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Organic Farming as a Rural Development Factor in Poland – the Role of Good Governance and Local Policies

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ABSTRACT

The main goal of this article is to assess the conditions under which market-oriented and formally organised organic farming might become a factor for local development. The main question is: to what degree is the impact of this factor (organic farming) due to local policies and the quality of local governance? Based on research carried out in 2013 and in 2016 in various parts of Poland, the authors demonstrate when and under what conditions and circumstances organic farming may improve farmers' social and economic conditions as well as the overall development of areas with a significant organic agricultural sector (proportionally to the local scale). The preliminary findings underline that local authorities in rural areas are an institution that can significantly contribute to the maintenance and development of organic farming in Poland.

Keywords: *organic farming; rural development; good governance; local governance, growth factors; endogenous resources.*

1 Introduction

From both the environmental and social point of view, organic farming in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) has great potential for development. The various countries of the region make use of this potential with differing results (e.g., Moschitz H. et al. 2015; Petrescu D. et al. 2017). The main barriers to the effective and dynamic development of organic farming are institutional, as the willingness of individual conventional farmers to convert to organic-farming practices depends to a large extent on the institutional system in which the farm is embedded (Michelsen et al. 2001).

In trying to understand the factors that may hinder the growth of the organic sector, Swedish researchers have stated: “[CEE] the window of opportunity offered by the entry to the EU has been used to some extent when establishing a regulatory framework and financial help. However, there is still a long way to go before the organic sector in these countries is fully developed” (Larsson M. et al 2013, p. 17). The results of Swedish and Polish (Jasiński J. et al. 2013) research also suggest a correlation between greater political willingness to promote the organic sector and more advanced development of the sector. Interestingly, the recommendations of the above studies largely overlap; e.g., support for the organic sector should be directed towards a market-oriented approach and it is necessary to foster discussion, collaboration and coordination between all the actors and institutions involved in organic farming (understood not only as farmers). Both institutional gaps and the lack of “political willingness” observed in Polish reality (Jasiński J. et al. 2013, Wilkin 2013, Hausner 2015) were the main reasons why we decided to address the quality of local governance as the main topic of our research in 2016.

The main goal of this article is to assess the conditions under which market-oriented and formally organised organic farming might become a factor for local development. The main question is: to what degree is the impact of this factor (organic farming) due to local policies and the quality of local governance?

It consists of the following specific objectives:

1. An analysis of the perception at the local level of organized organic, food production (producer groups, farmers, processors, etc.) as an endogenous growth factor.
2. Identification of local initiatives for the development of organic farming and organic, food production.
3. Assessing the impact of local government measures and initiatives (including good governance areas) on the development of the local organic sector.
4. An analysis of the impact of local organic food production on the economic and social development of the area.

The article is based on the authors’ qualitative research conducted in 2013 and in 2016 in nine locations throughout Poland. For the purpose of the article, they selected three microregions that are considered the best examples for describing the relations between good governance and the development of local resources – in this case, the development of organic production.

At the global level, there is a debate between political scientists and institutional economists on the transition from government to participatory governance in policy formulation and related decision-making procedures, e.g., policy implementation by means of concrete actions and projects (Secco L. et al. 2011). Governance is about coordinating the plurality and complexity of hierarchies, markets and networks (Kjær, 2004).

This study has also sought to verify how the proposed areas and indicators of governance quality – prepared on the basis of good governance theory – allow for reliable research analyses. Thus analysis constitute a contribution to further discussion on the impact of the quality of governance by local authorities on the development of rural areas.

In the following section, the authors explain the meaning of good governance theory at the local level, especially in the Polish context. Chapter three gives a brief picture of the recent situation in organic farming in Poland in comparison to the EU. Section four includes information on the methods and data obtained. Section five provides results and observations. In the final two parts the authors offer a discussion and conclusions.

2 Theoretical background – good governance theory at the local level

The concept of “good governance” and the issue of governance quality has been addressed by many institutions and organizations around the world (for example: World Bank 1992, 1994, 2003; Kaufmann, Kraay, and Mastruzzi 2009; Grosse 2009; UNDP 2010). Some of the relevant studies relate to research on the quality of governance (co-governing) at the local level. The term “local” in relation to the governance measurement system is understood variously – especially in geographic terms. The quality of governance is analysed in the five most

sensitive areas: efficiency, transparency and rule of law, accountability, participation and social commitment, and equality (UNDP 2008).

The systems for analysing the quality of governance at the local level (local authorities) also include the Methodological Guidelines for Local Governance Analysis in Latin America (UNDP 2008). In these countries a steady decentralisation process related to increasing the power of local governments can be observed. This also includes a significant increase in the volume of funds managed directly by regional and local administrations. In this case the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the author of the methodology, decided to focus on two goals:

- developing tools to diagnose government quality at the local level,
- preparing an action plan to strengthen and maintain high quality local governance.

