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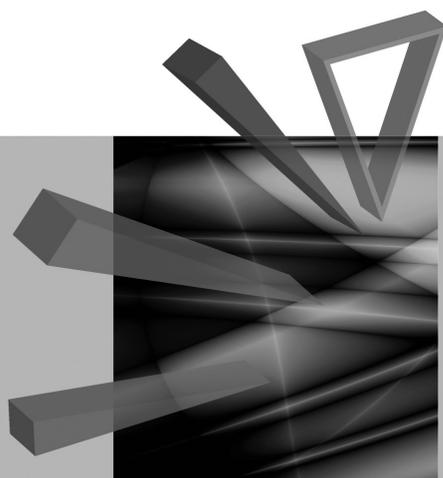
RESEARCH PAPERS

of Wrocław University of Economics

283

Local Economy in Theory and Practice

Local Development Governance Aspects



edited by

Ryszard Brol

Andrzej Sztando



Publishing House of Wrocław University of Economics
Wrocław 2013

Copy-editing: Elżbieta Macauley, Tim Macauley, Marcin Orszulak

Layout: Barbara Łopusiewicz

Proof-reading: Barbara Łopusiewicz

Typesetting: Adam Dębski

Cover design: Beata Dębska

This publication is available at www.ibuk.pl, www.ebscohost.com,
and in The Central and Eastern European Online Library www.ceeol.com
as well as in the annotated bibliography of economic issues of BazEkon
http://kangur.uek.krakow.pl/bazy_ae/bazekon/nowy/index.php

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www.wydawnictwo.ue.wroc.pl

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Wrocław 2013

ISSN 1899-3192

ISBN 978-83-7695-333-5

The original version: printed

Printing: Printing House TOTEM

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SCOPE AND FORMS OF COOPERATION IN POLISH LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Summary: Cooperation is of key importance for the efficient operation of local authorities. At the same time, it is a foundation for implementing the principles of good governance model. The article aims at highlighting major areas (tasks) with regard to which communes cooperate the most. The article refers to the results of questionnaire-based research conducted in Polish communes.

Keywords: local government, cooperation, governance.

1. Introduction and rationale

The on-going discussion on the existence and operation of functional areas, highlights numerous trends and conditions which make local authorities' capacity for cooperation extremely important in ensuring socio-economic development on both a local, as well as regional, and even national level. Cooperation may be defined as activities aimed at coordinating, creating, and reaching consensus with regard to strategies and implementing them [Bavkis, Juillet 2004, p. 8].

World-wide and European public policies evolve from a sector-based approach to an integrated territorial approach. The latter is characterised by (1) emphasising the use of endogenous development potential of functionally coherent territories, (2) spatial integration of public authorities' actions and (3) multi-level system of management [Ministry of Regional Development 2011, p. 180].

The need to research and analyse the capacity for implementing partnership-based task performance and cooperation in Polish local government comes from two general, world-wide trends:

- first of all, functional relationships between individual territorial units exceed the existing administrative boundaries [Marszał, Markowski 2006; OECD 2006],
- secondly, the approach to managing local affairs has been gradually evolving from government to governance which, on the one hand, reflects the growing importance of cooperation and, on the other hand, requires it. These developments are particularly visible in Central and Eastern Europe where the political

transformation of the 1990s resulted in shifting multiple tasks from the central authorities to local and regional level. At the moment, the CEE countries are attempting to bridge the gap with the Western European countries in terms of institutional capacity and introducing the concept of governance [Tonnisson 2006, p. 38]. Western European countries provide numerous examples of different cooperation patterns among various local stakeholders, including local government [Bolgherini 2010; Borraz, LeGalès 2005; Feiock, Steinacker, Park 2009; Peters 1998; West 2007; Wollmann 2003].

2. The need for cooperation and partnership

Managing the development of functionally related territorial units jointly, allows for better definition of the specific, endogenous development potential and offering a comprehensive solution to conflicts (of social and/or spatial nature). It has been broadly highlighted in literature that governance across multiple jurisdictions leads to the increased effectiveness of resource allocation [Hooghe, Marks 2003].

