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## The Quality of Local Self-Governance and the Political Participation of Non-governmental Organizations—Evidence from Silesia

*Abstract:* The quality of local authorities performance is determined, among others, by the involvement of social actors in the policy-making process. Among them, it is the non-governmental organisations (NGOs) that play a significant role in local politics, politics and policies. This paper tests if and how the participation of NGOs makes a difference in the quality of local self-governance, based on the evidence from Silesia (2010–2014)—the most densely populated region in Poland. The results show that the NGOs' involvement diversifies the outcomes in the quality of governance only in a modest way and extend. Consequently, the authors conclude that the politically engaged NGOs do not qualitatively bring much of an added value and rather play a role of proto-parties. Formally not being recognised as political parties, they perform many (if not most) roles that classical political parties deliver, including the recruitment of political elites, offering the political alternative, channelling the citizens' preferences and participation in power-sharing.

*Keywords:* Governance Quality, NGOs Political Participation, Proto-parties

### Introduction

The objective of the paper is to analyse the relations between the participation of the non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in the local self-governments' politics (electoral competition and power sharing) and the quality of governance in Upper Silesia (Poland). The quality of governance is conceptualized on a group of parameters formed into two components of the Quality of Cooperation Index (QCI, original name: *Indeks Jakości Współpracy*): one—the quality of public policies, the other one—the conditions of the delivery of public tasks. The participation of NGOs in local self-governance is operationalized as the proportion of NGOs related candidates on the electoral committees lists, their (proportional) success and participation in executive and legislative bodies after the elections.

The electoral committees formed in 2010 local elections by or with the participation of the NGOs embraced in total 33,9% of all the registered candidates, which makes them a substantively strong player in the local and regional self-governmental politics. Municipal efficacy grows together with the participation of the increasing involvement of social actors in the policy-making process. The formulated hypotheses were tested and verified in a number of locations, our paper contributes to this scholarly body of literature delivering

data from the localities in Upper Silesia (Poland). The authors argue that the politically engaged NGOs act as typical proto-parties rather than bring the added value to the quality of governance at the local level.

There is a great body of literature that addresses the questions of factors determining the quality of governance at various levels. Some scholars claim that better efficiency and quality of local authorities is, among others, a result of professionalization and organisational strength of the third sector (Petrova 2011). It is also recognised that the diversity of actors involved in the public decision-making may improve its quality (Demediuk 2009). At the same time, it is one of the elements of the grass-root democratisation in Central and Eastern Europe. It may be treated as a potential counter-balance to the processes and phenomena of apathy, neglect and disconnection from politics by the growing number of citizens. The post-communist societies are characterised by the low mass participation in civic groups, low levels of general interpersonal trust, social capital as well as approval of civic and political institutions (Rose 2000; Carnaghan 2001; Howard 2003; Theesfeld 2004; Riedel 2008).

On the conceptual level, this paper seeks to contribute to the better understanding of the phenomenon of the proto-parties. The authors propose a wider, than it is commonly identified, definition of proto-parties which goes beyond seeing them exclusively as the early phases of party development (immature parties) or political actors that developed in a corrupt way (usually in Eastern Europe at the early stages of the democratic transition). Here, the proto-parties are seen as non-party organisations that perform majority or most of the classical party functions and roles. The politically engaged NGOs are portrayed as exemplifications of proto-parties. In the transition countries, the tradition of the proto-parties phenomenon is very strong. It was the “Solidarity” movement in Poland that can be treated as a proto-party (both in the Communist times as well as in the post-1989 period when they participated in the governmental coalition 1997–2001). Registered as a labour union, “Solidarity” played numerous functions of a political party, mobilising the political activism, articulating people’s preferences, finally leading to the change of regime. Even when it stopped being a great social movement, it did not stop its typical for proto-parties political activism. In the Polish context, the proto-parties are usually described as: a less mature political parties (Nalewajko 1997) as well as NGOs that undertake *de facto* political activities (participation in electoral politics and power-sharing) (Wódz 2004).

The key question of this analysis is: do they make a difference? More specifically: do the participation of electoral committees formed by the NGOs and their representatives influence they way the communities are governed? Is there a governance quality variation determined by the NGOs political engagement? Certainly, it is not possible, in a scale of the paper, to analyse in detail all the parameters of the governance quality on the local scale. However it is feasible to focus on some of them. In this case the quality of governance is going to be operationalized as the intensity and functionality of the inter-sectoral cooperation. The measurement for the inter-sectoral cooperation is delivered in the form of an Index of the QCI.