The key research areas identified in this system are: vision and strategy (assessed through the existence of local development strategies and policy for implementation of the strategy); legitimacy and leadership; good and active relationships between actors (in particular relations between different levels of authorities); institutional efficiency (assessed through transparency, staff competence, sustainable finances, quality of public service); civic participation; and a focus on local community activity – assessed by education level and improvement of the quality of human capital. Similar indicators, requirements and recommendations on good governance – on the one hand as regards the competence and efficiency of local authorities, an inclusive approach to inhabitants and their problems, and on the other hand strategic planning based on the use of endogenous potentials and local advantages – can be found in studies, materials and guides developed and implemented in completely different parts of the world – from Great Britain to Australia (Delivering Good Governance... 2007, Good Governance Guide – Helping... 2012, Good Governance Guide 2018).

The issue of governance quality is also encapsulated in the Council of Europe's 12 Principles of Good Governance. This is enshrined in the Strategy on Innovation and Good Governance at Local Level (Council of Europe 2007) and cover the issues such as responsiveness, efficiency and effectiveness, competence and capacity, innovation and openness to change, sustainability and long-term orientation or accountability. The Council of Europe's aim has been to involve citizens in the decision-making process in the matters that directly affect them, as well as to facilitate the assessment of local authorities – on the one hand if the local representatives and officials are competent, and on the other hand, if they take responsibility and are held responsible for their actions. Meeting the criteria of good governance is also to ensure that objectives are met while making the best use of local resources and that benefit is derived from new solutions and best practices.

An obvious necessary precondition for the implementation of these principles is that local authorities have the powers, responsibilities and resources that enable them "to regulate and manage a substantial share of public affairs under their own responsibility and in the interest of the local population" (Article 3.1 of the European Charter of Local Self-Government). However, the 12 points endorsed by a decision of the Committee of Ministers (responsible for local and regional government) of the Council of Europe show how important is for the quality of rule by local authorities, to observe the principles of "good governance" (also in the most developed regions of the world), and how a rich and comprehensive spectrum of issues may include research on the quality of governance at the local level.

2.1 The Polish context of good governance

Many of the research areas of good governance and indicators of governance quality (UNDP 2008) seem to be applicable to Polish reality. In the 1990s there was a major reform of local government. *Three levels of self-government were created in Poland. The basic unit is the "gmina" (municipality). Several municipalities create a "powiat" (county). The highest level of local authority is the "województwo" (voivodeship/province).*

Since then strategic planning, long-term development and greater openness to the local community have been gaining in importance – in place of hierarchical governance based on the government's ability to exert control over society, i.e., the traditional government-based approach (Peters 2000). There is a need to shift from governing to governance (Bober et al. 2013; Hausner et al. 2014). However, analysis of the quality of governance in local government, which has rarely been analysed in Polish circumstances, requires adapting research areas and indicators to local needs and characteristics. Research areas and indicators used to analyse good-governance rules at the national level are not directly applicable at the local level. Good governance is not limited to soliciting high-quality public services, as it also means an effective and strategic decision-making development policy and guaranteeing local communities the ability to solve their own problems through citizens' active participation in governance processes (Kjær 2004; Council of Europe 2007, Rayner et al. 2010; Podgórnjak-Krzykacz 2011). In local governments, because of the direct and close relationship between "the rulers" and "the governed" the approach should be based on consensus and a multi-decision orientation, with dynamic interactions among a plurality of actors, including civil society actors such as private partners and local organised

interests. Such an approach was presented by researchers from the University of Padova, who attempted to adapt government research tools to the local characteristics of rural areas. For them, good governance is a management system that consists of a set of processes, procedures, resources, institutions and entities that determine the taking and execution of decisions in a specific area, or in a certain range of policy measures such as rural development (Secco et al. 2010).

Approach proposed by Secco is utilized in this article, as it fits Polish circumstances the best. Local government standards should also take into account of development policies, and should therefore not be limited to the actions of local authorities that improve public services, but should also address initiatives that ensure long-term development based on local resources. In Polish literature dealing with the issues of government quality, the most frequently encountered references to good governance areas (and the indicators involved with them) are contained in documents and publications of the World Bank (World Bank 1992, 1994), of the European Commission (Wilkin 2008, Podgórnjak-Krzykacz 2013), or presented in the Polish development strategies – e.g., the National Strategic Reference Framework (NSRF 2007). Leading indicators developed under the three above approaches are mostly convergent (see Table 1).

Table 1.
Good governance research areas and leading criteria

Institution	World Bank	European Commission	National Strategic Reference Framework
criteria, areas	1. The right to express opinions and the influence of citizens 2. Political stability and lack of violence 3. Effectiveness of public administration 4. The quality of law 5. The rule of law 6. Control of corruption	1. Openness, 2. Participation 3. Accountability 4. Efficiency 5. Coherence	1. Democratic state of law 2. Transparency 3. Accountability 4. Participation 5. Social inclusion 6. Efficiency and effectiveness

Source: Podgórnjak-Krzykacz 2013, p.170 and Wilkin (ed.) 2008, p. 16-17.

