

Aspirations of local communities in the context of the dualism of the development of Polish municipalities

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Abstract. The subject of this article is the development aspirations of local communities. The aim of the paper is to assess the diversity of development aspirations of local communities in municipalities representing different development dualisms and to identify the impact of opposing features of each dualism on the aspirations expressed by representatives of these communities. Achieving this objective was accomplished by conducting in-depth interviews in 36 municipalities representing different development dualisms and their features. The results confirmed that the dimensions of dualisms – conditioned by different development factors – are characterised by aspirations unique to local communities representing specific feature of dualism. At the same time, some development aspirations can be considered universal.

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1. Introduction

Understanding and analysing the aspirations of local government communities is important from both a scientific and a practical point of view. Among the many definitions of the concept of aspirations, as extensively discussed by Syrek (1986), identifying aspirations with desires for the future that an individual or a social group wishes to realise aligns closely with the approach presented in the study. In the field of politics and political science, aspirations can be considered, for example, in the context of power and governance. Aspirations, which can be equated with goals, are relevant in the context of both those who exercise power and those over whom power is exercised. Power itself is embedded in shared values, which are translated into goals derived from aspirations (Scott, 2006).

The relationship between power and aspiration can also be reduced to the problem of ensuring that local communities have an adequate level of well-being, which is both a multifaceted and interdependent concept (Kjær, 2009). Sociology, on the other hand, considers aspirations in the context of their sources arising from personal characteristics and those derived from the characteristics of the environment in which the person lives – the psychological and social nature of aspirations according to Syrek (1986). They are also examined in the context of the satisfaction that can be derived from the realisation of goals (Blau, 2009). According to Marody (1987: 132), aspirations, together with values, can be seen as "factors that direct and trigger action" – both at the individual and group level. Thus, environmental aspirations not only have a sociological dimension – they also refer to network relations that are discussed in many development concepts. In economics, for example, this aspect is raised as one of the important factors in shaping competitive advantage. Porter (2001) draws attention to "demanding customers" as one of several elements essential for building the competitive advantage of clusters, industries and even entire nations. Similarly, at the level of spatial economics and governance, the aspirations of local communities can be viewed through the prism of a development factor as well as a resource that can be used to achieve development goals. One definition of local development even uses aspirations as a determinant of development processes: "(...) the conscious realisation of the aspirations of stakeholders living in the area" (Dziemianowicz, 2023: 71).

A distinction must be made between needs and aspirations. The former refer to basic requirements – fundamental to the life of individuals and social

groups. Needs and the level to which they are met provide the platform for discussing poverty or deprivation (Lister, 2007).

Aspirations, on the other hand, go beyond basic needs and represent a higher level of objectives, goals, and dreams. When discussing the factors that differentiate the aspirations of individuals and social groups, personality and environmental factors arise. Without deciding which is the more important determinant of aspirations, this article assumes that the environment in which local communities live, through its diversity, is also a source of different aspirations. For this purpose, we use the category of development dualism, which in territorial terms denotes the duality of development of specific territories (Cybulska et al., 2022).

At the social level, two dualisms can be distinguished: prosperity and poverty, and activity and passivity (see Giddens, 2012). Referring to Landes' book (2000), one can formulate the thesis that there is a long history of dual development. The differences between the rich and the poor have different determinants (e.g. geographical and historical factors), but poverty seems to be a factor that is difficult to eliminate or to narrow the gap between the rich and the poor (see e.g. Cybulska et al., 2022). Historical conditions are seen in the context of social capital, which also influences the development of institutions. Therefore, the second type of social dualism is called "activity-passivity". Differences between active and passive municipalities can be seen in the level of development of different types of social capital (Putnam, 1995) and in the development of social networks. What is crucial for local development, policy-making – the quadruple helix – does not always have the opportunity to develop adequately in municipalities where passive attitudes prevail, including among local authorities (Leydesdorff, 2012).

Economic dualism is related to the poverty-prosperity dualism discussed above, but it manifests itself mainly in the operation of two or more economic systems (Phillips, 1965), such as the market economy and the socialist economy, as well as within countries: agriculture-industry (Bonatti & Haiduk, 2010). In this article, we point to two other types of economic dualism: innovation-imitation and contractual work-self-employment. The first suggests that some municipalities have the privilege of creating a local environment for innovation, along the lines of regional innovation systems. This possibility stems from the fact that a municipality has both innovative individuals and institutions, as well as developed relationships between them and the outside world (Tödtling & Trippel, 2011).