Theoretically, the paper is embedded in the scientific discourse on proto-parties that are formally non-party organisations that perform many of the political parties functions. Even though such organisations have played very important role in the history as well as

today, the problematic of NGOs related electoral committees and their participation in political competition does not engage a lot of scientific interest among the Polish scholars, neither these who specialise in the third sector, nor in the electoral politics or party systems. These themes are treated rather marginally at the occasion of research dedicated to the civic society, social capital or local democracy (see for example: [Rusek, Werpachowski 2007](#); [Meisel-Dobrzański 2014](#)). Comparative, in-depth analysis on NGOs participation in politics (including electoral politics and power-sharing) are rather rare, the most noticeable examples are: [Dzieniszewska-Naroska 2003](#), [Józko 2002](#), [Skrzypiec 2004, 2008](#). Even then however, the dominant conceptualisation perceive the NGOs as participants of the social dialogue, advocacy institutions, lobbyists or watchdogs. This deficit occurs obvious when we realise that the percentage of NGOs participating in political elections is very low (1% of all registered NGOs in Silesian Voivodship in 2010). It is however not legitimate from the point of view of their participation in power-sharing (in every second municipality of the Silesian Voivodship). Our article seeks to address the gap in the literature by examining the impact of citizens' involvement (in the forms of social organisations) in the local self-governments on the quality of the local authorities and their policy-making. This article positions itself in a stream of literature which focuses on the phenomenon of non-partisan electoral lists and their impact on the local policy-making.

### Theoretical Background

Proto-parties are treated in a literature as less mature political parties ([Van Beck 1972](#)). This term is most frequently used in relations to the party-system formation process that happens during the transition of the political system ([Markov 1995: 145](#)). However some of the proto-parties formations were stuck in the process of transformation and they remained in the phase of not performing all the political parties functions ([Spirova 2007](#)). They do not evolve (neither have ambition to do so) towards the classical parties. Therefore in this paper the proto-parties category will be used in relation to the socio-political entities that are not fully fledged political parties however they play some important roles of political parties in the socio-political system whether at the local, regional or central level:

- They offer the political alternative,
- They channel citizens' will and preferences,
- They participate in power-sharing,
- They recruit political elites,
- They are competitors to the classical parties.

As a result they fill a niche in the political market—usually in the local and regional scale—answering some of the citizens' political needs, usually these not satisfied by the central level catch-all political parties.

It is an uncontested truth that the modern democratic society will only reach its potential when citizens individually and collectively are able to shape their lives through participation in public sector decision-making ([Demediuk 2009: 52](#)). Citizens' participation became valid in many of the CEE states together with the democratisation and decentralisation processes that developed as a result of post-1989 reforms. The transfer of authority

from the centre to the periphery increased the importance of the local and regional actors. As a consequence the civic engagement in the power-sharing became important also on the local scale. Many expected that it would make the local governance more public, participatory, cooperative, reactive and accountable (Stumbraite, Riekasius 2008). This would lead towards the “good governance” postulates of pluralism, subsidiarity, transparency, accessibility and wider citizens’ participation. On the other side it is also obvious that there are limits to this democratic citizens’ inclusion—and one of the major barriers is the lack of communication (Davies 2007). This is why when constructing the indexes for this research design, the communicative aspects appear very often in the parameters of the quality of governance.

Reflections on the quality of democracy have regained a central position in sociology and political science after the wave of democratisation that came to CEE in 1989. There is however still relatively little scholarly attention put on the empirical verifications of the citizens’ participation impact on the quality on democracy in a local scale.

Jacek Wasilewski (2006), referring to the recognised hypothesis, originally formulated by Stefan Nowak, about the “sociological vacuum” in Poland 1970s. (Nowak 1979), identifies—on the local municipal level in Poland at the beginning of XXI century—a “political vacuum.” Its symptoms are: the lack of political parties, political class and even the political society in “municipal Poland.” And the local political life itself is rather bottom-up in this sense that it is spontaneous activities of local leaders. They refer to the local specificity and mobilise the followers around short-term tasks, like water-supply pipes renovation, new road or bus connection. The main mechanism of mobilisation is direct relations and interest-driven task, not political relations (ideologised community). Therefore the organisation of political society is rather *ad hoc* and the initiatives are not long-lasting or numerous. They usually activated to “force” a specific issue or candidate and then remain “in coma” until the next elections (Wasilewski 2006: 48–49).

