

DIFFERENCES IN LOCAL DEVELOPMENT CONDITIONS IN LAND COUNTIES IN POLAND DEPENDING ON CHANGES IN THE NUMBER OF THEIR RESIDENTS

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Purpose: The aim of the article is to identify and evaluate selected endogenous conditions of local development in rural districts in Poland, depending on changes in the number of their inhabitants.

Design/methodology/approach: The article identifies and assesses selected endogenous conditions of local development in rural districts in Poland, depending on changes in the number of their inhabitants. The empirical material of the article concerns all land districts in Poland. The numerical data come from the Local Data Bank of the Central Statistical Office in Warsaw and concern 2023. The collected and organised empirical material was developed in descriptive, tabular, and graphic form, using the method of comparative analysis. Furthermore, the article provides a point assessment of the diagnostic features illustrating the conditions of local development in separate groups of land counties in Poland depending on changes in the number of their inhabitants in the years 1995-2023, against the background of all land counties in the country in 2023.

Findings: The statistical data carried out in the article confirmed the research hypothesis, assuming that the conditions of local development vary between land counties in Poland, depending on changes in the number of their inhabitants, with the best conditions in the group of counties characterised by an increase in this number.

Originality/value: The originality of the work lies in the approach to the analysis of the research issues undertaken. For the purposes of the research, the article included a point assessment of the diagnostic characteristics analysed diagnostic features illustrating the conditions of local development in separate groups of land counties in Poland depending on changes in the number of their inhabitants in the years 1995-2023, against the background of all land counties in the country in 2023. The work is addressed to local government officials responsible for the conditions, possibilities and directions of local socio-economic development of poviats local government units in Poland, as well as to other decision-makers involved in the implementation of local development policy.

Keywords: local development, endogenous development conditions, land counties in Poland, changes in the number of inhabitants.

Category of the paper: research paper.

1. Introduction

Research issues related to socioeconomic development on a regional and local scale have aroused wide interest among economists. The main reasons for this are the danger of disappearing the specific features of regions and local environments, their cultural identity and historical heritage, as well as the growing threats to the values of the natural environment. In turn, from an economic point of view, the key issue is the optimisation and efficiency of the use of resources in the management and development process. Another significant problem is the growing interregional and intraregional disproportions in the level of socioeconomic development and quality of life of residents, which generally leads to migration of people from less developed regions and local communities, and consequently weakens the possibility of their further functioning (Błachut, Cierpień-Wolan, Czudec, Kata, 2018).

Socioeconomic development, understood as the scale, pace, and direction of changes in regional and local communities leading to better conditions and quality of life, as well as the resulting spatial structure and forms of space development, are spatially diverse and are the result of many conditions. They can be divided into the following groups regarding conditions: historical, related to the location in geographical space and economic structures, the natural environment and the quality of the human environment, the level of infrastructure development (social, technical, economic, institutional), the activity and effectiveness of local government activities, and also the entrepreneurship and innovation of residents. From a different perspective, we can also mention site conditions, environmental conditions, conditions resulting from space development, and conditions related to the quality of the regional or local community. The literature on the subject emphasises the key importance of sustainable development of local government units (including counties and communes), because it leads directly to improvement of the functioning of the economy and society, as well as the condition and quality of the natural environment (Heffner, 2007; 2011a, 2011b; Dziekański, 2018; Miłek, 2018; Grzebyk, Miś, Stec, Zając, 2019; Józefowicz, Smolińska, 2019; Utzig, Raczkowska, Mikuła, 2023).

Local development is a multidimensional concept, but it is usually perceived as a process of positive quantitative and qualitative changes taking place in the social and economic sphere of a given local government unit (i.e., powiat or commune), taking into account the needs, preferences, and hierarchy of values specific to its inhabitants (Sztando, 2012; Król, 2015; Józwiakowski, 2016).

