

## **Good Governance in Local Government Administration. The Results of Empirical Research.**

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**Abstract.** The aim of this article is to define the level of the adaptation of the local government units to the concept of good governance, and when posed in this way requires earlier operationalization by proposing a maturity model for local government structures in the scope of applying 'good governance' as suggested in the first part of this article. The second, empirical part presents the results of research conducted on this subject among the units of Polish local administration.

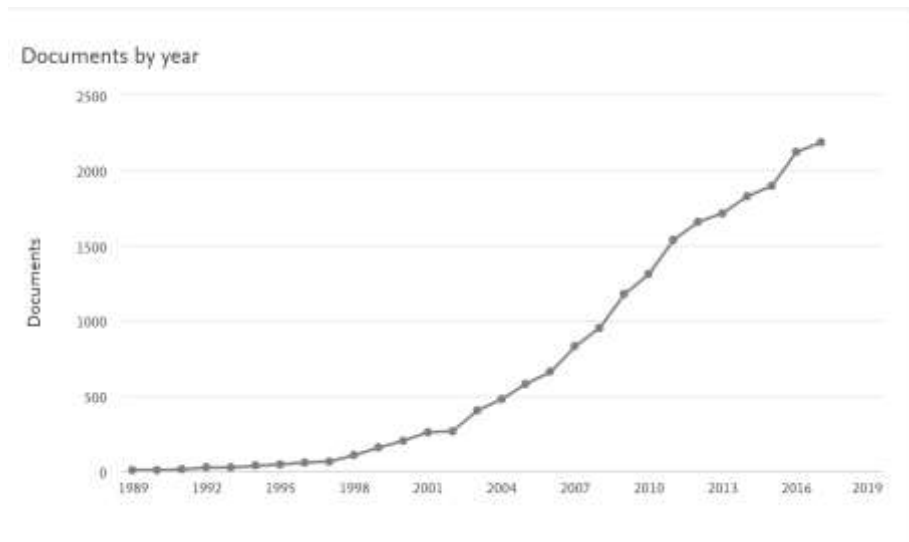
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### **1 Introduction**

The concept of good governance appeared for the first time in 1989 in the study published by the World Bank [25, p. 60]. Since then definitions of this concept have also been proposed by other international banks (e.g. the African Development Bank, the Asian Development Bank), international organizations (such as the UN, the OECD, the EU) as well as governments and institutions in individual countries.

The concept of good governance, developed within the practice of management, has had a major impact on the on-going scientific discourse related to the significance of good governance [15, p. 51; 9, p. 14; 19, p. 170; 11, pp. 14, 23]. Data analysis in the Scopus data base has shown unfailing interest in the concept since 1989.



**Fig. 1.** Number of publications in the Scopus data base referring to the concept of good governance.

In the popular understanding, the meaning of good governance seems to be obvious (intuitively it can be included in the same semantic category as effective governance, efficiency of governance, etc.), however from theoretical viewpoint it is not the case. The problem with interpreting the concept of ‘good governance’ becomes particularly evident when it is necessary to make its meaning more precise and when answering the question of what are the characteristics requisite for the way of exercising authority to be described as good governance? An extensive review of literature covering the ways of interpreting good governance can be found in the works by R. M. Gisselquist [8], T. B. Jørgensen and D.L. Sørensen [13, pp.71-95]. These authors indicate the lack of precision in defining the essence of good governance and the conceptual chaos arising from the sharp differentiation of individual approaches to defining good governance, which prompts the need to offer the author’s own definition allowing to determine the scope of research for this study. Accordingly, good governance (as a concept embedded in the field of public governance), describes a positive vision of exercising authority in a democratic system which requires that both the rulers and the administrative institutions (regardless of their level) adhere during that process, in the public interest, to a set of specific principles (characteristics) of governance in order to deliver to the citizens the results they expect [20, p. 116]. An analysis of the proposals offered by international institutions [24, p. 39; 1, pp. 2-3; 2, pp. 8-9; 10, p. 6; 18, p.1170; 16, p. 19] regarding the proposed characteristics, in particular those of the EU [5, pp. 8-11], as well as the analysis of literature on this subject [17, p. 308; 14, p. 13; 4, pp. 13-14; 6, p. 54; 3, p. 951], allow to suggest the following principles of good governance [21]:

- transparency – carrying out an active information policy in relation to the planned and undertaken actions and availing all the indispensable information resources to

the potential stakeholders, including the implemented processes and procedures (excluding the information which should remain confidential for reasons of public interest).