Participation of individual activists (volunteers, members of NGOs, etc.) in politics at all levels seems to be a common thing not only in Poland but everywhere in the democratic world. As it can be concluded from a research undertaken earlier in Cieszyn, members of every sixth local NGOs competed for various types of seats in local elections and every fourth of them was successful (Skrzypiec 2008). However it is not this form of participation (individual) that is within the scope of this analysis. This article is focused on the NGOs participation as political institutions.

The Polish legal system—which is quite common in the continental European civil law—allows the participation of NGOs in politics without the consequential loss of certain advantages (e.g. tax advantages). Even more, it is widely accepted that NGOs do not need to fulfil many obligations that other political actors (parties, labour unions, etc.) must comply with (similarly to economic activities—non-commercial, non-profit—in which sphere NGOs are also privileged in comparison to other participants of the market). This is why among the many types of political / electoral committees competing for power at the local level identified by Jacek Kurczewski (Kurczewski 2003)—parallel to party committees, individual candidates committees, their coalitions—there are also identified NGOs committees. Both the NGOs for whom participation in local power as one of the main goals and the NGOs for whom it is only occasional or side-activity.

It is also important to mention here that there is also recognised a marginal mechanism of camouflage in which classical political parties (usually from the central level) that, in the name of local identity, patriotism and self-government act on the local level seeking political support, hiding themselves behind the brands of local electoral committees. This type of identification is very often effective—for example in 2002, two thirds of the elected mayors were listed as candidates of committees with names like “Our city,” “Our house,” “Little fatherland,” etc. (Bartkowski 2003) even though they were predominantly classical politicians, members of the centralised political parties.

Kurczewski identifies NGOs electoral committees as “local political groupings” (Kurczewski 2003: 274) and Wódz (2004) as proto-parties. Gliński describes their style as para-political suggesting that they perform many political functions, including the ambition of active participation in public and political life, contributing to the ideological discourse, as well as direct participation in policy making, politics and power-sharing (Gliński 2006). All these conceptualisations refer to the political type of civic society, in which the associated citizen benefits not only his / her full social and economic rights but also political ones. The citizen uses them to influence the state and execute his/her demands. The associations (NGOs) function as a tool to influence the state and compete with other citizens over this influence (Raciborski 2010: 8–10). One of the forms of this competition is elections—including the competition of citizens grouped in NGOs related electoral committees.

### **The Methodological Approach**

Due to the formulated objectives of the paper, the scope of the scientific inquiry embraces the following social facts:

- the participation of NGOs in the municipal elections (competition for both the executive and legislative branches of the local self-government), measured as the number and proportion of:
  - the electoral political committees registered by NGOs,
  - the candidates listed by the NGOs,
  - municipalities in which NGOs took part in the elections;
- the results of the electoral competition, measured as the number and proportion of:
  - posts won in the executive (mayors) and legislative (members of the municipal boards) bodies,
  - municipalities in which committees labelled by the NGOs were successful;
- the effects of NGOs participation in power-sharing, in particular the quality of governance, parameterised in the form of the QCI.

Quality of Cooperation Index (QCI) is a recognized tool useful for diagnosing the relations between the public administration institutions (e.g. local self-government) and the non-governmental sector. According to its widely accepted function, it allows the representatives of the NGOs and the representatives of the public administration (of different levels) evaluate the quality of their relations as well as the quality of their cooperation in defining common goals, ideas, decision-making and performance.

QCI widely measures the quality of cooperation between local government and NGOs<sup>1</sup> in three dimensions: public policies creation, public tasks delivery and the development of “cooperation infrastructure.”<sup>2</sup> In the research process, QCI was enhanced with the additional dimension, that is: access to public information. It is vitally important from the point of view of openness and transparency of any public institutions, including the local authorities. This dimension of cooperation between NGOs and public authorities allows for better control and accountability of those in power. But for the purposes of this analysis we used only two dimensions: the creation of public policies and the delivery of public tasks.

In the field of creating the public policies, the following forms of activities were taken into account:

1. the existence of institutionalized civic dialog,
2. publishing (at the municipal official web pages) information about and for the social organisations,
3. application of consultations foreseen by the Act on Public Benefit and Volunteer Work,
4. consultations of the Yearly and Multi-annual Program of Cooperation between the local government and social organisations,
5. establishment of rules of conduct in the field of cooperation between the local government and NGOs as regards legislating on the public policies,
6. application (by the municipal) of rules regarding the legislative self-initiatives,
7. application of (partial) civic participatory budgets.