Municipalities that lack such resources are forced to imitate solutions created in other regions or to slowly build up their own innovation capacity. This is consistent with Schumpeter's (1960) triad, but also with the pattern of regions moving from lower to higher levels of innovation (Foray, 2015). In turn, the dualism of wage labour and self-employment highlights the issue of the differential functioning of local units, where some are dominated by firms that need large numbers of hands to work, and others rely on the local entrepreneurship of residents. Often the dominance of large workplaces leads to economic monoculture (Jałowiecki, 2008). Entrepreneurship, in turn, can be treated as a personality trait (Gerber, 2007), but also as one of the ways to achieve innovation (referring to Schumpeter's triad) (Dziemianowicz & Jarczewski, 2021).

We address the spatial duality in the following dimensions: core-periphery and accessible-inaccessible space. The core-periphery dichotomy, which has been described by many researchers in the context of development disparities and development opportunities, is treated by us as the difference between central growth poles and peripheries – areas from which resources and development factors are drained. The centre is treated here as a growth pole and later as a spatial region that develops faster than others (Hirschmann, 1958) and strongly influences its surroundings (Grzeszczak, 1999). In turn, accessible and inaccessible space emphasises the differences in development conditions in local government units depending on whether they are well or poorly connected internally. This approach requires attention to the fact that accessibility can have both a temporal and a spatial dimension (Rosik, 2021).

The aim of the paper is to assess the diversification of development aspirations of local communities in municipalities representing different development dualisms and to identify the impact of opposing features of each dualism on the aspirations expressed by representatives of these communities.

We address the following research questions:

1. Are there development aspirations that can be considered universal, independent of the environment in which local communities live?
2. How does the diversity of the environment, expressed through the opposing features of specific dualisms, determine the development aspirations of the local community?

The brief overview of the shades of aspirations and dualism described above allows us to formulate the hypothesis of this article: The dimension of

dualism and its opposing features determine the development aspirations of municipalities.

2. Research materials and methods

The article presents conclusions from research conducted in municipalities assigned to six dualisms, each described by two opposing features. In the first step, for each of the dualisms, the municipalities were selected in their own specific way using mainly statistical indicators from 2016-2018 (Table 1). We selected 25 municipalities for each feature of dualism (a group of 300 municipalities).

The next step was to select three municipalities for each feature of six dualisms (see Fig. 1). These case studies were selected based on the following factors: the characteristics indicated by the municipalities in the survey, which confirmed the municipality's affiliation with dualism, and the willingness to participate in an in-depth study. At the same time, efforts were made to select municipalities with similar statistical indicator values.

Below is a brief overview of the municipalities selected as case studies (Table 2). We started the field research in 2022, so we present the data from that year. We take the level of own income per capita as a general indicator of development. In addition to the prosperity dimension, municipalities with a specific employment structure are also distinguished by their level of development. The municipalities analysed are also characterised by varying sizes (e.g. large cities predominate among the innovative and core municipalities). Rural municipalities, on the other hand, are more characteristic of the periphery or imitation.

In each case study (36 municipalities), interviews were conducted with representatives of the authorities and the municipal office responsible for issues related to the dimension of dualism analysed, the chairman of the municipal council, councillors, entrepreneurs, representatives of the scientific community and representatives of NGOs. The number of interviews conducted in each municipality ranged from 5 to 18. In the qualitative analysis of the empirical material, a categorisation method was used based solely on the collected empirical material, without any assumptions made prior to the coding process. First, each respondent's statement was coded and then assigned to the appropriate feature of dualism. The analysis did not take into account the number of individual statements previously categorised, but rather the number of municipalities in which at least one respondent mentioned a particular category

Table 1. Type of dualisms and data with source

type of dualism	dimension of dualism described by two opposing features	data (source)	indicator values for groups of 25 municipalities in each dualism feature (min. and max. values)
social	prosperity-poverty	own income per capita, PLN (Statistics Poland)	prosperity: 5110 – 43000 poverty: 587 – 700
	activity-passivity	sum of standardised indicators: voter turnout and spending of European funds per capita (State Election Commission data, budget reports of the Ministry of Finance)	activity: 3.9 – 13.7 passivity: (-3.8) – (-2.9)
	innovation-imitation	number of enterprises in the high-tech sector per 1,000 enterprises (Statistics Poland)	innovation: 5.7 – 15.2
economic		number of enterprises in the low-tech sector per 1,000 enterprises (Statistics Poland)	imitation: 190.6 – 393.9
	self-employment-contractual work	number of individuals engaged in business per 1,000 residents (Statistics Poland)	self-employment: 137 – 299
		share of enterprises employing at least 250 people in the total number of enterprises in the municipality, % (Statistics Poland)	contractual work: 0.36 – 1.43
spatial	core-periphery	voivodeship capitals according to the administrative division of 1975-1998	core: none
		travel time to the relevant district city, minutes (database from: Stepniak et al. 2017)	periphery: 58.0 – 85.4
	accessible space-space of limited accessibility	travel time to the appropriate municipality office, minutes (database from: Stepniak et al. 2017)	accessible space: 0.21 – 1.46 space with limited accessibility: 21.2 – 27.5

