms of reinforcing administrative efficiency rather than building the ability to shape local development.

What is lacking in local government is the reflection on the consequences of changes implemented and projects undertaken. The challenges related to spending EU funding which, in themselves, represent an enormous development opportunity for Poland as a country and for its local governments ('small homelands') have, in many cases, overshadowed the overarching goal of all investments, i.e. the improvement of the quality of life in local communities rather than just living standards. It is important to bear in mind that once the basis existential needs of residents are satisfied, this will inevitably lead to the emergence of higher-order needs, such as personal growth, satisfaction with life, possibilities to pursue passions and interests, education etc. If those needs cannot be satisfied, citizens would be inclined to emigrate, either to larger urban centres or further away.

'Where powers are delegated to them by a central or regional authority, local authorities shall, insofar as possible, be allowed discretion in adapting their exercise to local conditions .' (Article 4.5)

This article opens up a never-ending debate about the so-called 'commissioned tasks', handed over to local governments which are expected to execute actions programmed by the central government or its agenda. Many issues in the field of operation of local administration are regulated on a top-down basis. The respondents speak of overregulation. In many cases, legislation gives local authorities no room for discretion or decision-making. And this gives rise to numerous problems.

Firstly, there are many areas where local authorities have no possibility to take action which would enable them to influence development in a planned manner, with due consideration for local conditions. Many tasks performed by local governments remain in a tight corset of legislation, ordinances, rules, indicators etc., which are beyond the influence of local authorities. In many fields, local government plays the role of a local intermediary in pursuing goals set by central agencies.

Secondly, the absence of local power in key areas of local administration does not enhance self-governance. Citizens hardly have a good grasp of the applicable laws and regulations, and are rarely aware of the legal foundations of local decisions (including unfavourable decisions in matters personally concerning those citizens). Not surprisingly, citizens take their dissatisfaction directly to institutions which perform administrative functions. As a result of overregulation, local government

is separated from decision-making functions in cases which should involve local needs and development conditions, and this certainly is not conducive to public confidence in local government.

Thirdly, there are many cases where local government has no discretion in defining how its tasks are to be performed. It is the official at the ministry level who decides on the organisation of administration responsible locally for processing matters delegated by central institutions. Considering the social, cultural, historical, economic or environmental singularities of local units, this kind of attitude is far from being efficient. Instead, it reflects central government's considerable mistrust towards local government. The research conducted to date clearly demonstrates that the policies pursued by central bodies lack consistency, coherence and sensible long-term planning. The range of tasks delegated to local administration usually does not result from carefully designed reform programmes. Instead, it is a result of ad hoc decisions adopted by decision-makers at different levels of central government. When seen in aggregate, those incremental changes represent considerable barriers which hinder local development.

For the record, we should also state that the local reflection on the organisational solutions adopted in local government or on ways to manage administration does not seem to be very advanced. This is partly due to systemic constraints and, presumably, also due to attitudes represented by a considerable group of local government leaders. In many a case, investment activities seem to overshadow problems arising from routine-based operations of the local offices, insufficient reflection on social needs or lack of innovation in shaping local development. At this point, it is a good idea to recall one conclusion from the present research: more than a half of LGUs do not apply any tools for self-assessment of their operations. Even if some respondents do realise those constraints, the implementation of corrective measures is often postponed 'until a better moment', presumably the moment when all investments have been completed. This is in line with a statement made by one voit (and quoted above), who would like to *'regroup the local office in a different way (…). But when the moment comes to do some work, I leave it aside for the time being (…). I have a vision and I think we will reach that vision sooner or later.'*

'Local authorities shall be entitled, within national economic policy, to adequate financial resources of their own, of which they may dispose freely within the framework of their powers.' (Article 9.1); 'Local authorities' financial resources shall be commensurate with the responsibilities provided for by the constitution and the law.' (Article 9.2)

Poland owes its recent degree of development largely to the activity of local government units. It is the local public authorities which were responsible for most infrastructural investments implemented in Poland for many years. However, local development is costly. This has been experienced by proactive local governments which boldly reached for EU finding. As a result, their financial burden related to the debt servicing is beginning to seriously constrain their capabilities. The results of analysis conducted by the Association of Polish Towns and Cities (ZMP) indicate that the funding available to local governments in the near future (e.g. for investments of implementation of measures to address local needs) will be increasingly limited. 'As many as 20–30% LGUs from all

categories (…) forecast that their disposable operating surplus for 2016–2019 (i.e. after repaying debt instalments) will be under 1%, which forces them to make really rigorous plans.'[22]

Decisions made at the central level have a serious effect on the financial standing of LGUs. As noticed by Andrzej Porawski, the Director of the ZMP Office, 'faulty legislation, which we have combated for many years, has upset our financial balance. The parliament imposes a large number of mandatory tasks onto local governments, and their implementation requires ever greater financial outlays. At the same time, the parliament reduces local governments' own revenues through its political decisions. At the moment, municipal budgets do not have enough money to go ahead with investments but, worse still, to finance ongoing tasks related to support for residents.'[23] Similar opinions were expressed by local leaders invited to take part in the research.

On the other hand, it is worth pointing to the locally adopted goals and decisions to allocate funds which are at the disposal of local governments. LGUs mention infrastructural investments as a priority which, for obvious reasons, calls for considerable expenditures. The validity of at least some of these investments remains an open issue, especially given that some leaders are not interested in careful development of public policies which would enable local governments to address social needs other than just improvements in basic living conditions.

'The conditions of service of local government employees shall be such as to permit the recruitment of high-quality staff on the basis of merit and competence; to this end adequate training opportunities, remuneration and career prospects shall be provided.' (Article 6.2)

Local government jobs are perceived as attractive in comparison with other locally available employment opportunities. What makes those jobs attractive? Regretfully, in many cases it is not the ethos of a local government organisation or a sense of responsibility for local affairs. While appreciating the work performed by many people in local government offices we should state that some people are simply administrators whose priority is to maintain stable working conditions, earn relatively satisfactory salaries, observe fixed working hours or get a bonus rather than to work for the satisfaction of the local community or to pursue ambitious development goals. Of course, this is a generalisation, yet it seems quite valid in the light of research findings.

Employees of local government offices quite actively participate in educational activities. The vast majority of offices do notice and appreciate the need to train their staff and largely address this need. However, this need is usually understood in a particular way: as a need to adjust officials' competencies in view of the changing legislation. In other words, this need is generated by the faulty system. On the other hand, there is little thinking about strategic development of the local administration to build local growth and development. What we see all too often in local government is the implementation of bold projects instead of developing staff's awareness to understand the impact of such projects and make the right use of their potential to enhance the quality of local life.

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[22] Szewczuk J, T. Potkański 'Integracja systemu zarządzania rozwojem obszarów funkcjonalnych – rekomendacje metodologiczne' [Integrated Management of the Development of Functional Areas]. in: T. Potkański (ed.) 'Współpraca jednostek samorządu…' [Collaboration of Territorial Government Units…], *op.cit.,* p. 120.
[23] A statement for the Polish Press Agency dated 28 May 2013 (http://biznes.pl/kraj/budzety-jst-w-13-moga-osiagnac-nadwyzke-porawski-zmp/hgclx).