It needs to be emphasised that local government in Poland is entrusted with a wide variety of tasks, ranging from public transport, through education and health care to social care and provision of technical infrastructure [see Miszczuk, Miszczuk, Żuk 2007]. What is more, Polish territorial division differentiates between two levels of local government which are considered “local” (these are communes – *gminy* – and districts – *powiaty*) and, additionally, a regional level. All three levels are expected to perform tasks of a complementary nature in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity [Regulski 2000; Zalewski (ed.) 2005].

Apart from cooperation between territorial units belonging to different levels of the local government system (vertical cooperation), it is often the case that joint performance of tasks by units of the same level (horizontal cooperation) may bring about greater economic efficiency, coupled with improved citizen satisfaction. The reason for this is that the socio-economic processes occurring in space have little or no regard whatsoever for administrative borders. The need for coordination on a level exceeding the traditionally established territorial division is particularly strong in such areas as public transport, waste management and spatial planning.

Establishing successful patterns of cooperation between territorial units is of key importance for implementing the principles of governance, yet in itself it is not sufficient to consider such cooperation as governance. According to UNDP, governance means exerting political, economic and administrative power in order to manage public affairs on all levels of administration [van Kampen, van Naerssen 2008, p. 943]. Furthermore, this approach to managing local development requires that a “command and control” approach to managing local affairs is given up [Healey et al. 1995, p. 18]. Finally, governance requires that far greater participation of local stakeholders, including: local business and employers’ associations, NGOs, local community, universities and research institutes, sports clubs, local and regional

development agencies, training centres, cultural organisations, local media and even individuals is ensured [Mossberger, Stoker 2001].

Regulations on local governments which are currently in force in Poland, allow local government to formally cooperate with one another in the form of either inter-communal associations or agreements between them. Both these forms of cooperation are regulated by the Act on Communes [1990]. Local government may also become involved in other forms of cooperation with other stakeholders. One of the most interesting and hotly debated examples of such cooperation is public-private partnership [Brzozowska 2006, pp. 21–22].

The trends and conditions outlined above have inspired research on the scope and forms of cooperation in Polish local government. The main assumption behind the research activities is that cooperation best reflects the capacity of territorial units to introduce the principles of governance into their operations.

3. Research methodology

The research was aimed at capturing the capacity of Polish local government to perform tasks using various forms of cooperation. The project was carried out in cooperation with the Ministry of Regional Development. The questionnaires were sent to all communes in Poland in May 2012. The response rate was 25.57% (634 questionnaires were completed by the end of September 2012).

The communes were asked to specify the forms of cooperation which they use in order to perform chosen tasks, from amongst the following:

- inter-communal associations,
- agreements / contracts between territorial units,
- agreements / contracts between territorial units and other stakeholders,
- foundations, Local Activity Groups etc.,
- public-private partnerships,
- public enterprises,
- other.

Similarly the communes were requested to indicate the scope of cooperation by choosing appropriate tasks from the list below:

- public transport (buses, trams, railways),
- water supply and sewage systems,
- waste management,
- social care,
- housing,
- promotion,
- attracting investments,
- obtaining funding,
- other.

In addition they were asked about perceived economic benefits. Benefits were defined as the decreased cost of service provision resulting from introducing cooperation.

4. Research findings

The research results are presented separately for seven types of tasks, with regard to which the communes reported most cooperation. Each figure contains information on the forms of cooperation used by communes with regard to a specified task, both generally for all communes, as well as allowing for a breakdown of this information by commune type (urban, urban-rural, rural). The figures illustrate the structure of cooperation forms used by communes.

