

VOLUNTEER FIRE BRIGADES IN THE CONTEXT OF SHAPING THE SAFETY CULTURE OF THE LOCAL COMMUNITY ON THE EXAMPLE OF THE RURAL MUNICIPALITY OF TOMASZÓW MAZOWIECKI

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Abstract

In times of contemporary challenges and threats, the aspect of building social resilience through the formation of the safety culture, especially at a local level, is of particular importance. The process of its shaping tends to differ in each community. However, the source of success is the openness and involvement of all actors in a given community (citizens, local authorities, safety institutions and rescue entities or non-governmental organisations). One of the critical and highly committed bodies in local communities, especially rural municipalities, are the Volunteer Fire Brigades (VFBs). The authors of the article undertook research to determine the extent to which the functioning of VFBs influences the shaping of the safety culture of local communities on the example of the rural municipality of Tomaszów Mazowiecki. The article presents the results of research carried out by means of a diagnostic survey among the inhabitants of this commune. It has been shown that the activity of VFBs is very highly rated and has a significant impact on increasing the sense of security of the local community. The local community appreciates the openness and involvement of the local VFB in various dimensions of functioning of the Tomaszów Mazowiecki rural municipality. An important result of the research are also suggestions and recommendations for improving the functioning of local VFB units with aim to shape the safety culture in all its dimensions - organisational, spiritual and material.

Keywords: volunteer fire brigades, safety culture, safety of local communities, social resilience

1. Introduction

Contemporary challenges and threats are forcing a change in the perception of how security is perceived and shaped, both individually and collectively. The aspect

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of building social resilience is therefore of particular importance. This is possible through shaping a culture of security in the micro- and macro-systems of security. However, according to the authors, it is most important to have this process implemented at the local level, as at this level it is easier to reach out to citizens to identify their needs and learn about their perspective on threat recognition.

This enables a more accurate selection of appropriate forms and tools for shaping the safety culture. The process of shaping the safety culture varies from community to community. However, the source of success is the openness and involvement of all actors in the community (citizens, local authorities, institutions and rescue bodies or NGOs). One of the key actors in the community area, especially in rural municipalities, are the voluntary fire brigades. They operate mainly at local level, which makes them best placed to know the needs and risks in the local environment (Forjas, 2020). They play a key role in the process of building social resilience, by increasing local people's knowledge of fire protection or first aid, but also shaping local identity through their cultural activities.

The tradition of volunteer fire brigades in Poland, as in many other countries around the world, dates back to the 19th century, and a vast number of units have celebrated their 100th anniversary in recent years (Marcysiak, 2021). Volunteer Fire Brigades (VFBs) are an important part of the security system, especially local security through social impact. One academic study reads: "voluntary non-governmental organisations are not part of the state structure, but are based on the idea of social self-government and are an important part of the organisation of social life" (Biniak-Pieróg, Zamiar, 2013). In the Law on Volunteer Fire Brigades, we read explicitly: "Volunteer fire brigades fulfil a servant role towards the local community, performing their tasks with respect for the dignity and rights of citizens" (Polish Journal of Laws/Dz.U. from 2021 item 2490). VFBs therefore fulfil an extremely important mission in the process of shaping the safety culture of local communities. By fulfilling their comprehensive statutory tasks, they serve the common good by creating a culture of safety in all its dimensions, namely spiritual, material and organisational ones. More on this in the further part of this report.

Volunteer Fire Brigades, as non-governmental organisations, operate on the basis of the Law of 7 April 1989 – Law on Associations (Polish Journal of Laws/Dz.U. from 2020 item 2261). According to the Law on Public Benefit Activity and Volunteerism with regard to VFBs and the Polish Association of Volunteer Fire Brigades, they are non-governmental organisations. Consequently: 1) they are not units of the public finance sector, 2) they do not operate for profit, 3) they are established under the Law (Polish Journal of Laws/Dz.U. from 2003 No 96 item 874). VFBs also operate under the provisions of the Law of 24 August 1991 on fire protection (Polish Journal of Laws/Dz.U. from 1991 No 81 item 351), being an essential element of the national firefighting and rescue system (NFRS) of state security. Cooperation within this system entails, above all, cooperation during nationwide rescue operations that involve specialists, rescue groups, use of equipment, preparation of joint training programmes on the principles of

first aid, use of basic rescue techniques, development of programmes providing information on the risks of catastrophes, natural disasters, fires and other hazards caused by natural forces or human activity, as well as making the resources, which they have at disposal, available for the purposes of rescue operations and training.

