

## METHODOLOGY OF STUDYING PREFERENCES AMONG RURAL RESIDENTS AS ELEMENT OF PROCEDURE FOR PUBLIC LAND MANAGEMENT IN RURAL AREAS

Elzbieta Szafranko, Joanna A. Pawlowicz  
University of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn, Poland  
elasz@uwm.edu.pl

**Abstract.** Business activities conducted in rural areas are associated with crop cultivation, animal rearing and agricultural produce processing. The countryside residents, after hard work, should be offered a chance of having pleasant leisure time activities. In general, the ambient conditions in rural areas provide many opportunities, but the surroundings should be adapted as to allow the pursuit of various forms of recreation. Another reason justifying the allocation of some land in villages to recreational purposes is the need to satisfy expectations of holidaymakers, who increasingly often choose agritourism as a form of summer holiday. This article will discuss the methodology, which can be applied to exploring opinions of village residents and to processing data sets needed to identify the most desirable forms of the management of land for recreational purposes in the countryside, using a rural commune in north-eastern Poland as an example. This part of Poland has certain distinguishing features, including a low level of urbanisation, and the local residents responding to the survey suggested what type of investment projects would stimulate the further development of their commune.

**Keywords:** land management, survey research, preferences of rural residents.

### Introduction

The north-eastern part of Poland is endowed with unique natural qualities. There are over 3,000 lakes in this region, and the forested land makes up 30 % of the whole surface area. Another distinguishing feature is the small number of towns. Reversely, there are numerous villages and hamlets, with small populations. According to the statistical data of 2014, the population density was the lowest in Poland, and equaled 60 persons per square kilometer, dropping down to 25 persons per 1 km<sup>2</sup> in the countryside. The whole region is at a low risk of intensive development. On the other hand, there are numerous areas or single objects designated as legally protected elements of nature. The few and scattered towns found in this Polish region are underinvested and their residents complain about an inadequate supply of basic technical infrastructure facilities. Most inhabitants of rural areas work in agriculture [1-3].

Despite a certain measure of backwardness, there is a notably growing awareness of the local residents, who articulate many needs aiming at improvement of the living standards. The situation is definitely made better owing to development projects funded from the EU funds [4; 5], especially the ones which improve the access to amenities (wireless internet, digital terrestrial television, roads). It is certain that the identification of current needs in the region is aided by the growing number of tourists, who travel here in search for close contact with nature, yet expect a certain level of living standards.

The influx of visitors from different parts of the world stimulates aspirations of the inhabitants of rural communes in northeastern Poland. Social initiatives are undertaken by many local communities with the purpose of managing the available public space. On the other hand, the development strategies of many communes include provisions for public consultations in matters, which concern good management of space [6-8].

### The research objective and method

Taking into account the above considerations, a study was designed with the purpose of collecting effectively opinions of residents of a rural commune regarding the management of their nearest surroundings and the process of planning public investments. The study was conducted in a model commune, situated about 60 km away from a town, which functions as the administration, cultural, social and economic center.

The investigations were based on a review of relevant documents and literature, surveys and in-depth interviews of the commune's residents based on a previously prepared scenario. The analysis of documentation and references provided basic information about the analysed commune. The other research instruments served to evaluate to what extent the residents were aware of their needs and were willing to participate in transformation of their environment.

## Material and methods

The survey research was divided into two principal parts. The first one included a diagnostic study of the current situation and collection of opinions about the present standard of living in the commune. The second stage dealt with the expectations of the commune's inhabitants with respect to development investments and their ideas how publically accessible areas should be developed and managed. In total, 360 persons, residents of 37 localities in the commune, participated in the research.

### Part 1 of the research.

Two surveys and two interview scenarios were prepared to conduct the study. The respondents were asked 22 questions. The diagram on Figure 1 shows a template of the questionnaire, and Figure 2 illustrates the results.