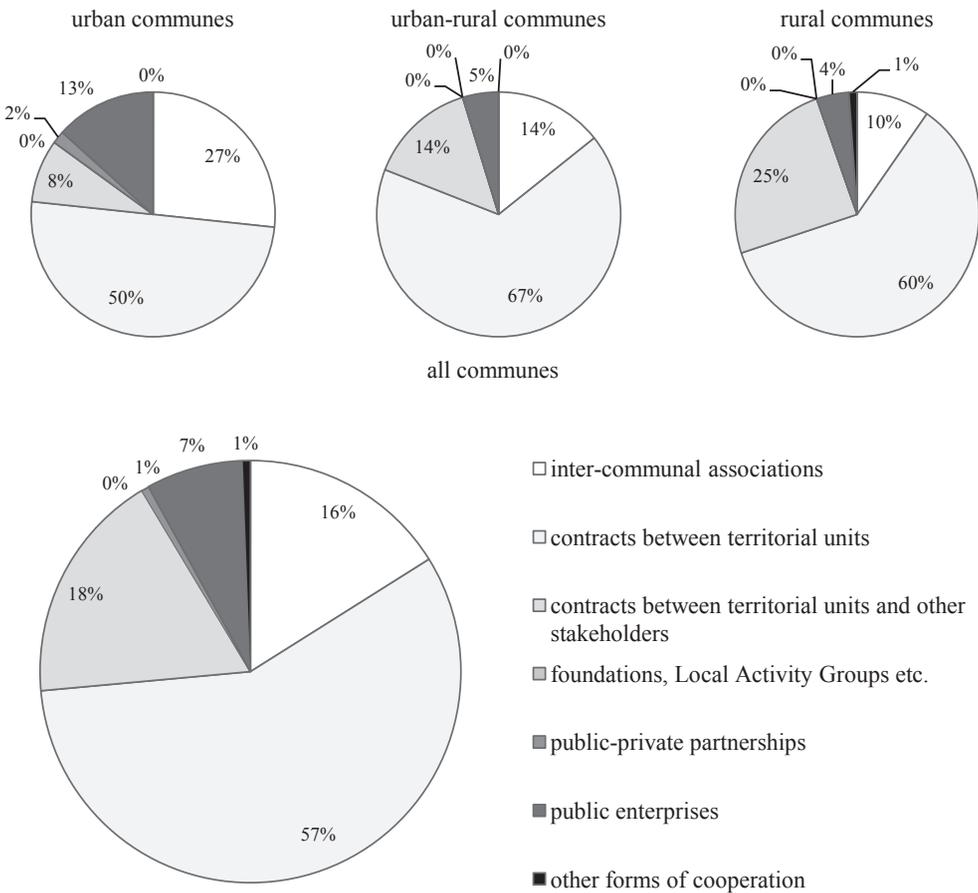


Figure 1. Forms of cooperation with regard to public transport (buses)

Source: own elaboration.

In terms of public transport (buses), the communes declared 174 cases of cooperation. In general, the contracts between territorial units are the most frequently applied forms of cooperation (57%). In the case of urban communes, however, the greater role of inter-communal associations (27% of indications as compared to 16% for all types of communes) and public enterprises (13% and 7% respectively) is clearly visible.