However, despite such great importance and impact on the life of local communities, the topic of VFBs is rarely addressed in the literature. Moreover, the authors did not find a formulation of this topic in the context of shaping the safety culture of local communities. Therefore, research was undertaken on the influence of VFBs' activities on shaping of safety culture of the local community selected by the authors, and namely the rural municipality of Tomaszów Mazowiecki. The research problem is in the form of the question: *In what way and to what extent does the activity of VFB influence the shaping of the safety culture of the local community of the rural municipality of Tomaszów Mazowiecki?*

Analysing the available literature, online publications, social media, legal acts and the results of own research, a wide range of activities and actions undertaken by voluntary fire brigades and specific activities carried out by VFBs in the rural municipality of Tomaszów Mazowiecki were presented.

The catalogue of activities presented is certainly not a complete and closed list, but the authors' aim was to present the comprehensive impact of VFBs on local security. Also presented are interdependencies and correlations that exist between the needs of local communities and the various dimensions of security culture, in conjunction with the statutory tasks of VFBs and the functions of the state.

As can be seen from the analysis of results of our own research, the activities of the VFBs in the rural municipality of Tomaszów Mazowiecki are rated very highly and have a significant impact on enhancing the sense of security of the local community. The local community appreciates the openness and involvement of the local VFB in various dimensions of functioning of the Tomaszów Mazowiecki rural municipality. An important result of the research are also suggestions and recommendations for improving the functioning of local VFB units with aim to shape the safety culture in all its dimensions – organisational, spiritual and material.

2. Research methods

To achieve the research objective, a review was carried out of the literature on the subject, reports and legal acts. Internet publications and social media information were also used, especially to obtain archival materials related to the activities of VFB units from the rural municipality of Tomaszów Mazowiecki.

Of key importance was information obtained from a diagnostic survey conducted among the residents of the rural municipality of Tomaszów Mazowiecki. The survey was carried out using a specially prepared survey questionnaire in the timeframe of July–August 2023. Only 104 residents of the municipality agreed to participate in this survey. Therefore, we present a qualitative perspective on the

problem, giving insight not only into the scale of a phenomenon or trend, but also providing data that cannot be easily reduced to numbers, which, as E. Babbie explains, “we do not always need to discover and understand regularities in social life” (Babbie, 2007, p. 21).

The compiled results of the study allowed understanding the specifics of the studied community and to learn the perspective of the perception of individual and collective security culture issues. It was possible to assess the real level of this community’s sense of security and the level of public awareness in the context of local threats and ways of responding to emergency situations. The research made it possible to assess the activities of local VFBs and the perspective of the perception of the role of VFBs in shaping local security culture.

In addition, the research used theoretical research methods, i.e. analysis, synthesis, inference, abstraction and comparison.

3. Results

3.1. Legal and organizational context of VFB functioning

VFBs are uniformed fire protection units, equipped with specialized equipment, designed to fight fires, natural disasters or other local threats, including carrying out specialized rescue operations (Polish Journal of Laws/Dz.U. from 2021 item 2490). VFBs work closely with the organizational units of the State Fire Service (SFS) and other entities and institutions to ensure the safety of citizens in the area of their operation (city and municipality) or support neighbouring areas under arrangements or agreements made. The records of forces and resources of the VFB, which can be available for rescue operations in cooperation with the competent chief of the municipality (mayor, city president) and the starost (county governor), are handled by the district (city) commander of the VFB. The tasks and organization of VFBs are defined in Article 3 of the Law on Volunteer Fire Brigades. The tasks carried out by VFBs include taking action to protect life, health, property or the environment by:

- “1) carrying out rescue operations, participation in rescue operations and rescue actions, as well as participation in actions carried out by other services, inspections and guards;
- 2) participating in rescue operations and rescue actions outside the country on the basis of international agreements;
- 3) participating in alerting and alerting the population about threats;
- 4) participating in the protection of the population;
- 5) providing qualified first aid;
- 6) organizing exercises and participation in training, exercises and sports-firefighting competitions organized by the State Fire Service, the municipality or other authorized entities;

- 7) securing the protected area of the competent firefighting and rescue unit of the State Fire Service, as specified in the district (municipal) rescue plan;
- 8) promoting principles and good practices in the field of fire protection of buildings, other structures and areas;
- 9) organizing projects to promote sports and physical culture;
- 10) organizing educational and cultural projects to promote knowledge and skills in fire protection;
- 11) disseminating and supporting cooperation between local social and economic partners in fire protection and economic partners in the field of fire protection;
- 12) promoting the principles of first aid;
- 13) supporting the municipality in the implementation of assistance to the local community;
- 14) integrating the local community;
- 15) participating in international cooperation of the municipality” (Polish Journal of Laws/Dz.U. from 2021 item 2490).