The research areas presented in Table 1 are primarily aimed at verifying the quality of governance on the state level, not that of the local government. Such a general approach is in contradiction with the thesis that all types of institutional arrangements – on which the concept of good governance is also based – should be adapted to the specific conditions of place and time (Rodrik 2007). However, because the concept of good governance was born at the level of central-national governments, Table 1 and the criteria/areas of good governance included in it should be treated as a kind of starting point for modeling, adjusting and improving the indicators of good governance to the local level and to the specificity of local government administration. Therefore, based on the experiences of the theory of good governance (especially those adapted to local authorities) and using the achievements of other theories, e.g.: New Public Management (Lane 2000), Strategic Scorecard (Kaplan, Norton 1992), the political considerations of Niccolò Machiavelli on the meaning of the necessary characteristics and virtue¹ of good authority (Machiavelli 1515), two groups of interacting planes of good governance – dimensions and characteristics – have been identified and proposed (see Table 2).

These planes allow us to identify more specific areas of good governance, i.e., the areas that define the field of the authorities' influences, indicate the tools used by the authorities and society in the governance process, and define the issues they really affect. It is only through these areas that it is possible to identify – as precise as possible from a local point of view – the indicators of good governance adapted to the specific case of local authorities. Indicators can relate to specific areas, both because of the dimension in which they operate and because of the characteristics that affect them.

The proposal for the definition and grouping of dimensions, characteristics (virtue), and areas of good governance are set out in Table 2 below.

¹ The quality of governance depends on the proper understanding and sharing of the key dimensions in which the rulers operate and on which the rulers interact, as well as on the characteristics of the people and institutions that are in power. It is worth noting that the characteristic – especially if it refers to the people – has a dimension similar to what Niccolò Machiavelli called *virtù*. This is virtue understood as a set of specific political skills, strong will, energy, initiative, creativity and decision-making ability. At the same time the action of the ruler is to be aimed at the realisation of the interest of the community and not for the benefit of the individual exercising authority [Machiavelli 1515].

Table 2.
Dimensions, characteristics and areas of good governance

Dimensions	Characteristics (Virtue)	Areas
Development	Strategic planning	Strategy and vision
		Sustainable development
		Cohesion
Power	Effectiveness	Creativity - Innovation
		Local law
		Strength of influence – impact
		Efficiency
		Competence
		Networking: coordination and cooperation
Social inclusion	Seeking consensus – legitimacy	Participation
		Transparency
		Accountability

Source: Jasiński 2016 and own elaborations

3 The condition of organic farming in Poland and the European background

In 2016 there were 23,375 organic producers in Poland and 271,500 in the EU as a whole. The number of organic farms in Poland in 2002-2013 increased more than thirteen times - to almost 27,000. The area of these farms ranged from about 44,000 ha in 2002 to 670,000 ha in 2013. However, the following years brought a reduction of the number of organic farms by 24%, to 20,000.2 In 2017 the organic area decreased by 26%, to 495,000 ha, (see Figure 1). Although in Poland, as throughout the EU, a slow but steady increase in the number of organic food processors has been taking place, it is obvious to both experts and farmers that the number of food processing plants is still insufficient to establish a strong organic sector. In 2015 there were 562 processing plants in Poland, with the ratio of farms to food processing plants at 40.9 (JIHRS 2017), while the EU average in 2015 was 4.6 (The World of Organic..., 2017).

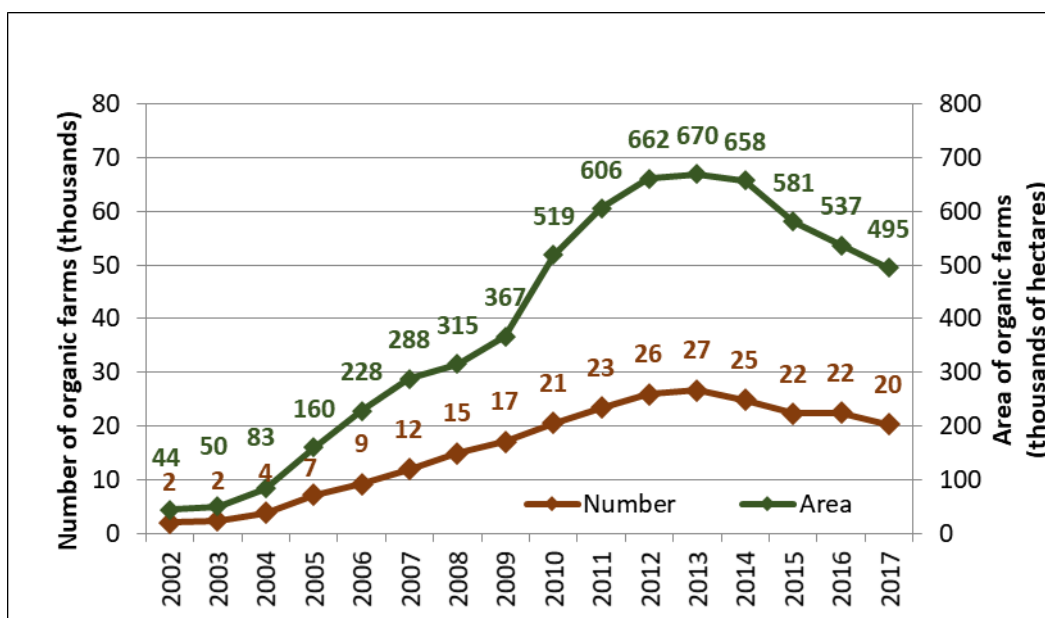


Figure 1. The number of organic farms (thousands) and the area of organic farms (thousands of hectares) in Poland
Source: JHARS (2017). The report on organic farming in Poland in 2015-2016. Warsaw, Agricultural and Food Quality Inspection.