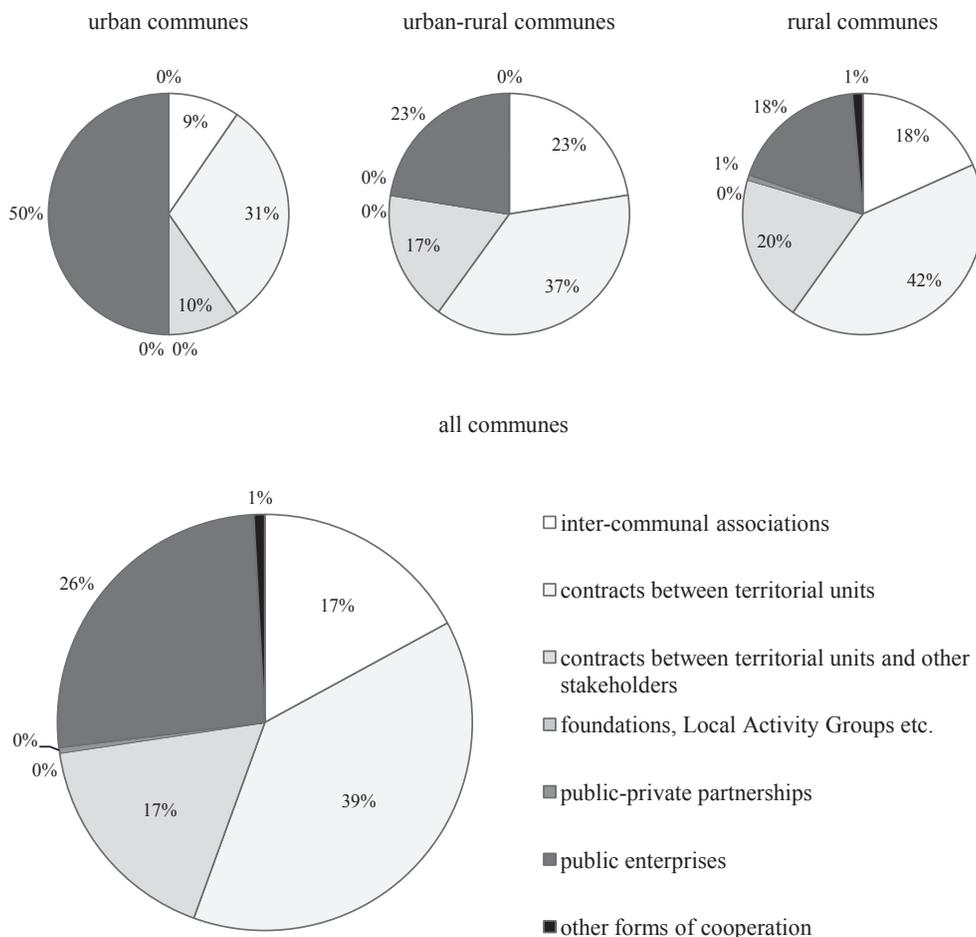


Figure 2. Forms of cooperation with regard to water supply and sewage systems

Source: own elaboration.

There were 234 cases of cooperation in relation to water supply and sewage systems. In general terms, two forms of cooperation dominate: contracts between territorial units (39%) and public enterprises (26%). Cities often set up public

enterprises (50% of cases in urban communes), while other communes tend to use contracts with other territorial units more often (37% of cases in urban-rural communes and 42% in rural ones). A recurring scenario is that public enterprises, set up by the cities, provide services for a number of communes in the surrounding area.

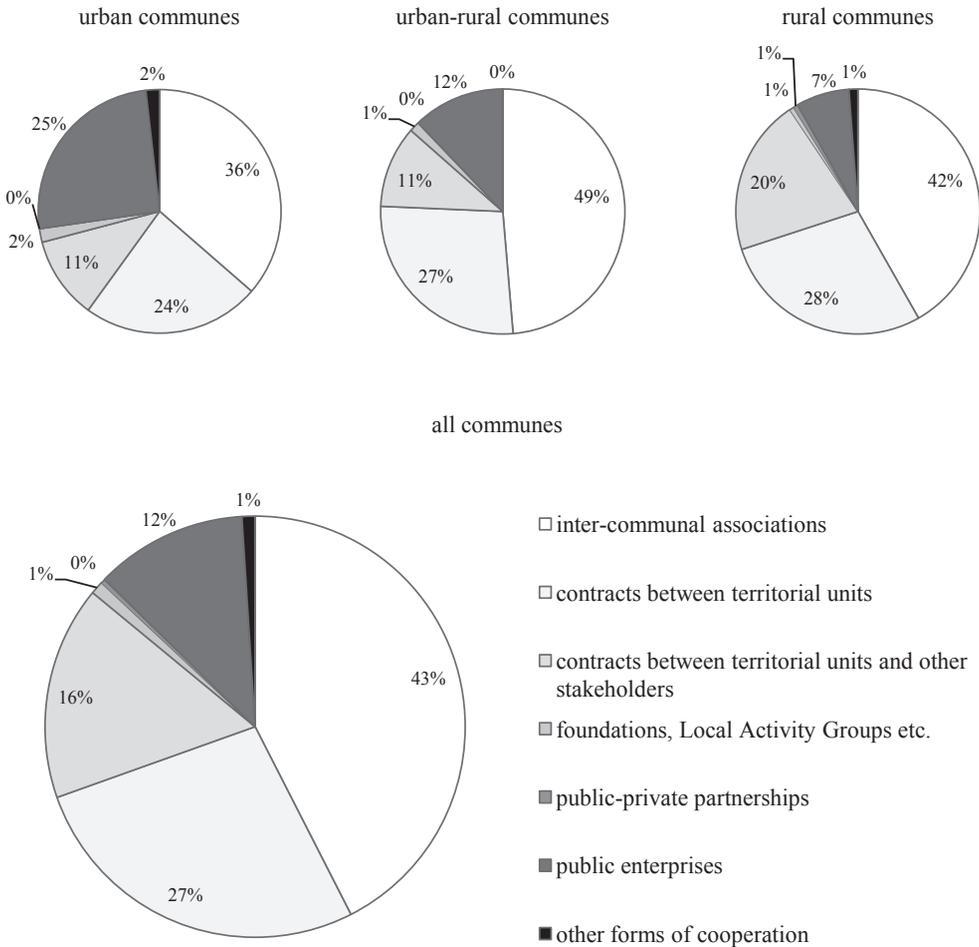


Figure 3. Forms of cooperation with regard to waste management

Source: own elaboration.