Local development can be considered on many levels, which is why it stands out (Balcerek-Kosiarz, 2018):

- ✓ local development that concerns a given area, i.e. changes in the territorial system;
- ✓ local development, which focusses on the needs of the local government community living in a given area;

- ✓ local development, which is a process, i.e., ongoing and therefore not a one-time action;
- ✓ local development, which is an expression of the activity of entities, institutions, and organisations.

The main goal of local development should be to guarantee the inhabitants of a given local government unit (i.e., *poviat* or commune) the possibly lasting improvement in their living conditions and quality. This can occur primarily by providing them with: work (income), conditions of material existence (food, housing, living in an environment that is not harmful to health), a positive environment for spiritual development (opportunity for education, recreation, participation in culture and entertainment, access to information, the possibility of travelling and contact with the wider environment), as well as the basic need for security and prospects for the future (sense of stability) and development opportunities for future generations (Król, 2015).

A characteristic feature of local development is the relatively low mobility of the main development factors, which include: the condition of infrastructure, qualifications of the labor force, social structure and branch structure of the economy, as well as general and technical knowledge of the local community. Therefore, the goal of local development policy should be the best possible use of these resources and factors (Król, 2015; Józwiakowski, 2016).

Effective implementation of local development policy depends on many factors, including primarily: understanding the essence and meaning of local development, willingness to act in this area, knowledge and ingenuity of the entities of this policy and the local economy, resources enabling development, unmet social needs that this development stimulate and direct, as well as on collecting appropriate financial resources, gathering people around the idea of local development and creating the right social climate, as well as on the effectiveness of the existing organisational structures of this development. However, the basic structure initiating and organising the local development process will always be the local government (district, commune), in relation to which the following conditions for the effectiveness of development policy are distinguished: pro-development activity, entrepreneurship, openness to innovation, new ideas and cooperation, inducing a collective process learning, readiness to build partnerships and create social capital (Guzal-Dec, 2015; Parysek, 2015; Zwolińska-Ligaj, 2019).

Local development factors can be divided into four basic groups, i.e., economic, social, technical and technological, and ecological. In the group of economic factors, the most important variables are: the size and the related functioning of the local market for goods and services, the situation on the local labour market, the amount and variability of income of the population, enterprises, and local government bodies. The rank and quality of local marketing and the level of management by local authorities should also be taken into account. The local economic situation is also influenced by external factors, including the country's macroeconomic situation. Some of the most important social factors include demographic changes and the pace and nature of urbanisation processes. The development and improvement

of social infrastructure, changes in the level and lifestyle of residents, the level of education, and the activity and participation of the authorities and the local community also play an important role. Technical and technological factors include: the quantity and quality of fixed capital and changes in its structure, development of research and development activities, the level of cooperation between the science and industry sectors, production diversification, and the development and improvement of technical infrastructure. However, the ecological factors of local development include access to natural resources, rationalisation of management of natural environment resources, implementation of the so-called "clean" technologies, stimulating the production of healthy food, improving the ecological awareness and culture of society and implementing modern environmental protection instruments. It should be added that the above factors usually influence development processes in a cumulative manner, making up a bundle of determinants of local development. There is often a coupling between individual factors. The issue of local development should therefore be considered comprehensively, bearing in mind that many processes have a cause-and-effect nature. Causes and effects are interconnected and connect to all mentioned aspects of development. They can constitute factors of local development, but, on the other hand, they can also effectively inhibit this development (Kiczek, Pompa-Roborzyński, 2013; Ziółkowski, 2015; Józwiakowski, 2016; Balcerek-Kosiarz, 2018).