- participation – carrying out actions based on transparency which enable the interested parties to participate in the processes of decision-making by the authorities. Participation requires both the existence of mechanisms facilitating cooperation and undertaking steps aimed at the involvement of interested stakeholders.
- efficiency and effectiveness – establishing and achieving, through the activities of the public administration, goals serving to satisfy the needs of the citizens, and at the same time aiming at minimizing the costs associated with these activities and the best possible use of the available resources.
- accountability – informing stakeholders, and in particular explaining and justifying actions undertaken by the authorities and the results thereof, whilst the stakeholders are entitled to asking questions and offering their judgement, and the subject under scrutiny may be held to account.

## **2 Methods**

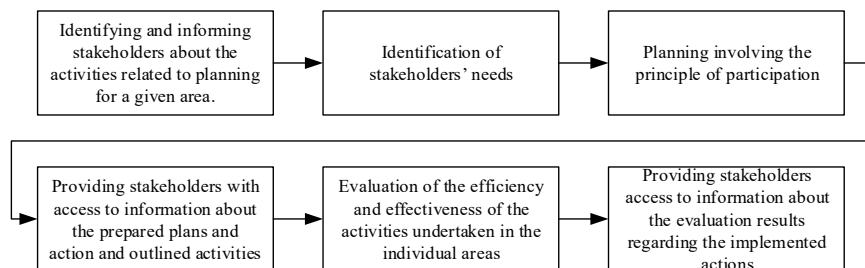
The practical implementation of the concept of good governance is linked mainly with the indicative evaluation of countries and regions, while the operationalization of this concept at the level of local administration or formulating recommendations regarding the transformation of the management system in government units is relatively infrequent. Therefore the assessment of the degree of adaptation in the units of administration requires an earlier formulation of proposals regarding the translation of the concept into a model for evaluation.

### **2.1 Operationalization of the Concept of Good Governance**

The operationalization of the indicated principles of good governance at the level of local government units requires a comprehensive view of such principles. An analysis of their content will allow for making an assumption about the existence of a sequence into which the principles of good governance can be included as the subsequent stages in the process of public management.

At the same time it is also necessary to determine the area of the influence of such principles on an organization such as a local government unit. Based on the most popular [12] models of organization in a systemic approach, such as the Weisbord model [23, pp. 430 – 447], Galbraith model [7, pp. 14-23] as well as that of Waterman, Peters and Phillips [22, pp. 14-26], the three basic elements of public organization in which the application of the principles of good governance is most vital are: strategy, processes and people.

The management process following the principles of good governance is oriented at shaping organizational solutions within the three identified above areas of organization (strategy, processes, people), is shown in Figure 2.



**Fig. 2.** Basic scheme of shaping the areas of organization according to the principles of good governance.

The starting point in the proposed process is the stage of identifying and of informing stakeholders about the future activities associated with planning solutions in any of these areas (i.e. strategy, processes, people). This stage relates to the transparency of actions and constitutes a condition indispensable for implementing the principle of participation, which in its turn is linked to the next two stages, that of establishing the needs of stakeholders and of ensuring their participation in decision-making. The information on the established solutions, in accordance with the principle of transparency, should be available to all the stakeholders, whilst the assurance of effectiveness and efficiency requires implementing mechanisms for the assessment of the functioning of the proposed solutions. An evaluation can be carried out from two viewpoints: internal, beyond the control function, ensures providing a set of management information; external, based on the assessment of the functioning mechanisms by external stakeholders which owing to the element of judgement made by the local community ensures the implementation of the principle of accountability. In addition, providing information related to the effects of the actions is linked both to accountability and transparency. Such an outcome is a consequence of basing the implementation of the principle of accountability on the transparency of the obtained results, just as in the case of the transparency of preparing plans which is the condition indispensable for observing the principle of participation.

A descriptive scale has been proposed for each of the listed stages, which can be used to evaluate the degree of maturity of local government units in the scope of implementing the principles of good governance (see Table 1). In the majority of cases within the individual evaluated areas of organization (strategy, processes, people) there are unified proposed levels of maturity. Slightly different levels of maturity were suggested only for the area ‘people’ in relation to the principle of transparency. This is caused by the idiosyncrasy of this area in which principally the stakeholders are the employees of local administration offices. In the presented proposal, transparency at the lower levels means enabling access to information to the staff, whereas at the higher levels it means providing access to information for all the interested parties.