From a broader perspective, in the years 2002-2017, the number of organic farms in the EU more than doubled - to approx. 313,000, and in Poland it increased tenfold. However in 2017, the total area of organic agricultural land in the European Union was over 12.5 million hectares, which accounted for 7% of the utilized agricultural area in the EU, in Poland it is only 3.4% (EUROSTAT).

Poland appears to have good conditions for the development of the organic food sector, due to the low degree of soil degradation, the surplus labour force, the farmers' good agricultural skills, etc. In the last decade Polish governments have also introduced a number of instruments under the Rural Development Programmes to enhance the organic sector. The above data show that there have been many difficulties in creating a strong, market-oriented organic-food sector that could be a factor for local development. However, the cases presented in this paper (see chapter 4) still show that there are many "islands" where the organic sector is vibrant and has contributed to local development. The cases described also emphasize the key conditions that enable the organic sector to become strong and market-oriented and thereby to contribute to local development.

4 Methods

In 2013, the authors of this article carried out qualitative research in five locations in various parts of Poland based on a purposive sample. The main goal of the project was to see if in Poland's circumstances organic farming might be a factor for local change that might enhance the social and economic development of the given area. The research was based on the assumption that market-oriented organic farming may be considered as a factor for local development. The results of the research showed that organic farming may serve as a factor, that increases both the incomes of individual farms (through the greater added value of organic production) and generates socio-economic growth in the area as a whole. However, specific conditions have to be met. The most fundamental is that key local actors (such as local authorities, local government, leaders of local organisations, etc.) have to take measures supporting the development of organic farming and organic processing, but in a way that the whole community can benefit from it.

This assumption was starting point for the next research in 2016. It was done in five case studies. The main question was: to what degree is the impact of this factor (organic farming) due to local policies and the quality of local governance? This was directly related to establishing research tools to assess how good governance at the local level may affect the success of rural development activities through proper use of organic farming.

The role of local government in the development of clearly defined resources in Poland has never been surveyed before. Therefore, it seemed legitimate to use rather qualitative studies with a purposive sample. The authors chose a sample based on the expert panel (see: Landeta 2006). Three practitioners have highlighted local communities throughout the country that fulfill the following conditions: there is a vibrant sector of organic

farming, local authorities have been actively supporting the whole sector, and at the same time the organic producers have created some form of formal cooperation. As a result, five locations in various parts of Poland were chosen. In the article, the authors decided to present three cases based on their geographic differentiation and the way endogenous resources were utilised.

In each location we conducted five in-depth interviews with key local leaders (among others with mayors or municipal officials) and one focus group with the organic producers from the area. The interviews were preceded by detailed analysis of the local organic market and the local legal acts in terms of the theory of good governance.

4.1 From indicators to research tools

Because analysing the quality of good governance is complex and related to the unique features of the subject matter, the development of research tools was a multi-stage process involving the following steps:

1. Establishing a set of indicators corresponding to each of the areas created² (see table 2 and table 4 – in appendix) to identify the quality of good governance at the local level. Adapting the indicators to the object of research – namely, the support of local government for organic farming. Altogether there were 132 indicators (an average of 11 for each area). The dimensions and characteristics (see table 2) are of a universal character; this means they may be suitable for any research regarding the issue of good governance and utilisation of any local resource at the local level. They refer to the theory of good governance described above (see chapter 1). The indicators should refer to particular conditions, in this case to the competencies of the local government in supporting endogenous resources and the character and formal frameworks of organic production.
2. Dividing the indicators into two groups: one deducible from the analysis of secondary sources, and the second to be obtained from the FGI and IDI interviews (see table 4 – in appendix).
3. Developing the FGI and IDI scenario. Indicators adopted for the purpose of the research were at the same time open questions. As there were many questions we had to combine some issues, otherwise the interviews would have taken too long. As a result, two similar interview scenarios were created.

5 Results and observations

5.1 Characteristics of research areas – case studies

In each of the research locations, besides the organic, market-oriented production, there was also a formal organisation of organic farmers and processors (various types), different forms of cooperation between organic food producers and local authorities. In each of the research areas, organic farming can be considered as an endogenous resource.

Each area had this same endogenous resource – here: organic farming and organic food production – so this made it possible to compare them in order to find the developmental analogies and also the impact and meaning of governance quality.³

Below we present three case studies carried out in 2016. The choice of the cases allowed us to take Poland's geographical diversity into account – the south-eastern region, central Poland, and the north-west of the country. In addition, these are three different types of area – a municipality (gmina) a geographical area (this is also a Local Active Group supported by the Leader programme) and a county. The basic information is followed by the tabular specification of the observations made during the research for all areas of good governance considered important from the point of view of local development, and at the same time adapted to the specificities of local government and organic production in Poland.

Case study A: Municipality, (gmina) – main features:

The municipality of 16,000 inhabitants is located in the south of Poland. From an economic point of view it is a municipality without significant domination by one area of the economy.

It has almost 2,000 farms, including four organic farms. The average farm size is 2.7 hectares (<http://www.swilcza.com.pl/index.php/information>).