Waste management is one of the top three (alongside promotion and attracting funding) areas of cooperation, with 299 reported cases. At the same time performing this task requires that inter-communal associations are used to the greatest degree (43%). Another significant observation is that urban communes frequently use

public enterprises (25% of cases as compared to 12% in urban-rural and 7% in rural communes).

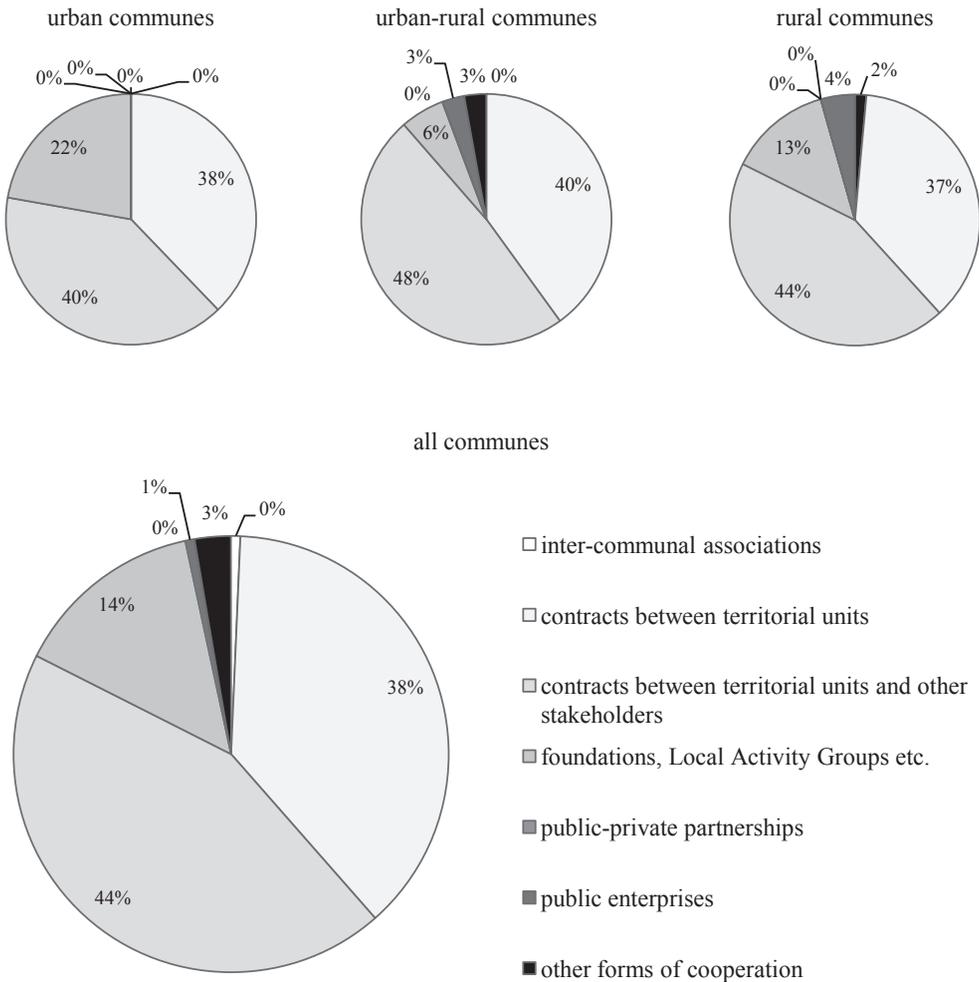


Figure 4. Forms of cooperation with regard to social care

Source: own elaboration.

In terms of social care, the communes declared 148 cases of cooperation, with two clearly dominant forms: contracts between territorial units (38%) – predominantly with districts in matters related to the labour market – and contracts with other stakeholders (44%) – mostly NGOs.