**Table 1.** Levels of maturity using the concept of good governance.

		Strategy	Processes	People
Informing stakeholders (transparency at the outset)	Level 3	The use of information channels is assessed and the conclusions are used to improve communication with stakeholders.		
	Level 2	The way of passing information and information channels are adapted to the specifics of the groups of stakeholders.		
	Level 1	Potential stakeholders are identified and then informed about the commencement of the process of planning strategies /processes / solutions in HR.		
	Level 0	Stakeholders are not identified nor informed before the commencement of planning strategies /processes/ solutions in HR.		
Identifying the needs of stakeholders	Level 3	Research on identifying the needs of local community is conducted regularly, and the conclusions are included in the process of planning strategies /processes / solutions in HR.		
	Level 2	Research on identifying the needs of the local community is conducted irregularly while the conclusions are included in the process of planning strategies /processes / solutions in HR.		
	Level 1	There are tools allowing for the assessment of stakeholders' needs in regard of the desired strategies\ways of implementing processes\HRM. Research is incidental.		
	Level 0	Lack of tools allowing to identify the needs of stakeholders regarding: desired strategy, way of implementing processes, HRM.		
Participation in planning	Level 3	Stakeholders participate in: planning strategy/ processes /solutions in HRM. Decisions are made in complete agreement with stakeholders' expectations.		
	Level 2	Stakeholders participate in: preparing strategy/ planning processes /working out solutions in HR. Local authorities include in their decision-making these opinions of the stakeholders which are deemed legitimate.		
	Level 1	Stakeholders are given an opportunity to participate in: preparing strategy/ planning processes / working out solutions in HR, e.g. through contributing comments and suggestions for the planned solutions.		
	Level 0	Stakeholders are unable to participate in: preparing strategy/ planning processes / working out solutions in HR.		
Transparency of solutions	Level 3	Information about the borough's strategy/course of processes and regarding the adoption of stakeholders' postulates, including notification about the rejection of selected postulates and its reasons is generally accessible	Information about the solutions in HR is generally available for all the stakeholders (including local residents).	
	Level 2	Information about the borough's strategy / course of processes/ functioning solutions in HR, is generally available to stakeholders		
	Level 1	Information about: borough's strategy, course of processes, functioning solutions in HR is available only when requested by stakeholders.		
	Level 0	Information about: the borough's strategy/ course of processes/ functioning solutions in HR, is not made available.		

		Strategy	Processes	People
Assessment of efficiency and effectiveness	Level 3	There is a cyclical measurement of the efficiency and effectiveness in: strategy, processes and HR. The obtained information is analysed and used as basis for improvement.		
	Level 2	Measuring efficiency and effectiveness of strategy, processes and HR is irregular, while the obtained information is analysed and used as basis for improvement.		
	Level 1	Local administration implemented the tools allowing to measure efficiency and effectiveness of strategy/ processes/ HR, the measurement is incidental.		
	Level 0	Local administration does not have tools allowing to measure the efficiency and effectiveness of strategy/ processes/ HR.		
Evaluation of the actions by stakeholders (accountability)	Level 3	There is a systematic research on: measuring the degree of acceptance for the goals/ policies and the assessment of their realization on the part of the local community /evaluation of processes implemented by the administration/ survey of staff attitudes. The obtained information is analysed and used to improve policies.		
	Level 2	The measuring of the acceptance for the goals / policies and the assessment of their realization on the part of the local community /evaluation of processes implemented by the administration/ survey of staff attitudes is not conducted regularly while the obtained information is analysed and used as basis for improvement.		
	Level 1	There are tools allowing to measure the degree of acceptance of the goals / policies and the assessment of their realization by the local community/evaluation of the processes implemented in the administration/ survey of staff attitudes. Research is incidental.		
	Level 0	There are no tools allowing to measure the degree of acceptance of the goals and the assessment of their realization by the local community/ evaluation of the processes implemented in the administration/ survey of staff attitudes.		
Transparency of the achieved results	Level 3	All the information about the efficiency and effectiveness in the realization of strategic goals/ processes and the scope of their modification are generally accessible		Prepared results of the surveys of staff attitudes are available in full for the office employees and external stakeholders
	Level 2	All the information about the efficiency and effectiveness in the realization of strategic goals / processes are generally accessible		Prepared results of the surveys of staff attitudes are available in full for the office employees
	Level 1	Information about the efficiency and effectiveness in the realization of strategic goals /processes are made available following a demand made by stakeholders		Selected information about the outcome of the survey of staff attitudes are communicated to the employees
	Level 0	Information about the efficiency and effectiveness of realizing strategic goals / efficiency and effectiveness of the implemented processes/ results of the conducted research on staff attitudes are not passed on to the stakeholders.		