Moreover, in the case of local development, attention should be paid to its internal (endogenous), external (exogenous) factors, and various types of centrifugal forces. In the case of endogenous factors, the basis for local development is the existing resources of basic production factors (i.e., human, property, raw materials, etc.), but their development, quality, availability, and efficiency of use as well as adequacy to the generally accepted and accepted development strategy are very important. Exogenous factors, in turn, include the state's economic policy and its entire environment, as well as spatial policy. Also of great importance in this respect are: state-wide social policy, state-wide basis for shaping the level and quality of social life, the country's situation in the international system, and the nature of trade with other countries (import and export policy). In the modern economy, despite the increasing importance of exogenous factors of local development, mainly related to national and European Union policies and the dynamic development of the international flow of human and financial capital, special attention is paid to endogenous factors. They constitute very important conditions for local development and the functioning of local government, because they have a significant impact on the scale, directions, and dynamics of socioeconomic development and also constitute the primary (somehow natural) conditions in which local government functions and conducts its own development policy (Zakrzewska-Póltorak, 2011; Król, 2015; Józwiakowski, 2016; Józefowicz, Smolińska, 2019; Grzebyk, Sołtysiak, Stec, Zając, 2020).

2. Research aim, empirical material, and research methods

The aim of the article is to identify and evaluate selected endogenous conditions of local development in land counties in Poland, depending on changes in the number of their inhabitants.

The article presents a research hypothesis that assumes that the conditions of local development vary between land counties in Poland, depending on changes in the number of their inhabitants, with the best conditions in the group of counties characterised by an increase in this number.

The empirical material of the article concerns all land districts in Poland. The numerical data come from the Local Data Bank of the Central Statistical Office in Warsaw and concern 2023. The collected and organised empirical material was developed in descriptive, tabular, and graphic form, using the method of comparative analysis.

To identify and assess the conditions of local development in rural districts in Poland, the following diagnostic features illustrating them in 2023 were analysed: population density (population per 1 km²), percentage of the working-age population, nonworking-age population per 100 working-age people, natural increase per 1,000 population, net migration for permanent residence per 1000 population, percentage of population using water, sewage and gas networks, average monthly gross salary (PLN), total income of poviats budgets per capita (PLN), own income of poviats budgets per capita (PLN), the share of own income in the total income of poviats budgets (%), total expenditure of poviats budgets per capita (PLN), investment expenditure of poviats budgets per capita (PLN) and share of investment expenditure in total expenditure of poviats budgets (%).

When analysing the diversity of local development conditions in land counties in Poland, it was assumed that the leading feature in this respect is changes in the number of inhabitants, i.e. a clear increase, stagnation or a clear decrease in this number. For the purposes of the research, the article divided all land counties in Poland into three groups, i.e.:

- I – land counties (poviats) with an increase in the number of inhabitants in the years 1995-2023 (these are units in which the population dynamics in the years 1995-2023, with 1995 = 100, is above 110.0);
- II – land counties (poviats) with stagnation in the number of inhabitants in the years 1995-2023 (these are units in which the population dynamics in the years 1995-2023, with 1995 = 100, ranges from 90.0 to 110.0);
- III – land counties (poviats) with a decrease in the number of inhabitants in the years 1995-2023 (these are units in which the population dynamics in the years 1995-2023, with 1995 = 100, is below 90.0).

Moreover, the article provides a point assessment of the analysed diagnostic features illustrating the conditions of local development in separate groups of land counties in Poland depending on changes in the number of their inhabitants in the years 1995-2023, against the background of all land counties in the country in 2023. Individual diagnostic characteristics were compared with the average for land counties in Poland, which was taken as 100 points, and their advantage or underweight was evaluated accordingly in all counties covered by the study. Then, all points were summarised and the average was calculated (graphs 1-4). It should be emphasised that this is a new approach to the research problem discussed in the article.

3. Results

The data contained in Table 1 show that the land counties in Poland are diverse in terms of the characteristics analysed illustrating the demographic conditions of local development, and this applies in particular to population density and the net migration rate for permanent residence per 1000 population. It should be added that in the case of all selected characteristics that characterise demographic conditions, the group of rural counties with an increase in the number of inhabitants in the years 1995-2023 is the most favourable. However, the worst situation in this regard occurs in the group of land counties with a decrease in the number of inhabitants in the years 1995-2023.

Table 1.