As regards the second element analysed in this paper and constitutive for the quality of local self-governance, realization of public tasks, there are the following elements combined into the form of an Index:

1. priority public tasks (number of fields and the budgets<sup>3</sup> of the public tasks to be delegated to the social organisations),
2. organizing competitive call for tenders (for realizing public tasks),
3. non-financial cooperation,
4. local initiative (whether the Cooperation Plans foresee such a form of cooperation),
5. evaluation of the Program of Cooperation between social organisations and the local self-government.

The QCI values were calculated in 2014, after almost the full cadency of local self-governments elected in 2010.

For the purposes of this analysis we conceptualise the NGOs electoral committees as those that were registered directly as such by the State Electoral Commission [SEC: PKW—Państwowa Komisja Wyborcza] or these electoral committees which address, name, per-

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<sup>1</sup> QCI is commonly used for operational purposes (improving the quality of cooperation in specific locations), rather rarely for scientific purposes and this article aims, on the methodological level, at scholarly utilization of this tool. The tool is the outcome of the project: “Model współpracy administracji publicznej i organizacji pozarządowych — wypracowanie i upowszechnienie standardów współpracy.” The project was executed within the framework of Operational Program “Human Capital” (European Social Fund), details may be followed on: <http://www.pok1541.pozYTEK.gov.pl/Produkty,38.html>.

<sup>2</sup> Cooperation infrastructure is defined as a set of institutions, procedures and norms which establish a platform of dialog and cooperation.

<sup>3</sup> Expressed as a share of the total budget of the respective municipality.

sonal composition or other sources (scientific literature, media relations) indicate undisputedly that they may be considered as NGOs related electoral committees.

NGOs participation in the local self-governmental elections was obtained from the official documents of SEC, after the elections in 2010 [<http://wybory2010.pkw.gov.pl/geo/eng/000000.html>]. The identification and classification of specific electoral committees was verified by the data from the NGOs official web pages, available third sector data bases, media content and other secondary sources (including the existing scholarly literature).

The primal categorisation of the analytical material was performed in line with the following criteria:

- name, type of the municipality, its population, number of seats in the board,
- data about the local self-governmental elections 2002–2010 (registered electoral committees, results, etc.), including:
  - turnout / attendance,
  - number and proportion of the electoral committees registered by the political parties, social organisations and directly by citizens (according to the official SEC terminology),
  - data about the inter-sectoral cooperation gained from the modified QCI, including all three, mentioned above, dimensions and additionally the “access to public information” dimension).

The research embraced two sets of data:

- A. All municipalities from the Silesian Voivodship.
- B. Municipalities selected based on the criteria:
  - participation of NGOs committees in self-governmental elections 2010,
  - seats in the municipal boards or mayors offices taken by the NGOs related committees.

In the second set of data, it was further possible to categorise the municipalities into five groups:

1. Municipalities with the participation of NGOs electoral committees in 2010—the ones in which NGOs listed their own candidates for mayors, members of the boards,
2. Municipalities without the participation of NGOs electoral committees 2010,
3. Municipalities with the NGOs related candidate successful in mayors office competition,
4. Municipalities with the NGOs related candidate successful in municipal board seats competition,
5. Municipalities without successful candidates related with NGOs.

The analysis presented in this article focuses on the correlation between the NGOs participation in power and the quality of governance, therefore it is concentrated predominantly on the groups: 3 and 4.

The structure of the data set is presented in the **table** below.

The analysis embraced 55 municipalities (populated by no more than 60,000 inhabitants) from the Silesian Voivodship (18 urban, 12 of mixed, urban-rural character and 25 rural). Among them, in 39 localities there were identified NGOs politically involved, in 25 of them they were successful, meaning they won seats both in executive and legislative bodies, in 14 of them they were successful in legislative bodies exclusively. The

Table 1

**The structure of the analysed sets—municipalities with / without the participation of NGOs related candidates in 2010 elections (and their results)**

A. All municipalities from the Silesian Voivodship (n = 167)		
B. Selected municipalities (n = 55)		
1. (n = 39)		2. (n = 16)
3. (n = 25)	4. (n = 13)	5. (n = 17)

localities were selected in such a way that the sample group embraced all the cultural sub-regions.