## 2.2 Research Tools

The next step in the research procedure was to transform the proposed maturity model into a research tool in the form of a survey using a construction similar to that of the self-assessment survey CAF (Common Assessment Framework). In order to limit the margin of error arising from the declarative nature of the conducted research, in respect

of each question examples of evidence were provided which confirmed the existing organizational state. Due to the limited possibility of presenting the tool, the author has shown below an example of the question aimed at evaluating the maturity level in terms of informing stakeholders about the commencement of the formulation of strategic goals by a borough.

**Table 2.** Example of a research question.

Please mark the answer describing the situation in your office	Answer	
Are the potential stakeholders identified before the commencement of the process of preparing a strategy (or the preparation of plans, documents strategic for the borough)? <i>Example of evidence for "YES": documenting the process of preparing a strategy</i>	No	Yes
Are the previously identified stakeholders informed about the commencement of the process of preparing a strategy (or the preparation of plans, documents strategic for the borough)? <i>Example of evidence for "YES": filed announcements, official correspondence</i>	No	Yes
Are the ways of informing and the information channels adapted to the specific requirements of the groups of the informed stakeholders? <i>Example of evidence for "YES": filed announcements, official correspondence</i>	No	Yes
Are there conducted any actions aimed at the assessment of the efficiency of the applied information channels, and are the conclusions drawn from the assessment used in order to improve communication with stakeholders in the process of preparing a strategy (or the preparation of plans, documents strategic for the borough)? <i>Example of evidence for "YES": reports from the conducted research, documents from the process of communication.</i>	No	Yes

Other questions aimed at assessing individual areas have a similar structure.

In order to increase veracity of the replies, in survey were examples of each organizational condition.

The object of the study were local government administration offices. A computer-aided telephone interview (CATI) was selected as the research method, in which the respondents were Chief Executives of local administration offices, i.e. persons who are best informed in the matters of the functioning organizational solutions in a given administration. The survey was conducted in 2017 (pilot scheme) and 2018 (the research proper).

### 2.3 Structure of the Research Sample

The subject of the conducted research were the offices of local administration, of which 410 were questioned. In the sample of this size and for the assumed level of trust of

0.95, the maximum statistical error amounted to 4%. The choice of trial subjects was of the random-quota nature. Using the criterion of quota selection, due to the character of a borough represented by the office (rural, urban-rural, municipality, town with county rights), the obtained deviations of the trial structure in relation to the structure of local administration in Poland were at the level lower than 3 percentage points for each of the categories, and the value of the similarity index of structures ( $\omega_p$ ) reached 0.976.

### 3 Results

The results obtained from the research procedure are presented in Tables 3, 4 and 5. When comparing the outcomes in the individual areas, one should note the relatively high level of maturity regarding the adaptation of the area of strategy to the principles of good governance. Next in respect of the maturity level is the management of human resources, while the lowest values are recorded in the area of managing processes.

#### 3.1 Strategy

Within the scope of shaping strategy we should draw attention to the high level of maturity regarding transparency of planning and preparing solutions. There are a few reasons for such a state of affairs. Firstly, the offices of local government in Poland are legally obliged to create documents of a strategic character in the areas indicated by the legislature, among which there are: spatial planning for a borough, environmental protection, waste management, and solving social problems. This obligation, combined with the implementation of the statutory access to public information, produces very good results in regard of the maturity of preparing plans and their subsequent availability.

**Table 3.** Level of maturity of local administration in the scope of shaping strategy according to the principles of good governance.