Source: Own elaboration

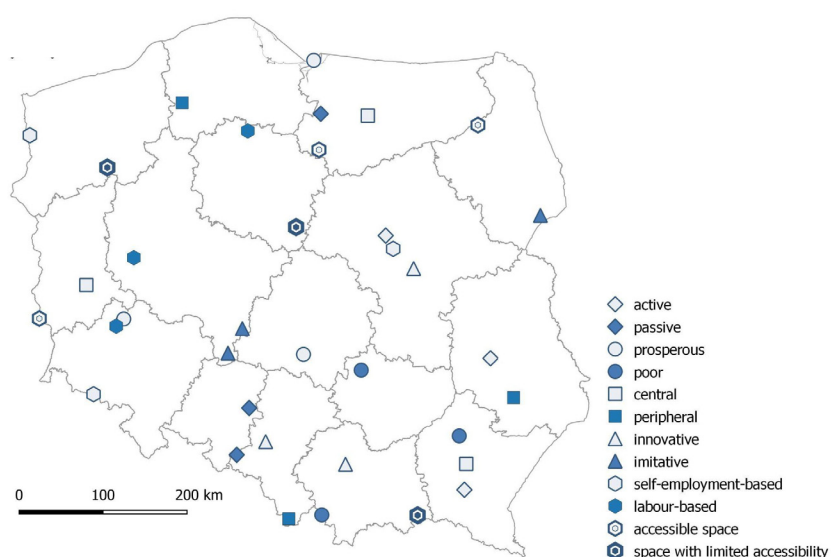


Fig. 1. Municipalities selected for the in-depth study

Source: Own elaboration based on proper data (see Table 1)

Table 2. Basic characteristics of the 36 municipalities

Feature of dualism	Number of municipalities of each type			Number of residents		Own income per capita, PLN	
	urban	rural	urban-rural	min.	max.	min.	max.
prosperity	1	2	-	1173	6208	9983	32749
poverty	-	2	1	6058	8196	1489	1545
activity	-	3	-	7582	14468	1810	3481
passivity	-	1	2	4804	6227	2521	3036
innovation	3	-	-	21116	803282	5275	5827
imitation	-	3	-	1351	8279	3999	6257
self-employment	1	1	1	4321	31417	4441	9598
contractual work	-	1	2	5430	26915	2830	10142
core	3	-	-	139278	197181	4398	4534
periphery	-	3	-	3179	8401	1903	3072
accessible space	2	1	-	2277	21089	3271	5410
space of limited accessibility	-	2	1	4662	7357	2961	3311
summary	10	19	7	mean: 49480		mean: 5237	

Source: Own elaboration based on Statistics Poland data

of aspirations. In the first stage of the analysis, all categories of aspirations were taken into account, while the hypothesis test was based only on those categories that corresponded to a single feature of each dualism.

3. Research results

3.1. Universal aspirations

Municipalities, regardless of which dualism and dualism feature they represent, strive to retain or attract young people. They also aim to become more ecological and enhance their tourist potential based on natural assets. The development of road and technical infrastructure, including high-speed Internet, good internal and external connections served by sustainable public transport, as well as economic development, innovativeness, and support for the private sector, remain universal aspirations. Additionally, active residents engaged in municipal affairs and a diverse cultural offer that encourages social, public, and civic involvement are also one of key aspirations.

3.2. Aspirations assigned to different dualisms

When verifying the hypothesis, we identified aspirations that were indicated exclusively by

municipalities representing one of the two features of each dualism (Table 3).

3.3. Prosperity – poverty

Municipalities of high revenues aspire to be even better adapted to the changing economic model and labour market than they currently are. This may also indicate that the good financial condition of these municipalities is the result of, among other factors, relatively greater economic flexibility, which translates into higher incomes.