Selected features characterising demographic conditions in land counties in Poland in 2023

Specification	Land counties (poviats)			
	Total	According to changes in the number of inhabitants in the years 1995-2023		
		I	II	III
Population density - population per 1 km ²	99,2	183,5	102,4	72,1
Percentage of the population of working age	58,4	59,2	58,6	57,9
Population of non-working age per 100 people of working age	71,3	69,0	70,7	72,7
Natural increase per 1000 population	-4,0	-0,5	-3,4	-5,8
Balance of migration for permanent residence per 1000 population	-0,5	+8,1	-0,7	-2,7

Explanations for the table: I – land counties (poviats) with an increase in the number of inhabitants in the years 1995-2023; II – land counties with stagnation in the number of inhabitants in the years 1995-2023; III – land counties with a decrease in the number of inhabitants in the years 1995-2023.

Source: Central Statistical Office in Warsaw.

In land countries in Poland, the most developed infrastructure element is the water supply network, followed by the sewage network, and the least developed is the gas network. However, there are differences between land counties in terms of the access of their inhabitants to the sewage and gas networks. Namely, the best situation in this respect occurs in the group of rural poviats with an increase in the number of inhabitants in the years 1995-2023. However, the group of rural poviats with a decrease in the number of inhabitants in the years 1995-2023 has the cheapest access to these infrastructure elements. In turn, in the case of population access to the water supply network, there are no major differences in this respect between separate groups of countries in Poland, depending on changes in the number of their inhabitants in the years 1995-2023 (Table 2).

Table 2.

Selected features characterising infrastructure conditions in land countries in Poland in 2023

Specification	Land counties			
	Total	According to changes in the number of inhabitants in the years 1995-2023		
		I	II	III
Percentage of the population using the water supply network	90,5	88,0	91,1	90,5
Percentage of the population using the sewage network	60,4	65,1	62,9	55,8
Percentage of the population using the gas network	40,0	58,5	41,9	32,5

Explanations for the table: I – land counties (poviats) with an increase in the number of inhabitants in the years 1995-2023; II – land counties with stagnation in the number of inhabitants in the years 1995-2023; III – land counties with a decrease in the number of inhabitants in the years 1995-2023.

Source: Central Statistical Office in Warsaw.

The data in Table 3 indicate that the land districts in Poland are diverse in terms of the characteristics analysed features illustrating the economic and financial conditions of local development. The average value of the average monthly gross salary is the highest in the group of land counties with an increase in the number of inhabitants in the years 1995-2023. The situation is similar in the case of the average value of own revenues of poviats budgets per capita, as well as the share of own revenues in the total revenues of poviats budgets. In turn, the average value of total income of poviats budgets per capita is the highest in the group of land poviats with a decrease in the number of inhabitants in the years 1995-2023.

The land counties in Poland are also diverse in terms of the expenditure of their budgets. Namely, the average value of total expenditure and investment expenditure of poviats budgets per capita is the highest in the group of land poviats with a decrease in the number of inhabitants in the years 1995-2023. However, these values are the lowest in the group of land counties with an increase in the number of inhabitants in the years 1995-2023. In turn, the share of investment expenditure in the total expenditure of land poviats budgets is similar in all their groups, depending on changes in the number of inhabitants in the years 1995-2023 (Table 3).

Table 3.

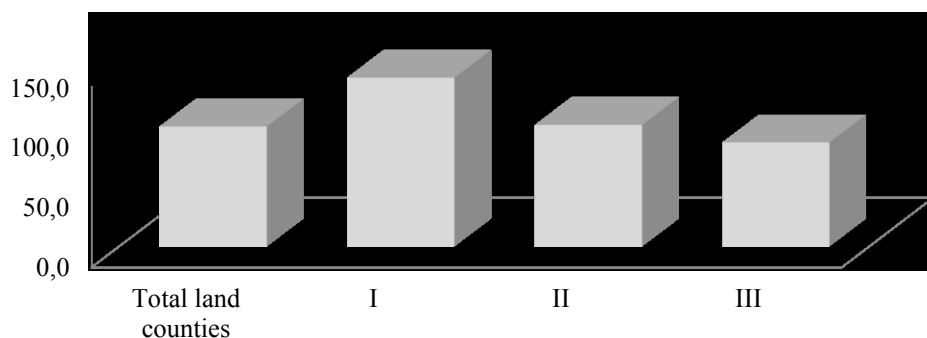
Selected Characteristics of the economic and financial conditions in land counties of Poland in 2023