	Level	Level	Level	Level	A	CV
	0	1	2	3		
Transparency of planning	13%	8%	47%	31%	1.97	48.8
Identification of stakeholders' needs	54%	0%	30%	15%	1.08	112.1
Participation in planning	31%	4%	61%	4%	1.38	70.0
Transparency of the prepared plans	1%	4%	67%	28%	2.21	26.1
Assessment of efficiency and effectiveness	73%	1%	14%	12%	0.66	169.3
Accountability (public control)	83%	1%	11%	4%	0.36	231.1
Transparency of the results	74%	16%	1%	9%	0.44	201.3
Average value					1.16	45.5



The assessment of the principle of participation is connected with the two suggested aspects. First is the identification of stakeholders' needs. In this instance more than half of the offices of local administration declare the absence of tools prepared to identify the needs, and the lack of any related research. Those who declare conducting activity in this scope, decidedly more frequently (30%) confirm their irregular character. Only 15% of the studied institutions declare the cyclical nature of the conducted research and drawing conclusions on such basis.

The second aspect of evaluating the implementation of the principle of participation is linked to the possibility of stakeholders' participation in making decisions of a strategic character. The level of maturity in this area most frequently declared by the officials (61% of the offices) means the possibility of the stakeholders' participation in the process of preparing strategic documents, and of contributing their comments related to the prepared documents and/or decisions. Moreover the majority of local government administration declares that the opinions expressed by stakeholders are taken into account when making decisions although they are not of a decisive nature.

A significantly lower level of maturity has been identified in the case of using the evaluation tools for actions of a strategic character. Regarding the internal mechanisms for assessment (measuring the effectiveness and efficiency in implementation of strategic goals) almost three quarters of the offices confirmed the lack of implemented tools which enable measuring the realization of strategic goals. In the remaining cases, when such measurement was made it was rather of a sporadic nature (14%) than a constant and systematic practice (12%). Similar, although on an even lower level, are the results obtained in the area of assessment of the realized goals made by the local community (as the implementation of the principle of accountability). In this instance only 16% of the offices implemented mechanisms allowing to gather information on the degree of acceptance by stakeholders for the strategic actions realized by their borough, while merely 4% of the offices conduct regularly research of this type.

The level of transparency regarding efficiency and effectiveness in the realization of strategic goals is directly related to the usage of measuring tools (the value of the Spearman coefficient of correlation between the level of maturity in the scope of evaluating efficiency and effectiveness, and the availability of information about the achieved results equals 0.94). Naturally it is impossible to divulge information which is not gathered, however it is worth noting that in the situations when the administration obtained information regarding the efficiency and effectiveness of the implementation of strategic goals, it is not generally available but is passed on to the stakeholders only when specifically asked for (the situation is reverse in the case of transparency of the set out strategic goals).

### **3.2 Processes**

The other research area, i.e. maturity in managing processes in accordance with the principles of good governance, shows the lowest average level of advancement of the applied solutions. This is related to the low level of the orientation on processes on the part of the questioned officials in the local administration. In the research sample only in 42% of cases the implemented processes were identified, and they were mapped out

in 34% of the offices. Such a situation leads to a relatively weak diversification of results at the level of the average evaluation made from the viewpoint of the adaptation of this field to the individual principles of good governance.

For the proposed model of evaluation the highest results were obtained in the aspect related to the transparency of mapping out processes (identification and providing information for stakeholders) and revealing information on carrying out processes.

**Table 4.** Degree of maturity of the offices in the scope of shaping processes in accordance with the principles of good governance.

		Level 0	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	A	CV
Processes	Transparency of planning	69%	3%	15%	13%	0.72	158.3
	Identifying stakeholders' needs	82%	0%	11%	7%	0.43	216.9
	Participation in planning	81%	1%	17%	1%	0.38	210.3
	Transparency of processes	70%	15%	5%	10%	0.55	177.7
	Assessment of efficiency and effectiveness	89%	0%	6%	5%	0.27	288.1
	Accountability (public control)	83%	0%	11%	6%	0.40	225.4
	Transparency of the results	91%	6%	0%	3%	0.15	363.1
	Average value					0.41	144.8

The offices which implemented the process approach more frequently conduct research regarding the identification of stakeholders' needs and the assessment of the implemented processes than make use of the internal mechanisms for assessing the efficiency and effectiveness of the implemented processes, which are based on the measures established for processes in respect of their cost and the degree of realization of the set goals. Just as in the case of the area of strategy, this has a significant influence on the transparency of the achieved results.

### 3.3 People

In regard of the average value of the assessment of maturity in the application of the principles of good governance, in the scope of human resources management the results were lower than in the case of strategy. An analysis of the results obtained in this area shows, just as with strategy, the high assessment of the studied offices in relation to transparency of planning. Surprisingly, the needs of employees regarding the desired solutions are quite rarely identified, in as many as 82 % of cases such practice does not exist. When such information is actually obtained, it does not occur on a regular basis.