### Part 2 of the research.

Having analysed the replies received to the first questionnaire, another survey was prepared, which contained questions dealing with important actions and investments in land management and further development of the commune. The list of suggested actions included:

1. Modernisation and expansion of the road grid.
2. Construction of car parks.
3. Implementation of better waste management principles.
4. Expansion and modernisation of waterworks and sewers.
5. Support to the development of agritourism facilities.
6. Support to the development of tourism.
7. Construction of waterworks.
8. Support to the development of sports and recreation.

Support to initiatives of local community in the scope of culture, preservation of local tradition, education and protection of the natural environment.

Questionnaire					
How do you evaluate the following elements in your commune: *					
No.	Question:	Bad	Poor	Good	Very good
1	Safety?		X		
2	Street lights?		X		
3	Waterworks?			X	
4	Sewers?		X		
5	Gas pipes?				
6	Electric power system?				
7	Access to internet?				
8	Telephones?				
9	Roads?				
10	Car parks?				
11	Public transport?				
12	Attractiveness to investors?				
13	Tourist accommodation facilities?				
14	Restaurants and other catering facilities?				
15	Tourism offer?				
16	State of the natural environment?				
17	Cleanliness and aesthetic quality in the commune?				
18	The work of offices?				
19	Range of cultural events?				
20	Range of sports events?				
21	Education?				
22	What do you think your commune should be like? (own answer)				
* sign the answer in the right place					