Specification	Land counties			
	Total	According to changes in the number of inhabitants in the years 1995-2023		
		I	II	III
Average monthly gross salary in PLN	6442,3	6759,7	6391,2	6419,6
Total revenues of poviats budgets per capita in PLN	1935,1	1461,4	1890,8	2120,7
Own revenues of poviats budgets per capita in PLN	601,6	617,5	600,6	598,5
Share of own revenues in total revenues of poviats budgets in %	32,0	43,4	31,9	28,9
Total expenditure of poviats budgets per capita in PLN	2001,5	1536,3	1952,0	2191,3
Investment expenditure of poviats budgets per capita in PLN	492,1	373,5	469,2	553,6
Share of investment expenditure in total expenditure of poviats budgets in %	23,6	24,2	23,4	23,6

Explanations for the table: I – land counties (poviats) with an increase in the number of inhabitants in the years 1995-2023; II – land counties with stagnation in the number of inhabitants in the years 1995-2023; III – land counties with a decrease in the number of inhabitants in the years 1995-2023.

Source: Central Statistical Office in Warsaw.

Figure 1 presents the results of the point assessment of the selected demographic conditions of local development in separate groups of land counties in Poland depending on changes in the number of their inhabitants in the years 1995-2023, against the background of all land counties in the country for 2023. It should be noted that the land counties of Poland are very diverse in this regard. Namely, the best demographic conditions for local development are found in the group of land counties characterised by an increase in the number of inhabitants in the years 1995-2023. In turn, they are the worst in the group of land counties characterised by a decrease in the number of inhabitants in the years 1995-2023. However, in the group of land counties with stagnation in the number of inhabitants in the years 1995-2023, they are more similar to the average for all land counties in Poland.



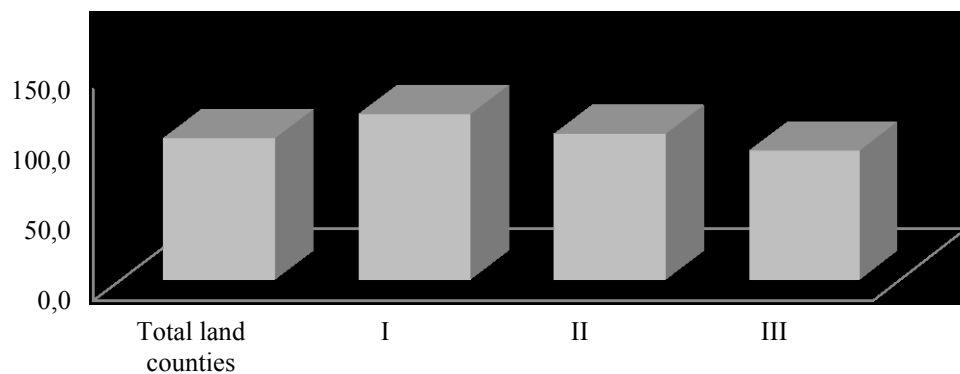
Explanations for the figure: I – land counties (poviats) with an increase in the number of inhabitants in the years 1995-2023; II – land counties with stagnation in the number of inhabitants in the years 1995-2023; III – land counties with a decrease in the number of inhabitants in the years 1995-2023.

Figure 1. Point assessment of selected demographic conditions of local development, in separate groups of land counties in Poland, depending on changes in the number of their inhabitants in the years 1995-2023, against the background of all land counties in the country for 2023 (counties in Poland = 100.0 points)

Source: Own study.