Participation, understood as the input of employees in the preparation of strategies and solutions HRM, exists on a fairly low level. In 60% of the offices, employees do not participate in the process of shaping personnel function, while in 37% of cases it is possible for the staff to participate and to postulate but without any binding power. The transparency of the prepared solutions also remains quite low since in 44% of the cases they are not communicated to the employees.

**Table 5.** Degree of maturity of the offices in the scope of shaping personnel function in accordance with the principles of good governance.

	Level 0	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	A	CV
Transparency of the prepared solutions	25%	9%	34%	32%	1.73	66.9
Identification of stakeholders' needs	82%	1%	11%	6%	0.42	219.8
Participation in planning	60%	1%	37%	2%	0.81	124.1
Transparency of the prepared plans	44%	20%	27%	10%	1.02	102.5
Assessment of efficiency and effectiveness	7%	8%	10%	75%	2.54	35.7
Accountability	80%	0%	8%	12%	0.51	206.8
Transparency of the results	81%	8%	10%	0%	0.29	222.7
Average value					1.02	47.8

The high level of maturity in respect of applying the tools for assessing the efficiency and effectiveness of human resources is linked to the usage of the system of periodical assessment, including the evaluation of individual effectiveness of employees, declared by these offices, 75% of which also report using the system of periodical evaluation for the purposes of improving their human resources management.

Accountability in the case of HRM is directed at the organization internally, therefore the HR solutions should be judged through conducting the job attitude study. The use of job attitude study in the process of human resources management was declared by 20% of the offices, whilst 12% confirmed constant and systematic practices in this scope. Almost all the units which implement the surveys of employee attitudes declare revealing in part (8%) or as a whole (12%) the results of such research, which are however made available only to their own staff and not to the external stakeholders.

## 4 Discussion and Conclusion

The presented research results allow to formulate a conclusion about the diversified level of the adaptation to the concept of good governance on the part of the local government offices in Poland. The highest level of the adaptation can be observed in the area of shaping strategy. This applies in particular to transparency, which to a large degree results from the legal conditions. Documents which are strategic for a borough (e.g. the strategy and development plans for a borough, plans for spatial development, programmes for a borough, strategy for solving social problems) require the participation and the approval (confirmation) of an organ of local government such as the local council, and according to Art. 61 act 1 of the Polish constitution every citizen holds the right to obtain information about the activities of public authority organs and persons performing public functions. Thus the high level of maturity for transparency in that scope (in particular regarding the access to information about the existing solutions) is completely understandable and resulting from the legal regulations.

The way of shaping organizational solutions in the other two areas (processes and HMR) is to a higher degree regulated by the offices of local administration, hence probably their lower average indices (in particular in the area of managing processes). Nevertheless, when analysing the scale of adaptation of the transparency measure in these areas it can be observed that transparency regarding the planned and the existing management solutions remains at a relatively high level.

In the scope of participation, which in the proposed model consists in the identification of stakeholders' needs and in ensuring their participation in the process of shaping strategies and organizational solutions, we should indicate the more frequently declared by the officials possibility of stakeholders' participation in preparing solutions rather than the identification of those needs with the use of the tool of the public opinion survey. Such an observation does not refer to the area of managing processes where the diversification of the maturity levels of the individual principles of good governance is significantly lower.

We should also note the very low degree of adaptation in regard of the applied measures of efficiency and effectiveness in the area of strategies and processes. This observation does not refer to the area 'people' in which legal regulations demand carrying out employee appraisals, which strongly influences the applied practices.

The lowest degree of adaptation relates to the transparency of results and accountability. In the case of transparency of the results this is connected with the previously indicated lack of measurement tools. The activities in all the studied areas are also rarely the subject of the stakeholders' scrutiny. This in turn leads us to the conclusion about the low level of organizational maturity of these offices in terms of accountability.

The conducted research aimed at identifying the levels of maturity in the offices of local government in relation to their adaptation to the concept of good governance, has shown above all that in the studied administration the degree of adaptation is primarily influenced by legal regulations, and the offices demonstrate only a very small degree of their own initiative in the improvement of areas which are not regulated by the existing legal requirements.

It also seems justifiable to conduct further research aimed at the verification of the potential links between the degree of maturity of local government administration and the satisfaction of the stakeholders.

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