### Empirical Data—Presentation and Discussion

In 2010 elections to the self-governments in Silesian Voivodship, there were registered 1,299 committees that listed 540 candidates for mayors and 16,020 candidates for members of municipal boards. In 82 municipalities (which constitute a half of them in Silesia) 89 NGOs registered 155 own electoral committees. They listed 85 candidates for mayor seats and more then three thousands candidates for members of boards. In 42% of municipalities, the NGOs related candidates were successful and won their seats. In every fifth municipality they won both the executive and legislative seats. And in three municipalities they took all of the available seats. In every sixth municipality, the representatives of NGOs participated in majority or minority coalitions. And in every eighth municipality they won one seat. Even though their representation was more modest in comparison to all the other electoral committees combined, they showed more efficiency—their candidates were much more often successful in relation to the other types of electoral committees and in proportion to the number of candidates listed.

For the purpose of the analysis, we categorize the municipalities into the several groups:

1. municipalities in which the representatives of the NGOs participate in the executive power (mayors, vice-mayors, members of the executive board, etc.)—position no. 3 from the methodological chapter
2. municipalities in which the representatives of the NGOs participate in the city, village councils (legislative branch of authority)—position no. 4 from the methodological chapter
3. municipalities in which there are no successful representatives of the social organizations—position no. 2 and 5 from the methodological chapter.

The analysis embraces a set of selected municipalities in which the NGOs representatives took part in the boards and / or councils, altogether 38 communes. The structure of this set is presented in the [table](#) below.

The proportion of NGOs representatives in the executive or legislative authorities remain very diversified—from less then 10% to 100% of the positions. On average however they remain usually below the 50% line. In every sixth council, they sum up to three quarters of all the council members.

Table 2

**The structure of municipalities with the participation of NGOs representatives in local governments (mayors seats / members of municipal boards)**

Municipality	Number seats		Proportion of elected seats in analysed municipalities	
	mayors	members of the municipal boards	mayors	members of the municipal boards
analysed data-set (n = 38)	25	66%	323	49%
urban (n = 12)	7	58%	95	39%
urban-rural (n = 8)	4	50%	77	51%
rural (n = 18)	14	78%	151	56%

Table 3

**Proportion of NGOs representatives in municipal councils**

Municipality	Percentage of seats in municipal boards			
	X < 10%	10% < X < 50%	50% < X < 75%	75% < X
analysed data-set (n = 38)	1	21	9	6
urban (n = 12)	1	9	0	1
urban-rural (n = 8)	0	3	4	1
rural (n = 18)	0	9	5	4

We also observed that the smaller the community, the larger the representation of the NGOs in the executive and legislative authorities.

The QCI representing the quality of the inter-sectoral cooperation is much higher in the communities where NGOs have councillors (participation on legislative power) and considerably lower (by 7,5%) in these communities where the NGOs gained position in the executive power exclusively. See [table 4](#).

The lowest values of the index are observable in the rural communities (lower by 40% to the average). Within the rural communities, the same pattern of representatives of NGOs in executive vs. legislative power was noticed.

Statistical analysis does not prove the correlation between the participation of NGOs related electoral committees in 2010 municipal elections and the generalised QCI value, as well as in specific dimensions (Policies, Tasks, Support, Access) in analyzed localities in 2014 at statistical importance 0,05<sup>4</sup>.

From the point of view of this analysis it is important to identify the correlations between the participation of the NGOs in power-sharing and the quality of the inter-sectoral cooperation. By political participation, we understand here taking over the seat of mayor or members of the councils. The comparison of the set of data with municipalities in which NGOs participate in the councils (G 2) to the ones in which they have members of legislative boards (G 1) shows that the G 1 differs by many statistical parameters:

- 1) Higher variation of QCI (3,42 vs 3,13)

<sup>4</sup> Generalized QCI  $\chi^2 = 6,00$ , Policies  $\chi^2 = 1,66$ ; Tasks  $\chi^2 = 4,11$ ; Support  $\chi^2 = 1,87$  in every dimension with 4 degrees of freedom (dof).