² Each of the areas is assigned to a specific dimension and characteristic (virtue).

³ Difficulties in comparing and in analysing the impact of governance quality on local development based on endogenous potentials have been described in the context of analysing such an impact on local management of sustainable forest management (Secco et al. 2011).

Two non-governmental organisations dedicated to organic farming operate in the municipality. They bring together 50 certified organic farmers and processors from the entire voivodeship, organize Eko-Gala fair, one of the biggest events promoting organic food in Poland, along with the Organic Farming Conference one of the country's key conferences in the field.

Case study B: (Local Action Group and geographical area) – main features:

The area is inhabited by nearly 80,000 people and has 4,000 farms, with an average farm size of 13 hectares. It has over 50 organic farms, and their number is constantly increasing. There are also six organic processing plants in the area. The dominant sectors of the economy are: construction, agriculture, the agro-food sector and the dairy sector.

There are over 30 NGOs in this area, including one that combines more than 100 organic farmers and processors (circa 50% of the members come from the area studied). The association is engaged in training and educational activities in the field of organic farming and organic food production. It helps to organise joint commercial ventures: an organic food market is held in the town once a month in cooperation with the Ethnographic Museum and every year it co-organises an ecological fair in the town of Brodnica. The association also helps its members to make business contacts and sign joint contracts with wholesalers.

Case study: C) County – main features:

The county, consisting of six municipalities, is located in the region of West Pomerania. The area has nearly 50,000 inhabitants and is dominated by an agroforestry economy. There are nearly 40 non-governmental organisations in the county. The active organisation dedicated to organic farming has its office in the province building (the office is available free of charge). The association promotes organic food and facilitates communication between farmers, processors, and consumers. There are nearly 2,500 farms, of which about 100 are organic farms of very diverse size (from a few to several dozen hectares) and no organic processing plants. The county has one of the largest number of farms producing organic food in West Pomerania.⁴

5.2 Research observations

Below we present a (tabular) description of the observations made during the research for all areas of good governance. On the one hand, our observations dealt with the actions and initiatives of local governments – both local government representatives and their subordinate institutions. On the other, the research covered the broadly-defined involvement of local social partners, particularly those affecting the development of endogenous potential (organic farming). Table 3 presents the key information obtained during the research on the development activities undertaken by local authorities and inhabitants (civil society) with the focus on endogenous potential in the form of organic farming.

⁴ According to IJHRS report on 31.12.2014 in all of West Pomerania there were 3,549 organic producers. This was second to the Warmia and Mazury voivodeship in terms of the number of organic producers.
<http://www.ijhar-s.gov.pl/index.php/raporty-o-ekologii.html> – access: 10. 10.2017.

Table 3.

Case study observations on areas of good governance and on the development of organic farming.

Good governance area	Case Study A	Case study B	Case study C
1. Strategy and vision	Organic farming is strongly represented in the Local Development Strategy, and is considered as a factor of local development. It is seen more as a tool for the promotion of the local community than as a driver for economic change.	Organic farming is strongly presented in the Local Development Strategy, and is considered a crucial alternative to conventional farms, especially in areas with increased environmental protection. Some of the communities do not treat organic farming as a growth factor because it simply does not bring in budget revenue to the community.	Organic farming is present in the county's strategy and – to a greater extent – in the Local Development Strategy (prepared by the Local Active Group). Organic farming appears in the context of the development of rural tourism and is connected with the sale of local and organic food.
2. Sustainable development	Organic farming is seen as a factor strongly integrating the local community – e.g. organisations of organic farming producers conduct educational activities for children and young people. In addition, it is a tool for relatively cheap and effective promotion of the community. In this context, organic farming is also a development factor that creates a positive image of the municipality as a good place to settle, live, and invest.	Organic farming seen as a factor strongly integrating the local community. It is also an agricultural sector that enhances the protection of nature: this is very important because natural resources are the main local development factor. Organic farming is considered a profitable agricultural sector. In addition it increases employment in rural areas. It is also a tool for relatively cheap and effective promotion.	Organic farming is an indispensable element of the development of tourism. Organic production methods are perceived by local producers in ideological terms – mainly as a form of environmental care, to a lesser degree as an opportunity for economic development.