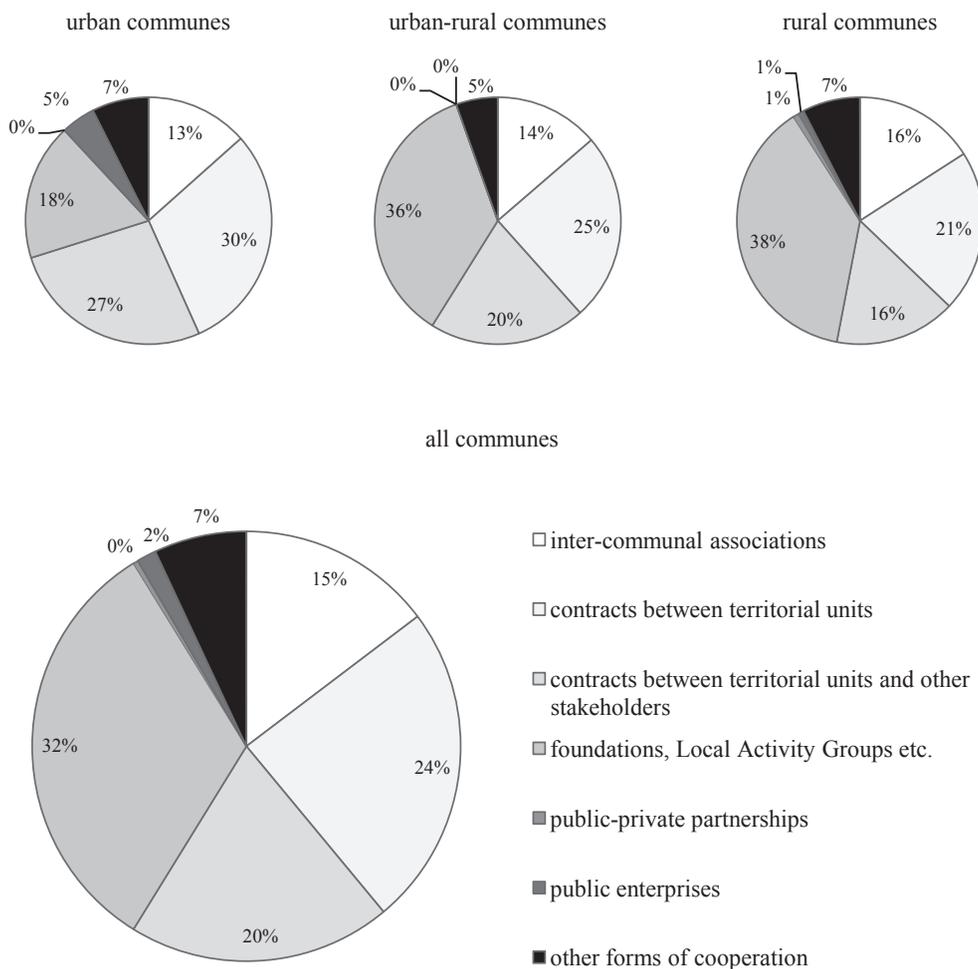


Figure 5. Forms of cooperation with regard to promotion

Source: own elaboration.

There were 272 cases of cooperation in relation to promotion. The research results indicate that Local Activity Groups (LAGs) are the most useful form of cooperation, especially in urban-rural and rural communes (36% and 38% respectively). Other forms of cooperation frequently used for promotion purposes are: contracts between territorial units (24%), contracts with other stakeholders (20%) and inter-communal associations (15%).