Table 4

**The average values of QCI in the sub-group of municipalities with the NGOs participating and non-participating in 2010 election (as a % of maximum values of QCI)**

Municipality	Cooperation Quality Index				
	Policies	Tasks	Support	Access	Total
analysed data-set (n = 37)	44	52	23	63	44
Municipalities with executive seats taken by NGOs related candidates (G 1)					
analysed data-set (n = 24)	41	51	23	63	43
urban (n = 7)	42	55	32	77	47
urban-rural (n = 4)	39	44	8	60	37
rural (n = 13)	42	51	23	60	43
Municipalities with municipal board seats taken by NGOs related candidates (G 2)					
analysed data-set (n = 13)	47	53	23	63	46
urban (n = 5)	44	58	33	60	48
urban-rural (n = 4)	56	55	25	83	52
rural (n = 4)	43	45	8	50	38
Municipalities without participation of the NGOs in local elections (G 3)					
analysed data-set (n = 16)	42	44	25	57	41
urban (n = 6)	34	44	25	60	38
urban-rural (n = 4)	50	53	33	67	49
rural (n = 6)	47	38	20	43	39

Explanations:

*Policies* means policies creation

*Tasks* means public tasks delivery

*Support* means development of "cooperation infrastructure"

*Access* means access to public information

- 2) More narrow span between the highest and lowest values of the QCI in specific municipalities (G 1: min = 11, max = 21; G 2: min = 8, max = 21)
- 3) Higher average and median value of QCI
- 4) More municipalities with QCI equals min. 50% of the maximum value
- 5) Higher values of quartiles 1 and 3
- 6) Higher value of the dominant.

See **graph no. 1**.

We compared the effects of participation in power-sharing in two dimensions of cooperation: public policies creation and the executing of public tasks. For the first one, the statistical analysis does not confirm the correlations between the representation of NGOs in the executive power of the communities and the realization of the above mentioned activities at the (statistical importance) level of 0,005<sup>5</sup> The detailed values of the QCI are presented in the **table** below.

So conceptualized index shows that such a cooperation is performed in the analysed communities in a limited scale. The average index value is 43,6% of its maximum<sup>6</sup>. In the communities with the participation of the NGOs in the executive power, the Index was

<sup>5</sup> For individual activities of cooperation: activity 1  $\chi^2 = 0,23$  (2 dof); activity 2  $\chi^2 = 4,14$  (4 dof); activity 3  $\chi^2 = 10,76$  (8 dof); activity 4  $\chi^2 = 6,34$  (6 dof); activity 5  $\chi^2 = 6,07$  (4 dof); activity 6  $\chi^2 = 2,12$  (2 dof); activity 7  $\chi^2 = 1,36$  (2 dof).

<sup>6</sup> The mean and dominant were 2% lower.

Graph 1  
**The Structure of the values of QCI in G 1 and G 2**

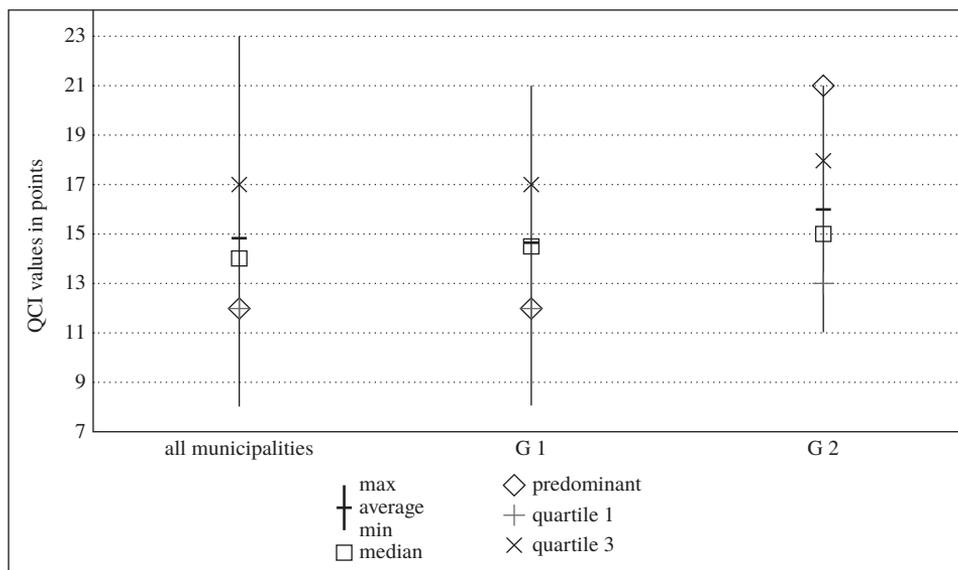


Table 5  
**QCI in creation of public policies (as a % of maximum values of QCI)**