Figure 2 presents the results of the point assessment of selected infrastructural conditions of local development in separate groups of land counties in Poland depending on changes in the number of their inhabitants in the years 1995-2023, against the background of all land counties in the country for 2023. On this basis, it should be stated that rural districts in Poland are diverse in this respect, and, as previously noted, this is mainly due to the different accessibility of their inhabitants to the sewage and gas networks. Therefore, the best infrastructure conditions for local development are characterised by the group of land counties with an increase in the number of inhabitants in the years 1995-2023. In turn, the worst infrastructural conditions for local development occur in the group of rural poviats with a decrease in the number of inhabitants in the years 1995-2023. However, in the group of land counties with stagnation in the number of inhabitants in the years 1995-2023, the discussed infrastructure conditions of local development are most similar to the average for all land counties throughout the country.

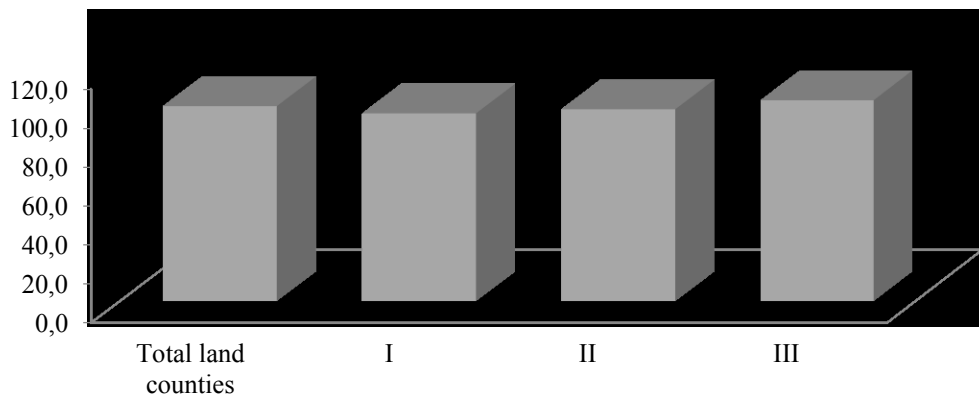
Figure 3 shows the results of the point assessment on selected economic and financial conditions of local development in separate groups of land counties in Poland based on changes in the number of their inhabitants in the years 1995-2023, against the background of all land counties in the country for 2023. Therefore, it can be noted that the separated groups of land counties are not significantly different in this respect. Because in all of them, the economic and financial conditions of local development are similar to the average for all land counties throughout the country, but the best economic and financial situation occurs in the group of land counties with a decrease in the number of inhabitants in the years 1995-2023.



Explanations for the figure: I – land counties (poviats) with an increase in the number of inhabitants in the years 1995-2023; II – land counties with stagnation in the number of inhabitants in the years 1995-2023; III – land counties with a decrease in the number of inhabitants in the years 1995-2023.

Figure 2. Point assessment of selected infrastructure conditions of local development, in separate groups of land counties in Poland, based on changes in the number of their inhabitants in the years 1995-2023, against the background of all land counties in the country for 2023 (counties in Poland = 100.0 points)

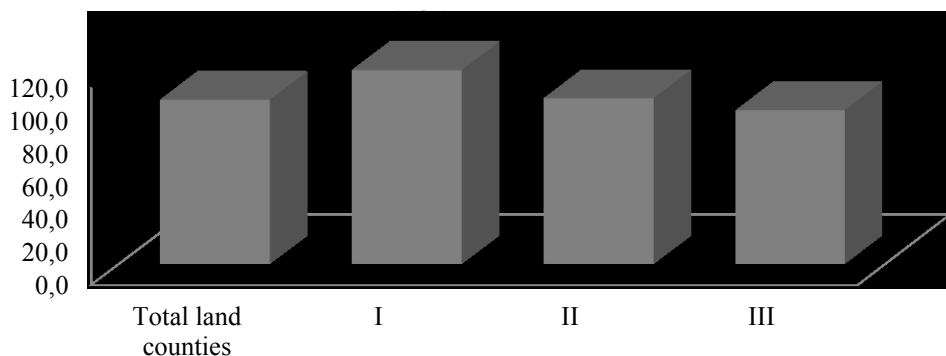
Source: Own study.