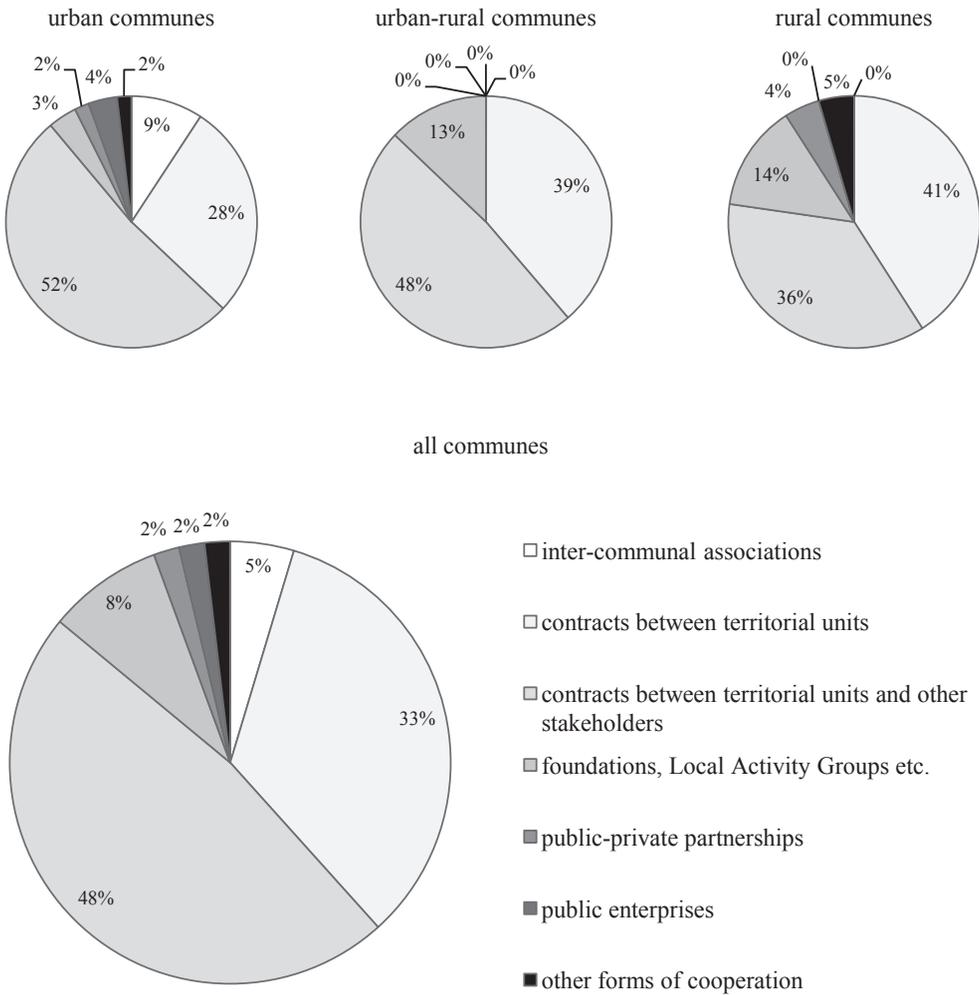


Figure 6. Forms of cooperation with regard to attracting investment

Source: own elaboration.

In terms of attracting investment, the communes declared 107 cases of cooperation. In general terms, two forms of cooperation dominate: contracts with other entities such as Regional Development Agencies and Special Economic Zones (48%) as well as contracts between territorial units (33%). This structure remains similar regardless of the commune type.