Activity of the Cooperation <sup>a</sup>	Data-sets			
	all (n = 54)	G 1 (n = 24)	G 2 (n = 13)	G 3 (n = 17)
<b>Creation of public policies</b>	<b>44</b>	41	47	43
1. institutionalized civic dialog	<b>28</b>	29	31	24
2. announcing	<b>73</b>	67	77	79
3. act on consultation	<b>34</b>	34	42	26
4. consultation of the Yearly Programme	<b>36</b>	33	38	37
5. rules of conduct	<b>62</b>	50	62	79
6. legislative self-initiatives	<b>20</b>	29	15	12
7. civic participatory budgets	<b>44</b>	46	54	35

<sup>a</sup> As detailed in chapter Methodological approach.

lower (by 13%), compared to these where NGOs had representatives among the executive power.

The above mentioned activities were realized in a different scale in various communities. Activity no. 2 (publishing information about and for the NGOs) was the most commonly realized (only 5,5% of municipalities did not realize it). Also the activity no. 5 (Establishment of the rules of conduct in the field of cooperation between the local government and social organisations as regards legislating on the public policies) was realized by a relatively high share of the communities (above 50%). The least popular was the activity

n. 6 (Establishment of rules of conduct in the field of cooperation between the local government and social organisations as regards legislating on the public policies), only every sixth community allowed it.

There is an observable tendency that shows that the existence of institutionalized civic dialog is much more frequent in the urban areas (more than 50%) than the rural communities. Additionally much more frequent in the communities with the participation of NGO representatives in the community councils rather than represented in the executive power.

The final two activities, that is: the application of rules regarding the legislative self-initiatives as well as the application of the (partial) civic participatory budgets, have a direct influence on the local self governments legislation and budgetary spending. The participatory budgets are applied relatively often (44% of analysed municipalities) whereas the citizens' legislative initiatives are allowed only in less than 20%). More often in the rural areas and in the communities where representatives of the social organisations have their councillors.

And in the dimension of the realisation of public tasks, the cooperation between the local self-governments authorities and the social organisations is also limited—the Index rate is equal 50% of the maximum value. It is considerably higher in the communities where the representatives of the social organisations are councillors, little bit lower (10% relatively) where they are participating in the executive power. The lowest rate (10% below average) can be observed in these communities, where there are no representatives of the social organisations neither in the legislative, nor in the executive.

Among all the above mentioned types of activities, it is the organizing competitive call for tenders (for realizing public tasks) that are the most commonly present in the analysed communities (93% of maximum). On the other side the first element (priority public tasks) entertains the lowest popularity. It is seriously lower in the rural communities—8% of the maximum rate. In practical terms it means that municipality cooperated with the social organisations only in a narrow field—predominantly sport. In this case, it appears that a much stronger predictor is the size of the community rather than the participation of NGOs' representatives in legislative or executive branches of power. These communities which allowed the local initiatives (40% of the analyzed sample) are predominantly these ones with representatives of the social organisations. Additionally this instrument was recognized in urban communities much more often than in rural communities.

In general, in the second group of parameters of the quality of the local self-governance, the most important variables that appeared to be decisive are:

- the participation of the representatives of social organisations in the elections,
- their participation in the executive power,
- the type of the community (rural or urban).

## Conclusions

The political participation of NGOs in local governance is not sufficiently researched field of study. Apart from being active in social dialog, advocacy, lobbying or as watch-dogs, the NGOs perform also classical party functions. Therefore in this paper they were perceived

Table 6

**QCI in realisation of public policies (as a % of maximum values of QCI)**

Activity of the Cooperation <sup>a</sup>	Data-sets			
	all (n = 54)	G 1 (n = 24)	G 2 (n = 13)	G 3 (n = 17)
<b>Realisation of public tasks</b>	<b>50</b>	51	55	45
1. priority public tasks	<b>20</b>	16	31	18
2. call for tenders	<b>93</b>	96	100	82
3. non-financial cooperation	<b>54</b>	56	46	56
4. local initiative	<b>41</b>	46	62	18
5. evaluation	<b>69</b>	73	65	65

<sup>a</sup> As detailed in chapter Methodological approach.