When asked about their vision of the municipality in 2030, respondents described it as an ecological, modern, and innovative, but also more economically resilient community, with a stable and diversified labour market. The better financial situation of the municipality also leads to redirecting development aspirations towards the post-materialist goals, which embrace the mental well-being of the residents and a stronger locality. This is consistent with Ronald Inglehart's (1977) theory of human development, according to which a high material standard of living is accompanied by greater aspirations concerning quality of life (Zdziech, 2010). At the same time, the needs of municipalities classified as the poor seem to be a projection of their current problems, i.e. insufficient number of workplaces, underused development potential, poor internal and external transportation system, as well as technological, infrastructural, and service backlog. Greater

Table 3. Aspirations that differentiate municipalities due to the opposing features of the six dualisms (the number of municipalities in which such an aspiration was expressed is given in brackets, with the maximum number being 3)

prosperity	poverty
Ecological, environmentally friendly technologies (2)	New jobs (3)
Modern, innovative (1)	Greater integration in the municipality (2)
Stable labour market (2)	Better use of landscape, natural or historical assests (2)
Economically resilient (adapting to the capabilities of the local economy and responding to changing circumstances) (2)	Well-connected internally and externally (2)
Diversified labour market (1)	Catching up on technological backlogs (1)
Happy residents (1)	More open residents (1)
Strong localness (1)	Better access to health care (2)
A more peaceful municipality (1)	
activity	passivity
Developed cultural base and offer (3)	Better work of the office and better management (2)
Offering new jobs based on local resources (1)	New jobs (2)
Better cooperation between the municipality and business (1)	More apartments (2)
Cooperating with the poviats and other municipalities (1)	Being a leader in any field (1)
	Greater integration within the municipality (1)
	Open to people's initiatives (1)
innovation	imitation
Economically resilient (adapting to the capabilities of the local economy and responding to changing circumstances) (2)	New jobs (3)
Implementing the principles of circular economy (1)	One large employer (1)
Cooperation between municipal schools and other schools, universities and foreign institutions (2)	Industrialised (factories) (1)
Cooperation between the university and business (1)	Stronger industry based on local agriculture (1)
Creative (1)	Receiving external aid (2)
Respecting diversity (1)	Debt-free, financially stable (1)
Actively taking advantage of opportunities (1)	Cooperation between the municipality and business (1)
Developing its specialization (1)	Open to changes (1)
More active residents cooperating for the benefit of the municipality (2)	
Open to people's initiatives (1)	
Open to changes (1)	
self-employment	contractual work
Moving away from its agricultural character (1)	Developed economy, entrepreneurial and investor-friendly (2)
Using its potential (1)	Making profits on endogenous resources (1)
Better use of landscape, natural or historical assets (2)	Diversified labour market (1)
Developing its specialization (1)	Jobs adequate to residents' qualifications (1)
More municipal properties and municipal businesses (1)	With a strong leader (1)
	Independent (1)
core	periphery
The increasing importance of the city as a growth pole/metropolis (3)	Receiving external aid (1)
Attractive, well-paid jobs (1)	Moving away from its agricultural character (1)
Cooperating in the international field (1)	Computerized municipality with competent residents in this area (3)
Cooperation between the university and business (2)	Healthier lifestyle (1)
A stronger academic centre (1)	Better use of landscape, natural or historical values (1)
Education adapted to the labour market (1)	Silver tourism (1)
Well-planned (also spatially) and predictable (1)	Well-developed sports and recreational base (1)
	Adapting the local spatial development plan to development needs (1)
accessible space	space of limited accessibility
Making better use of its border location (1)	Better accessibility of the office, closer to everywhere (1)
	Independent of a stronger neighbour, offering everything on site (1)

Source: Own elaboration based on in-depth interviews

openness among residents to new initiatives in the municipality could be the first step in the process of overcoming its poor socio-economic situation.

"Residents have to be more active and open to initiatives. (...) Nowadays, it is difficult to pull someone out of the house, especially young people who are not very active. Young people of school age can be involved somehow, but not older ones". (representative of the Dzikowiec municipality office)

3.4. Activity – passivity

Socially active municipalities strive for a more diversified cultural offer and infrastructure. Culture improves the quality of life and remains closely related to the economy, being a source of innovation and added value (Klasik, 2010). Active municipalities also aspire to better utilize local resources in creating workplaces, as well as multifaceted cooperation between the municipality, other local government units, and businesses.