Fig. 1. Questionnaire for survey research

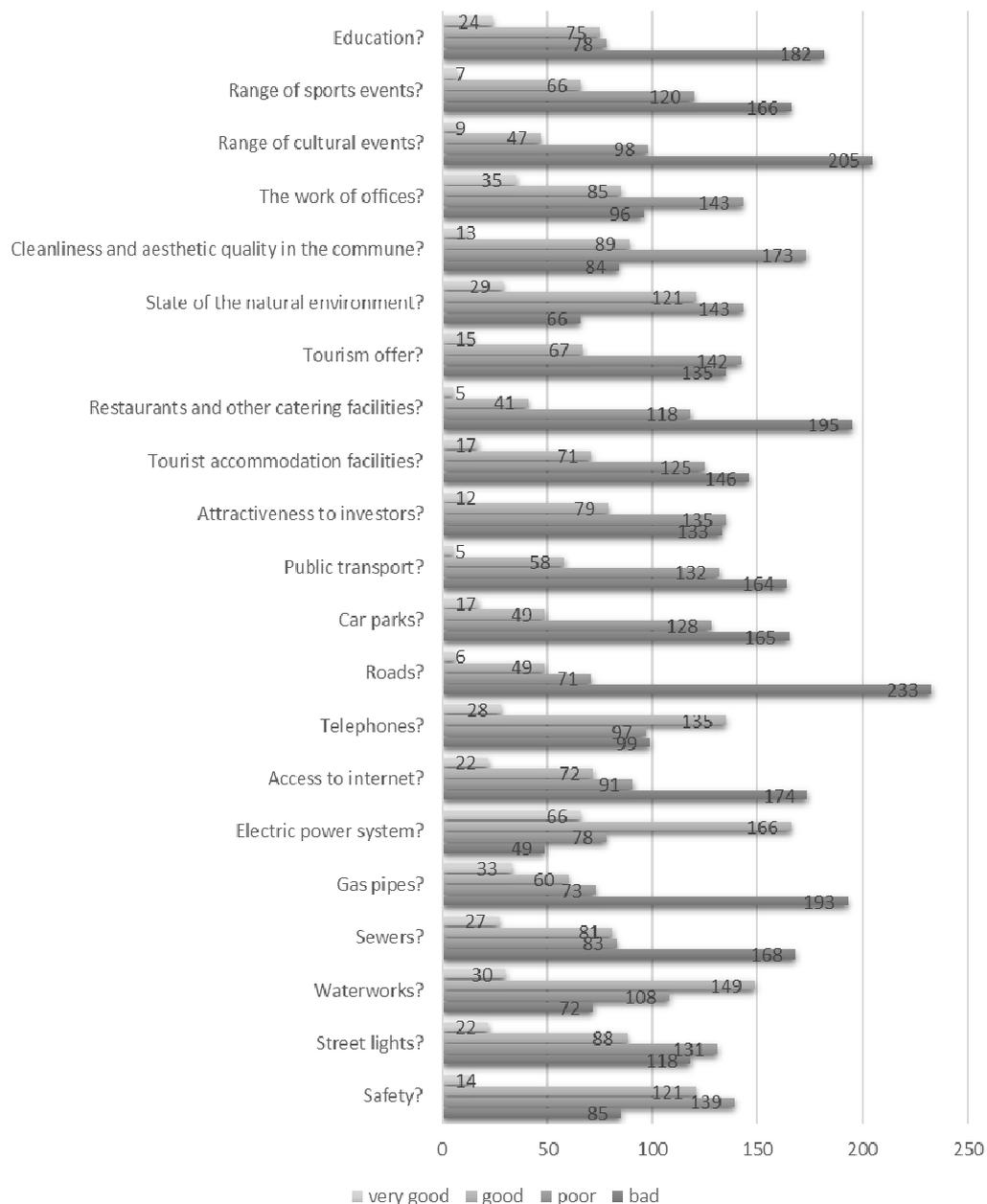


Fig. 2. Illustration of survey results per question

## Results

The results of this preliminary survey showed that the poorest value was assigned to the current state of order and aesthetic quality of the commune, the condition of roads and transport routes, and the range of cultural, sports and educational opportunities. Over 60 % of the respondents indicated that the commune in which they lived should develop towards becoming an area with tourist and recreational functions, while 45 % suggested that the cultural function should gain more importance drawing on the commune's cultural heritage. Details of the survey are shown in the diagram in Fig. 3.

When filling in the questionnaire, the respondents were instructed to provide answers on a scale from 1 to 5 (where 1 meant a rather unimportant task, and 5 stood for a very important task) while evaluating the importance of goals related to the development of the commune's area. The following were evaluated as priority tasks: modernisation and expansion of roads and car parks in the commune (average score of 4.42), as well as the modernisation and expansion of the sewerage system in villages situated in the commune (average score of 4.01). The respondents claimed that the third most important task of their commune is to support tradition-based initiatives of the local community (average score of 3.76)