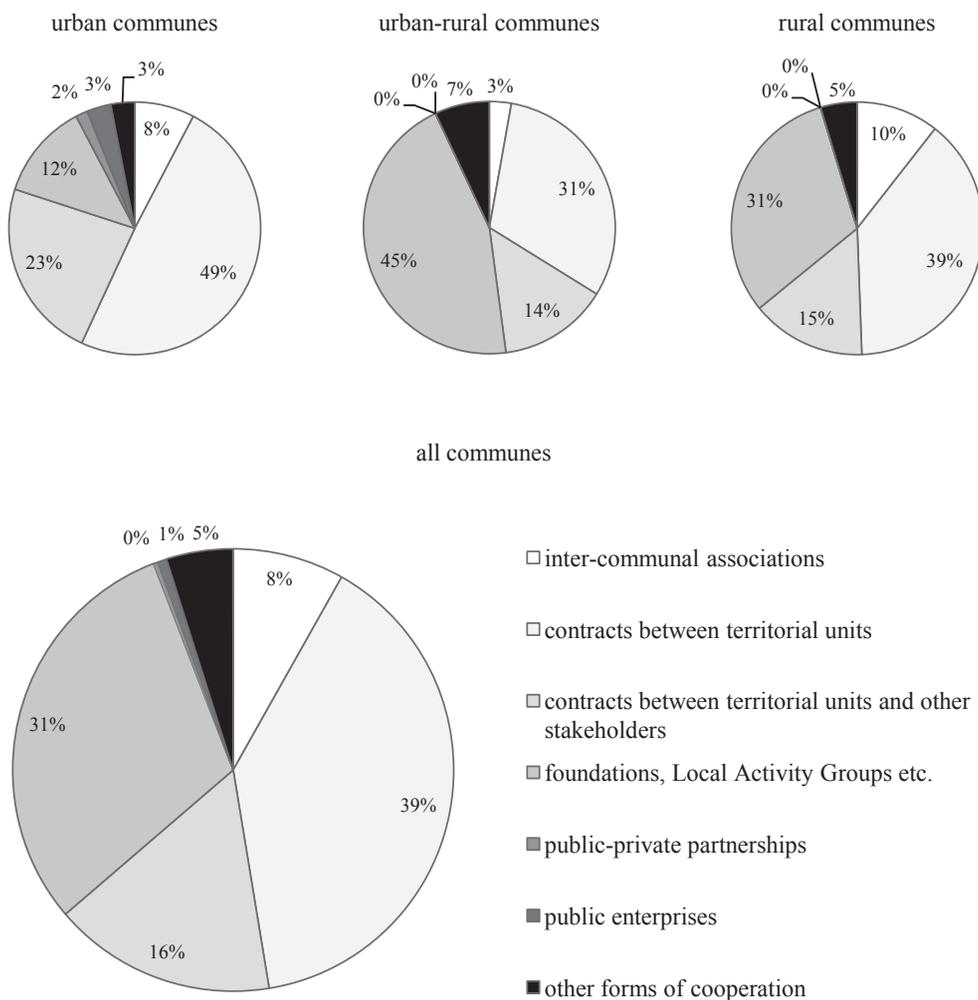


Figure 7. Forms of cooperation with regard to attracting funding

Source: own elaboration.

Attracting funding is an area of communes' activity which generates most cooperation – communes reported 306 such cases. Communes attempt to obtain funding predominantly by means of contracts with other territorial units (39% of cases in all communes and 49% in urban ones) and by means of establishing LAGs or foundations (31% in all communes and 45% in urban-rural ones). Cooperation in this area is enhanced by the availability of external sources of funding, mostly from EU structural and cohesion funds.

5. Conclusions

The main conclusion resulting from the research is that there is a clear tendency towards cooperation in Polish local government – as time goes by an increasing number of territorial units is entering into various forms of cooperation in diverse fields. The cooperation often involves third parties – i.e. local governments often cooperate with NGOs, Regional Development Agencies, universities and other stakeholders.

As far as the perception of economic benefits resulting from cooperation is concerned, 42% of local governments involved in cooperation perceive the economic effects of cooperation as positive (reduced costs of service provision), while as many as 20% have a negative perception. Interestingly, 38% of communes are unable to assess the impact of cooperation on the cost of service provision – this implies that they do not measure or even estimate this cost. Such an approach to managing local affairs may only be characterised as unprofessional and irresponsible, especially in times of economic and financial crises.

Finally, the research results show that Polish local government is characterised by a growing readiness for implementing the principles of governance. It seems however, that at least another decade needs to pass before a managerial attitude in local government becomes a standard rather than an exception. This, in turn, is a prerequisite for the appearance of governance.

Further research should concentrate on identifying the barriers to cooperation and on outlining incentives required for stimulating such attitudes. The need for this is highlighted by the currently ongoing discussion and debate concerning the “Act on cooperation in local government for local and regional development”, which has been drafted by the Chancellery of the President of the Republic of Poland. Furthermore, it is widely expected that various instruments (i.e. Integrated Territorial Investments) supporting co-operation between local stakeholders will be developed for the next budgeting period of the European Union. For the reasons outlined above, it is planned to revisit the issues covered in this research towards the end of the next programming period of the EU.

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ZAKRES I FORMY WSPÓŁPRACY JEDNOSTEK SAMORZĄDU TERYTORIALNEGO W POLSCE

Streszczenie: Współpraca z interesariuszami działającymi na danym terytorium ma kluczowe znaczenie dla efektywnego funkcjonowania władz lokalnych, zwłaszcza w obszarach funkcjonalnych. Jednocześnie stanowi podstawę dla wdrożenia zasad dobrego współzarządzania (*good governance*). Celem artykułu jest przedstawienie głównych obszarów, w ramach których gminy najczęściej współpracują z innymi podmiotami (władze lokalne i regionalne, przedsiębiorstwa, NGOs itd.) oraz form jakie ta współpraca przyjmuje. Zostały one zaprezentowane w oparciu o wyniki badań ankietowych przeprowadzonych w polskich gminach w roku 2012.

Słowa kluczowe: władze lokalne, współpraca, *governance*.