Explanations for the figure: I – land counties (poviats) with an increase in the number of inhabitants in the years 1995-2023; II – land counties with stagnation in the number of inhabitants in the years 1995-2023; III – land counties with a decrease in the number of inhabitants in the years 1995-2023.

Figure 3. Point assessment of selected economic and financial conditions of local development, in separate groups of land counties in Poland, depending on changes in the number of their inhabitants in the years 1995-2023, against the background of all land counties in the country for 2023 (counties in Poland = 100.0 points).

Source: Own study.



Explanations for the figure: I – land counties (poviats) with an increase in the number of inhabitants in the years 1995-2023; II – land counties with stagnation in the number of inhabitants in the years 1995-2023; III – land counties with a decrease in the number of inhabitants in the years 1995-2023.

Figure 4. Scoring of all selected local development conditions (ie, demographic, infrastructural and economic and financial conditions together), in separate groups of land counties in Poland, depending on changes in the number of their inhabitants in the years 1995-2023, against the background of all land counties in the country 2023 (counties in Poland = 100.0 points).

Source: Own study.

Figure 4 shows the results of the point assessment regarding all selected conditions of local development (i.e. demographic, infrastructural, and economic and financial conditions together), in separate groups of land counties in Poland depending on changes in the number of their inhabitants in the years 1995-2023, against the background total land districts in the country for 2023. On its basis, it must be concluded that the local government units in Poland are diverse in this respect. Namely, the group of land counties with an increase in the number of inhabitants in the years 1995-2023 clearly has the best conditions for local development. In turn, they are the worst in the group of land counties characterised by a decrease in the

number of inhabitants in the years 1995-2023. However, in the group of land counties with stagnation in the number of inhabitants in the years 1995-2023, the analysed local development conditions are very similar to the average for all land counties in Poland.

This allows us to confirm the research hypothesis presented in the article, which assumes that the conditions of local development vary between land counties in Poland, depending on changes in the number of their inhabitants, with the best conditions being in the group of counties characterised by an increase in this number.

4. Summary and conclusions

The conditions of local development in poviats local government units in Poland are a very important, interdisciplinary, extensive, and broad issue, constituting, among others, an important research issue for both economic theory and economic practice.

The analysis of the collected statistical data carried out in the article shows that:

- ✓ The demographic and infrastructure conditions of local development vary between districts in Poland, depending on changes in the number of their inhabitants in the years 1995-2023. They are clearly the best in the group of land counties with an increase in the number of inhabitants, while the worst are in the group of land counties with a decrease in this number.
- ✓ The economic and financial conditions of local development are similar in all separate groups of land counties in Poland, depending on changes in the number of their inhabitants in the years 1995-2023, and similar to the average for all land counties throughout the country.
- ✓ In turn, a point assessment of all analysed conditions of local development (i.e. demographic, infrastructural and economic and financial together), in separate groups of land counties in Poland, depending on changes in the number of their inhabitants in the years 1995-2023, against the background of all land counties in the country, showed that the studied groups of local government units are diversified in this respect - in favor of the group of counties with an increase in the number of mixed inhabitants. This allows us to confirm the research hypothesis, which assumes that the conditions of local development vary between land counties in Poland, depending on changes in the number of their inhabitants, with the best conditions in the group of counties characterised by an increase in this number.

The results of the analysis of the collected statistical data presented in the article provide important and up-to-date knowledge that may be useful for local government officials responsible for the conditions, possibilities, and directions of local socio-economic development of poviats local government units in Poland, as well as for other decision-makers involved in the implementation of local development policy.

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