The study proved that social activity is usually accompanied by greater sensitivity to the quality of social capital. Unlike active municipalities, the passive ones focus on improving the management of the office and the municipality in general, as well as to solve existential problems by providing residents with jobs and housing. Existential security is of primary importance in the democratisation process. It guarantees the implementation of self-expressive values (Zdziech, 2010). Passive municipalities also expressed a desire for greater openness to bottom-up initiatives, stronger integration of residents, and greater recognition among other units. They are characterized by the current withdrawal and passivity of both the residents and the local authorities – the latter are expected to take responsibility for every possible initiative.

3.5. Innovation – imitation

Innovative municipalities are much more aware of economic sectors recognised as innovative. As a result, they wish to base their future development on the circular economy, new industries that build greater economic resilience, and developing smart specialisations of the region, as well as on the cooperation between schools, universities, foreign institutions, and businesses. Active residents involved in public affairs are also significant.

"In 2030, the municipality will offer an environment that facilitates, supports, and partially finances

people that have new ideas." (businessmen from the municipality of Gliwice)

Innovativeness is also manifested in the constant search for better and improved solutions instead of duplicating what other cities have achieved.

"Learning from the mistakes of other cities will allow us to do something new." (businessmen from the municipality of Gliwice)

In the perspective of 2030, the imitating municipalities aspire to be financially stable, debt-free, and active in using various forms of external support and creating new jobs, but not necessarily in industries that align with the trends of the modern economy. Other aspirations such as a greater openness to changes and better cooperation with businesses, point to the current factors contributing to low innovativeness. Some imitating municipalities expressed their unrealistic over-optimism (being modern and wealthy in 2030), while others had pessimistic visions predicting the decline of the municipality.

"The municipality will probably not survive. Young people leave, the municipality has no resources, its development is limited by different forms of nature protection and the lack of investment from the state." (representative of NGOs, the municipality of Dubicze Cerkiewne)

3.6. Self-employment – contractual work

There is a strong relationship between self-employment and striving for a better use of the values and development potential of the municipality, as well as for deepening its specialisation. The high level of entrepreneurship encourages reflection on the possibility of such an involvement of the municipality as a self-government unit in the development of local specialisation so that it can derive greater income from developing specific industries.

The municipality's participation in the revenues generated by profitable industries may become its development ambition. Some municipalities dominated by large employers expressed the ambition to break this dependence - they strive for greater diversification of the local labour market by creating conditions conducive to the development of small entrepreneurship. The implementation of these ambitions often requires a strong leader who can

push the municipality off its current development path.

"We aspire to become a municipality with diversified industrial and service activities that would give us higher revenues and attract young, well-educated people." (representative of the education sector, the municipality of Osie)

3.7. Core – periphery

Central municipalities represented by three big cities strive to become significant urban cores or metropolises, cooperate with international partners, make better use of their academic function, and adapt education to the needs of the labour market.

"Our aspiration is education that aligns with the needs of the local labour market since currently, the education is developed in sectors with too much supply of workers" (councillor of the municipality of Rzeszów)

The cities under study also aspire to be well-planned, predictable, and sustainable in terms of space. Unlike them, rural municipalities aim at overcoming both the economic and the spatial peripherality. Some of them declare the ambition to change the agricultural character of the municipality and benefit from external financial support. What distinguishes them from the central municipalities are the expectations towards the labour market. In 2030, it should be adapted to the education of residents, and not – as was the case in central municipalities – education adapted to the needs of the labour market.

"In 2030, there should be an increase in the number of jobs that are adequate to the education of the residents." (representative of NGOs, the municipality of Koczała)

Peripheral municipalities want to mitigate these problems by digitization (remote work), adjusting local plans to the development needs, and making better use of the peripherality associated with "slow living", agrotourism, sports and recreational infrastructure, the silver economy, silver tourism, and the promotion of a healthy lifestyle.

3.8. Accessible space – space of limited accessibility

In the case of accessibility, differences in development aspirations turned out to be less related to the space compared to the core – periphery dualism. The research proved that the proximity to the municipal office is a less important manifestation of accessibility and does not significantly shape development needs. While none of the respondents' future visions of accessible municipalities can be considered a result of the proximity to the municipal office, some of the development needs of the communities with limited accessibility express a desire to solve the problem of the too large spatial distance to the municipal office and other facilities important for everyday functioning by improving public transport.