<p>3. Cohesion</p>	<p>Cooperation for organic farming involves neighbouring communities (geographical aspect), as well as the county and the voivodeship. Both the former and the current local authority are endeavouring to support the organic farming sector. There is continuity of local government policy in this regard.</p>	<p>There is no cooperation between local governments in using local potential of organic farming. The local authorities undertake ad hoc cooperation only in matters related to nature conservation and against the location of investments threatening the environment – which indirectly positively affects the development of organic farming.</p>	<p>County authorities actively support organic farmers. Municipalities in the county do not show such interest in this development factor and do not cooperate with each other or with the county. Although the town authorities are undertaking a lot of activities – creating a bio-bazaar, green public procurement in kindergartens etc. – the interviewees (farmers and district authorities) are of the opinion that there is no good cooperation with town authorities on organic farming. Voivodeship authorities take rare actions on the issue.</p>
<p>4. Creativity and innovation</p>	<p>Local authorities have agreed to establish an “organic farming office” (free of charge) in the municipal building. Municipal officials provide support in accounting for all NGOs in the area. The municipality also provides support to organic organisations at fairs and exhibitions. Both local authorities and organic organisations conduct educational activities in schools and kindergartens for healthy living and eating. Authorities and NGOs dedicated to organic farming cooperate in organising the largest organic conference in the region.</p>	<p>Interesting forms of promotion of the city through the organisation of a large organic annual festival in cooperation with associations of organic farmers and landscape park. Activities of the landscape park connected with educational and training activities, including participation in an international project devoted to the development of organic farming (international study trip). In most municipalities in the area, however, there are no ideas for the development of the endogenous potential of organic farming.</p>	<p>Sustainable support from the province for integrating and promoting organic farming – e.g. by setting up an organic farmers’ office at the local government headquarters, by part-financing an employee of an organic organisation, lending (free of charge) a conference room, etc. The town’s kindergarten director orders great deal of the raw materials for the canteen from local certified organic producers. The town has organised an organic market free of charge (for farmers).</p>

5. Local law	In the spatial development plan the municipality has separated “ecological clean zones” to protect organic farms from potential pollution and industrial investment.	There are environmental regulations for investment and building in landscape parks. Preparation of municipal development plans prohibiting investments with a negative impact on the environment.	One of the town’s kindergartens uses green procurement and orders 70% of its raw materials from local organic farmers.
6. Power of influence	The inhabitants respect the local authorities for listening to their opinions and needs. The mayor is also considered trustworthy, cooperative, effective in his actions. It can be said that he is recognised as one of the local leaders by people involved in organic farming.	Representatives of local authorities are not considered local leaders. Undoubtedly, the local leader – as pointed out by local authorities themselves – is a charismatic, well-liked and respected head of the local organic producer association.	County authorities enjoy great popularity among organic farmers. They are appreciated for their unwavering support for organic organisations and farmers. In spite of their actions, the town and municipal authorities are considered ineffective for the development of this area, including organic farming.
7. Efficiency	The inhabitants appreciate the effectiveness of the actions and the style of municipal management by the mayor. In spite of financial problems, the municipality has not ceased its activity in favour of organic farming and is even developing it (e.g., a free place for organic producers in the local market).	The inhabitants appreciate the local leader: his commitment, charisma, dedication, and effectiveness. Because of his activity, organic farming in the area continues to grow (the number of organic farms has been constantly increasing). He also frequently participates by supporting or even engaging local authorities in solving local problems.	The inhabitants appreciate the actions both of the local leader and the head of the organic farmers organisation as well as of the provincial authorities. With the support of the county authorities the association of organic farmers has carried out many activities for the integration of organic producers as well as for consumer education in the field of natural food. Organic raw materials in the canteen of the kindergarten is a success of the local association of organic farmers and the director of the kindergarten.

8. Competences	The mayor has great experience in business, which – as he claims – helps him a lot in managing a municipality..	The local leader has been an unquestioned pioneer of organic farming throughout Poland for some 30 years. One of the mayors in the area is from the NGO sector – he also currently leads the Local Active Group.	The charismatic leader of the organisation (the association of organic producers) has extensive experience as a farmer, and has also become a certificated agri-environmental adviser. According to the interviewees, regardless of personnel changes the county authorities are very open to cooperation.
9. Networking – coordination	Local actors are constantly consulted on matters related to the development of the community in the preparation of the local development plans the officials benefit from expert knowledge and experience of the inhabitants.	Coordination of any activities related to organic farming mostly takes place through the head of the association of organic producers. It seems that the strength, prestige, and knowledge of the local leader releases other organic producers from social activity. Local authorities in this area are largely passive.	Coordination of activities related to agriculture and organic food are carried out by the leader of a local organic production organisation. Its activities include cooperating with provincial governments and with local NGOs (including the Local Active Group). Attempts are also being made to cooperate with the town and municipality. The county authorities play a key role in this cooperation, as they have been supporting organic farmers for over ten years
10. Participation	Inhabitants have been increasingly participating in municipal meetings. On one hand, it results from the introduction of the “sołectki fund” on the other hand the local authorities are trying to involve as many people as possible in the development of the municipality.	The inhabitants are rather uninterested in the issues of municipal development. More willingly involved in local rural organisations (local housewives’ clubs, local song and dance groups, etc.). Organic producers are well organised in order to influence local law-making.	The inhabitants are interested in what is going on in the county when it comes to the issue corresponding to their health or safety – effective protests before building a waste incineration plant. In contrast, local organisations, including organic farmers’ associations, have been very active in the consultation process of the Province Development Strategy. Pressure from the organisation led to the creation of the District Council of Public Benefit in 2017

11. Transparency	Local authorities organise meetings with inhabitants, on a regular basis with multimedia presentations so those interested understand what the municipality is planning, what the authorities have done and why. In addition authorities use the local press to communicate with the inhabitants.	The respondents rather negatively assessed the local authorities in providing information on issues relevant to the development of the municipality. They also drew attention to the mismatch of the public consultation calendar – a large group of residents could not take part in the consultations.	Residents believe that public information about the preparation of the local development plan was insufficient, but the organic organisation managed to report some of the proposals that were included in this document.
12. Accountability	Indicators of activities and undertakings are included in the local development strategy. Every 6 or 12 months reports on the implementation of plans are prepared and meetings are held with the inhabitants to show what has been accomplished.	No tools in this area	Almost no tools in this area. Indicators for implementation of the local development strategy (without assigned values) do not mention any activities directly related to organic farming: indirectly they are among the indicators for one of the strategic areas, i.e., tourism.