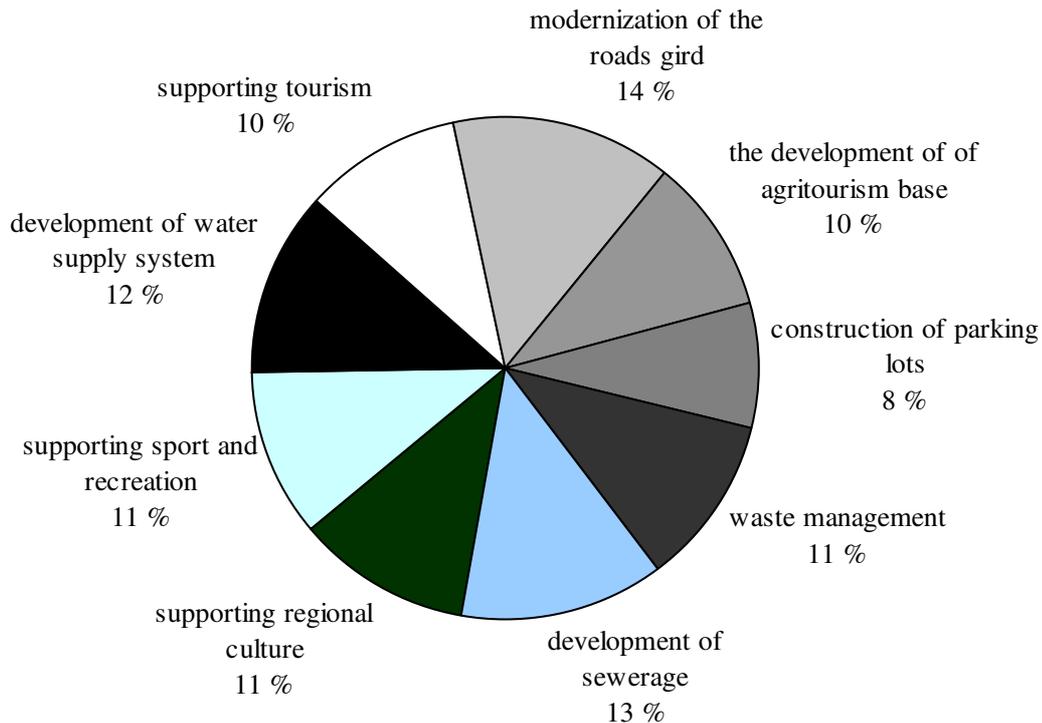


Fig. 3. Details of survey research

When these results were analysed, the subsequent stage of the research was completed, which consisted of in-depth interviews with residents. The interviews were carried out according to a scenario developed on the basis of the survey results. The aim was to point to specific tasks, as implicated by the needs diagnosed in the survey (Figure 4). The interviewees declared that the most important tasks were:

1. Constructing street lights in villages, repairs of bus stops and bus stop shelters, repairs of old and construction of new pavements.
2. Expanding the system of waterworks and sewers, and making it possible for residents to connect their houses to these facilities.
3. Ensuring wide access to the Internet.
4. Creating tourist trails.
5. Expanding the facilities used for sports and recreation (beaches, marinas, sports grounds, outdoor fitness facilities).
6. Building cycling trails with adequate infrastructure (areas for stopovers and camping).
7. Bringing more diversity to the tourism industry facilities – theme agritourism.
8. Building theme villages (a fishermen's village, a farmers' hamlet, a settlement of animal breeders).

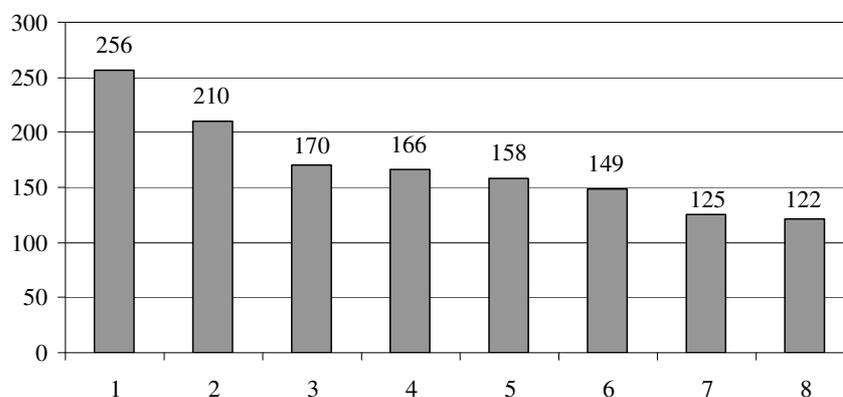


Fig. 4. Number of votes cast by respondents on investments 1-8

## Conclusions

1. The study allowed us to identify the strategic needs declared by the residents.
2. The division of the study into stages meant that we were able first to identify the strategic goals, and next to determine detailed needs with respect to land management.
3. The surveys and scenario-based face-to-face interviews were also helpful to the residents of villages, who could realise what they needed and share their opinions on a broader forum. Consequently, certain mechanisms are created, which activate local communities and evoke the sense of being responsible for the nearest environment. The initiatives, which are undertaken in the course of such a procedure, are generally approved by the local community and help form social bonds.

The field research methodology presented in this article, which divided the procedure into stages and employed two different data collection methods, proved to be efficient. In the consecutive stages, from posing general questions to identifying detailed problems, the research revealed how members of rural communities can have an influence on the shape of their surroundings and on the execution of the most essential development projects.

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