4. Discussion

With regard to the results of the study, it is important to highlight several issues that have already been the subject of general academic discourse. The first is the nature of aspirations, which, based on the research, can be reduced to two types. The first type includes aspirations related to satisfaction, contentment or acceptance of the status quo, and the need to continue with certain activities. The second type involves aspirations strongly related to the need to change the situation. In this context, aspirational traps are also important. Muller et al. (2024) indicate three sources of traps: lack of awareness, low self-esteem, and conscious choice. The authors define aspirational traps as situations where there are low aspirations and high opportunities available in the environment of an individual or organization. Another type of behaviour leading to the poverty trap occurs with low aspirations and low opportunities. Local units characterized by high aspirations are in a better situation. However, in cases of limited opportunities, they may experience frustration. Nonetheless, there are known examples of development based on local resources, i.e. bottom-up development (Perry, 2010), which can lead to development despite few external opportunities. In practice, those municipalities characterized by high aspirations co-occurring with opportunities in the environment are in the best situation. Of course, it is still debatable to what extent high aspirations are associated with high internal capabilities (including human resources) allowing the use of

opportunities. Aoki (2020) compares aspirations with the high capabilities of local governments as a path to creating innovations, but also to taking on a leadership role in development processes.

The aspirations of local communities representing desirable development directions (regardless of dualism) aim to make even better use of the factors that contributed to their position within the given dualism. In this case, the link between the aspirations and the current development situation of the municipality is more pronounced. What might explain why certain conditions are simultaneously linked to specific sets of aspirations? The shaping of development, linked both to the specificity of existing internal characteristics and to the appropriate long-term management by local authorities, aligns with the concept of so-called long-term processes, which assume a relational approach connecting the past and the future (Domański et al., 2010). As a result of the historical processes that take place, institutional and social arrangements and repetitive mechanisms are formed in accordance with the assumptions of the concept of path-dependence (Arthur, 1989). The achievement of aspirations by a local community can lead to entry into the next stages of development (as a result of policies that target internal resources), but local authorities need to consider at least two principles concerning the realisation of aspirations. As Blau (2009) points out, the first is about changing aspirations and expectations of rewards. The realisation of this principle can be seen as a driver of change. The marginal principle, on the other hand, speaks of the decreasing significance of rewards (fulfilment of aspirations) as people or social groups become increasingly satisfied with their goals. It seems that this mechanism can be seen as an inhibiting factor.

The aspirations of local communities representing undesirable development features reflect either the causes of the negative situation or ideas for mitigating these problems. A negative development direction can also result in a loss of faith in a better future, leading to a passive attitude towards factors that could potentially bring about positive change. When the poor fail to see a better tomorrow in which their well-being could be much higher, they do not take action to improve their future, and consequently become even more stuck in a poverty trap (Duflo, 2013). This insight relates to the concept of the "capacity to aspire" (Appadurai, 2004), where low-income households usually aspire for less due to their present conditions. The capacity to aspire is shaped not only by access to various resources but also by broader social determinants (Genicot

& Ray, 2017). This is exemplified by research on rural communities in Pakistan, which revealed that income, assets (wealth), social status, education for children, and security are typical aspirational themes in these communities (Kosec & Mo, 2017).

Translating the aspirations of different local communities into actual development processes, on the other hand, is anchored in the path creation approach (Garud & Karnøe, 2003). A legitimate question in this context is: Do needs that are strictly related to development deficits in an area translate into action by local authorities? The discussion on this topic can be embedded in existing research on local authorities' actions, as well as in research on the problems of engaging local communities in development activities (e.g. Dziemianowicz & Cybulska, 2019). The study conducted focused on aspirations or general expectations, which Blau (2009) treats as only one of three types. Considering the other two: specific expectations (which also take into account the issue of rewards) and relative expectations (concerning the relationship between the benefits of realising aspirations and the necessary costs), further areas of research on the relationship between aspirations and dualism can be outlined.

5. Conclusions

The hypothesis put forward in the introduction about the differences in the development aspirations of local communities between dimensions of dualisms and their opposing features was confirmed. The aspirations expressed by the representatives of municipalities with different specificities differed and showed a character directly or indirectly related to the dimension of dualism represented. At the same time, the obvious result is that some of the aspirations can be considered universal, due, among other things, to the impact of national trends on municipalities (such as an ageing population) or to certain basic needs, such as the development of entrepreneurship, which will always take place, only at different levels and to different extents.

Despite the complexity of the course of development processes, dualisms manifest their intrinsic specificity in terms of development aspirations. There are, therefore, related characteristics that somehow guide development, and so it can be said that the aspirations of local communities are de facto derived from the development opportunities that a place offers them.

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