Source: Own analysis, based on own research

6 Discussion – the analysis of the significance of the proposed areas of good governance

The authors have tried to assess the conditions under which market-oriented organic farming might become a factor for local development. The main question was: to what degree is the impact of this factor (organic farming) due to local policies and the quality of local governance? The study also sought to verify how the proposed areas and indicators of governance quality – based on good governance theory – allow for reliable research analyses. Thus they constitute a contribution to further discussion on the impact of the quality of governance on the development of rural areas.

In following the order of the areas of good governance (presented in the table 2), it must be stated that the strong emphasis in local development strategies of endogenous potentials is the first step to making this potential a real factor in local development.

However, this is a necessary but insufficient condition. The goals of the strategy must also truly address the challenges and opportunities for development, as well as express the needs of local communities. Consequently, close involvement of local inhabitants in the process of creation, enforcement, and evaluation of the strategy is necessary: this is strictly connected with other areas of good governance, such as networking and coordination, participation, and accountability.

The development vision presented by the local authorities is also important for the proper use of endogenous potential. It has to be present and consistent with existing documents. If there is absence of the precise vision or if it is inconsistent with existing strategic documents, it is difficult to plan to employ the local potential according to the rules of good governance. While organic farming was present in all local strategies, in cases where there was lack of developmental vision presented by the local government, these strategies seemed to exist beyond the real policy and have been not focusing on the endogenous growth factor. The “strategy and vision” area, as well as the corresponding indicators, should be considered one of the most important in assessing the impact of good governance on local development.

Indicators of sustainable development seem particularly relevant for verifying the extent to which local authorities and inhabitants are aware of the meaning and the role of the endogenous potential for economic, social, and environmental change/development. If this role is important or considered to be so, it is a real and strong foundation for long-term local development based on this potential. The verification of the local

authorities' measures for long-term and sustainable development can not be overlooked when assessing the quality of governance: this indicates local political leaders' conceptual horizon regarding development and verifies whether it goes beyond the current electoral cycle.

During the research it was proven that the coherence of governance can also have a major impact on the development of local potentials. This is particularly important in regard to cooperation with neighbouring local authorities, however it was observed only in one case (A). In this case, it has a positive influence on development. Cooperation with other local and regional authorities is closely linked to other areas of good governance related primarily to the characteristics of the politicians themselves and their willingness, ability and readiness to undertake joint actions. This includes the following areas: competence, efficiency, and networking and coordination. The coherence of power, understood as its continuity over time, is of less importance in the case of an appropriate institutional framework or a well-written, implemented and enforced local development strategy. A local strategy – especially when there is a strong local social partner – forces a continuation of development policy, regardless of who is currently at the political helm. It is also supported by well-developed accountability tools.

Indicators dedicated to the authorities' creativity and innovation should be included among the absolute key indicators of good governance at the local level – comparable to those in the “strategy and vision” area. Thanks to these, it is possible to verify whether the local authorities have a vision and an idea for the development of a given area and are not afraid to implement it. A good example are the actions taken by local authorities – in close cooperation with representatives of NGOs – see case study C.

Research results in this scope should be combined with indicators of the area's sustainable development, which may help to assess the performance of local authorities in terms of using the strength of endogenous potential in a given area. As presented in the study, indicators related to local legislation⁵ are often regarded as one of the manifestations of creativity and innovation and, possibly, the effectiveness of the local government.

Indicators of the areas of “force of influence”, “efficiency” and “competence” can be interpreted together. The study found that all of them show the subjective attitude of inhabitants (those surveyed) towards the representatives of local authorities rather than the actual competence of the latter. From the point of view of the principles of good governance and the desired inclusiveness and interactivity of the authorities, this seems to be significant (Hausner 2012). Another very important question, as it facilitates the understanding of social relationships, is who in the area is regarded as a local leader.

After analyzing the information from the locations surveyed, it must be pointed out that in assessing the work of local authorities and their competencies, willingness to act, and openness to cooperation, the most important thing is to assess their real boldness and ingenuity. Here in particular the indicators dedicated for the area of “networking and coordination” should be considered, in addition to indicators related to the areas “strategy and vision” and “creativity and innovation”. These allow us to ascertain how local authorities function as local development moderators and coordinators, and how they are able to share some of their competences with the local community (e.g., by setting up a civic budget).

The last group of good governance areas – i.e., participation, transparency and accountability, as well as data and information derived from the indicators of the above areas – are complementary. In each of the surveyed locations it was possible to use the proposed indicators to assess the extent to which inhabitants want to engage in local community affairs and how effective they are.