as proto-parties, which answers the recognised deficit in the literature. In their proto-party's roles, the NGOs were equal, and even in some aspects more successful, competitors to the classical party organisations. They effectively offered the political alternative, and by doing so, they channelled the citizens' needs and preferences. Moreover they also recruited important part of the political elites placing many of their representatives in the executive and legislative bodies. Consequently they also participated in the power-sharing, which allowed to test if (and how) they make a difference in the quality of local self-governance. The assumption that had been formulated based on the existing literature suggested higher standards of governance quality, predominantly better cooperation, responsiveness, participation, transparency and, last but not least, accountability. Consequently we can perceive the politically engaged NGOs as local actors who enjoy quite important influence on the politics and policies. This allows us to widen the concept of proto-parties which, so far, was used in the academic discourse in a narrow (and usually negative) meaning.<sup>7</sup> In this paper we analyse NGOs that are politically active on the local level and play important roles traditionally attached to the classical political parties.

NGOs engage in local politics with various attitudes and effectiveness. In majority of cases, as it is proven by this piece of research, they registered electoral committees with sufficient number of listed candidates to capture the salient proportion of available seats. And, even though they revealed much more efficiency compared to other types of electoral committees, this tactics was not sufficient enough to win the substantial number of seats which allowed them govern the specific municipality without a coalition partner.

There is however a clear pattern identified—the smaller the community, the larger the representation of the NGOs in the legislative and executive bodies of the analysed local self-governments. This observation may have serious implications for the future tactics of electoral politics both for the proto-parties and classical parties. The allocation of various types of political resources needs to take into consideration this trend.

<sup>7</sup> Additionally, important to remember, as one of the potential characteristics of political life in Poland, which is valid from the point of view of this analysis, we observe a tendency not to use the word "party" in the party names. This is a result of a highly pejorative connotation of this word in public debate. Due to the communist party in the more distant past as well as due to the compromised parties more recent past the vast majority of political parties avoid the name party.

The provided analysis does not indicate that the participation of the NGOs representatives in the local power structures improves the quality of governance as measured by the two proposed indexes. But it is illegitimate to claim that the participation of NGOs in local politics has no influence on the quality of the governance quality and the functioning of local communities. However this picture needs to be nuanced. The cooperation of self-governments with the NGOs was realised at low and average levels (which is illustrated with the QCI values). On higher level of the cooperation were realised these tasks that are obligatory in nature (e.g. calls for applications). On lower levels—the facultative ones (e.g. non-financial cooperation). What is more important, we observe the widening gap between the normative dimension and the “on the ground” realisation of public tasks, in other words the theory and practice of this cooperation. The expectations as well as the available “cooperation infrastructure” remain empty shells in confrontation with the “on the ground actions” and attitudes of the local actors.

In the rural communities however there are lower values of the QCI observed. The reason for this is predominantly the weaker developed third sector and the fact that the social activities are conducted in a non-formalised way (Halamska 2008). The relations and communication between the public authorities and the society are much more personalized and much less institutionalized. At the same time it is important to remember that—from the political system point of view—Poland is one of the most centralized states in relative terms (considering the distribution of tasks, competences and financial resources across the national, regional and local levels of governance). As a result the cooperation between the local authorities and social organizations takes place predominantly in the field of sport and culture (Skrzypiec 2014). In such circumstances, the locally engaged NGOs become natural participants of public life, including the political life, and play the role of the socializing institutions—they fill the “political vacuum.” Participation in the executive power is much stronger positively correlated with such activities as legislative self-initiatives, non-financial cooperation and the evaluation of the Program of Cooperation between social organisations and the local self-government. Taking the council seats by the NGOs is positively correlated with the cooperation quality in normative dimension (generating local legal acts, conditions for cooperation).

In general, however, this study shows that the participation of NGOs in power-sharing does not correlate positively with the quality of governance at statistically significant level. Therefore it is legitimate to claim that they do not bring to the local political system much added value (in qualitative terms) but rather they act as the proto-parties. They substitute the classical political parties offering alternative political vehicles that are very effective in electoral politics. However they do not contribute to the local political system in a way that would bring qualitative change and therefore should be treated as nothing else but just proto-parties (non-party actors performing the classical party functions).

The undertaken research contributes to the important field of studies on local self-governance qualities and political participation of non-party actors. It has a lot of scholarly potential which may be explored in line with alternative variables based on cultural determinants, recruitment strategies, modes of governance, etc. At the same time, it allowed to refresh the scholarly reflection on proto-parties, widening the concept beyond the traditional definitions rooted very much in the tradition of transitology.

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