It is important also to assess, how local authorities are facilitating and supporting social engagement of local inhabitants. Last but not least, the real openness of the authorities and the social will to verify the proceedings of local leaders can be verified through the “accountability” area. It is worth to note that the lack of tools or mechanisms in this area remain highly symptomatic of the overall picture of the quality of local governance, as seen in the positive example of the county (case study C) and the quite negative one in the Local Action Group (case study B).

There are several important limitations of the research. First, it is based on a small sample and so one has to be careful in generalizing our findings. Hence our research is of an introductory character. The proposed indicators should be verified by other research work based on other kinds of local assets. Another problem concerns the general difficulty in measuring the quality of governance, especially at the local level. Nonetheless, the way we propose to measure this regarding the utilisation of local resources and the role of local policies seems promising.

⁵ Examples are: local law (e.g. local council resolution) as a land use plan or a law applicable in a given area resulting from the jurisdiction of another public entity e.g. landscape park. In any case, the above-mentioned issues seem to be relevant in terms of evaluating the activity of local authorities or local development policy.

7 Conclusions

Local authorities in rural areas are an institution that can significantly contribute to the maintenance and development of organic farming in Poland. The research shows that the application of good governance principles by local authorities is not a sine qua non for organic farming to become a factor for local development. This can also happen through the strong personality of the local leader or by exogenous factors not analysed in this article. However, it can be stated that in each of the surveyed cases the involvement of the local authorities and the application of good governance rules have had a positive impact on development. This process took place by the comprehensive use of endogenous potential, i.e., organic farming. At the same time, the more intensive use of the instrument of good governance, together with the effective use of local resource, the better the outcome is.

At least two of the surveyed locations (the municipality (case A) and the county (case C) should be mentioned here. In both places in spite of the relatively low value of organic production, this endogenous potential has become one of the real drivers of local development through the ingenuity and openness of the authorities and the activity of the inhabitants, as well as the joint actions of officials, producers, and local organisations. The results of our research indicate that the fruitful use of the potential of organic farming is possible primarily through bottom-up initiatives and activities. The latter should be based on close cooperation between farmers and processors of organic food, as well people interested in the development of this sector (eg. representatives of tourist sector or landscape parks).

The paper aimed at presenting a multi-actor dynamic process that has rarely been described in the literature. This is significant from the point of view of a theory of good governance at the local level, and also from practical point of view. It tackles the problem of establishing closer relations between local government and the community for the purpose of local change.

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Appendix

Table 4.
Examples of some indicators for governance key dimensions and sources of data

	Secondary sources	IDI/FGI
Area 1 – Strategy and vision		
Does the local development strategy (if there is one) propose solutions to accelerate the local development through the use of the endogenous resources?	X	
What should be done to change the current situation and increase the use of local potentials?	X	X
Area 2 – Sustainable development		
From the development point of view what are the strength and weaknesses of the community?	X	X
Is the organic farming and food processing considered by the local authorities and inhabitants as a factor that might enhance the change in local area?		X
Area 3 – Cohesion		
Does local authorities collaborate with other communities for the supporting the development of organic production?	X	X
Does present authorities continue the development goals set up by previous authorities in regard of organic farming?		X
Area 4 – Creativity – Innovation		
Does local authorities' offer innovative idea for the local development based on the endogenous resource?		X
Does local authorities implement goals regarding the organic production introduced in the local strategy?		X
Area 5 – Local law		

Does local laws acknowledge the local strategy, especially in the regard for the organic production?	X	X
Do local law's concern the use of potential of organic production and other endogenous resources?		X
Area 6– Strength of influence – impact		
Who is considered as a local leader by inhabitants of the community?		X
Is mayor the member of local nongovernmental organizations or he is involved in their activity?		X
For how many terms of office the mayor holds his/her duty?	X	X
Area 7 – Efficiency		
Are there any decisions of local authorities that are related to the development of organic food production? What other local potentials of the commune are developed by local authorities? How?		X
Does local authorities have implemented any project concerning the organic production implemented by the local authorities in cooperation with NGO's or any other group of local inhabitants?	X	X
Area 8 – Competence		
What is the educational background of mayor? What was his/hers profession before it took their post?		X
Does the mayor has conciliation abilities? Does he know how to win people?		X
Area 9 – Networking: coordination and co-operation		
Does the mayor coordinate any kind of activities around organic farming?		X
Does local authorities support any civic initiatives aiming at supporting organic production?		X
Area 10 – Participation		
Were there any local referendum held in last five years? What was they were concerned? What was their turnout?	X	X
How many NGO's are in the community? How many of them are aiming at the development of organic farming, and popularization of organic food? How many members have does organization for 10 000 inhabitants	X	X
Do local actors involved in organic farming take an active part in creating local strategies?		X
Questions only for the representatives of local authorities		
How the local authorities assess the civic activity of local inhabitants, including also the issues referring the organic production?		X

What are the main obstacles for good and efficient collaboration between local authorities and other local stakeholders involved in the organic production?		X
Area 11 – Transparency		
Do the commune authorities have fixed periods of on call time?	X	
Do local inhabitants recall any successful public consultation?		X
Area 1 2 Accountability		
Is a periodic review of the implementation of the strategic and operational objectives of the development of the municipality carried out?		X
Did they hold ex ante evaluation of the commune strategy?		X

Source: Authors' elaborations.