Volunteer fire brigades (VFBs) carry out tasks for civil protection, firefighting and rescue, as well as large-scale prevention activities addressed primarily at youth. There are also numerous Youth Fire Brigade within VFBs, which are natural centres for training and recruiting future firefighters (Marcysiak, 2021). However, it should be emphasized that the activity of VFBs is not limited to activities aimed at providing direct assistance to local communities, but also to the popularization of fire safety knowledge, actions promoting culture, sports, recreation and environmental protection. The VFB has nearly 800 orchestras with nearly 20,000 musicians, as well as 300 artistic teams and 600 sports teams. The memory of fire history is compiled and made available in approx. 1,000 chambers of tradition (Fedyszak-Radziejowska, 2018). Volunteer fire brigades are promoters and carriers of cultural heritage, both in the tangible (including fire stations, uniforms, firefighting equipment) and intangible (traditions and “living expressions of culture inherited from ancestors and passed on to future generations”) dimensions (Goszczyński, Kniec, Czachowski, 2015). It is worth adding, however, that the cultural activities (which are ancillary activities) undertaken by VFB members do not in any way interfere with their primary fire protection activities. Also, their influence on the formation of local identity through the building of specific social ties is relevant in the functioning of VFBs. The activities of VFBs are varied, but their characteristic feature is that they work for the common good (Lipowicz, 2017). They aim to meet the needs of members of the local community in which the VFB is based. They can also be addressed at people outside this community (Behr, Bigos, 2018). According to sociologists, it is (...) locally generated and transmitted from generation to generation social institutions (such as volunteer fire brigades) that help to perpetuate the patterns of cooperation necessary for survival (Goszczyński, Kniec, Czachowski, 2015). These positive patterns of cooperation have become firmly established in the public consciousness thanks to firefighters,

in whom Polish society invariably places the utmost trust. At the same time, they can count on the help of volunteer firefighters when needed. The level of trust and certainty of assistance was similarly assessed by our respondents; when asked if they can count on VFB's assistance – 95.2% of them answered in the affirmative¹.

The basic goals and tasks of volunteer firefighters arising, among other things, from their statutes, are to carry out activities aimed at preventing fires, to participate in rescue operations carried out during fires and other incidents and disasters entailing a hazard, and to inform the population of the existing dangers. VFB units, as part of their tasks, are included in the national firefighting and rescue system (NFRS). However, the inclusion of individual units in the NFRS is conditional on the achievement by a given unit of equipment and training standards specified by the minister responsible for internal affairs and the Commander-in-Chief of the State Fire Service, in accordance with the Regulation of the Minister of Internal Affairs of September 15, 2014 on the scope, detailed conditions and mode of inclusion of fire protection units in the national firefighting and rescue system, (Polish Journal of Laws/Dz.U. from 2014 item 1317), which allows the implementation of independent rescue operations.

The inclusion of a unit in the NFRS is preceded by the conclusion of an agreement between the locally competent district (city) chief of the State Fire Service (SFS), the given unit and the head of the municipality, mayor or president - in the case of volunteer fire departments. A unit that is equipped and whose rescuers are trained at a level that allows them to carry out specialized rescue activities may also be included in the system if its activities are applicable to the conditions provided for in the rescue plan. Evaluations of these conditions are carried out by the locally competent district (city) chief and the provincial chief of the SFS, each within the scope of their jurisdiction. Records of units incorporated into the NFRS are kept by the Chief Commander of the State Fire Service. As of December 6, 2021, 4738 VFB units were incorporated into the NFRS. In addition, there are also more than 11,000 units outside the system in Poland (<https://www.gov.pl/web/mswia/ochotnicze-straze-pozarne>).

It is also worth bearing in mind that the current dominance of the issue of preventing and extinguishing fires in the daily practice of the volunteer formation is gradually shifting to other types of rescue, including mainly technical rescue, during incidents on roads, where other techniques of rescue operations are adopted. Depending on the specifics of the protected area, also to be mentioned are VFB's activities carried out in water areas and flood control operations. In the area of broadly defined civil protection, it is also necessary to take into account the preparation of volunteer rescuers to organize the evacuation of people and property during major fires, floods and other disasters (especially those resulting

¹ Own research carried out by the authors of the article among the residents of the rural municipality of Tomaszów Mazowiecki, 07-08/2023.

from weather anomalies), as well as the provision of assistance between localities and municipalities in terms of housing, catering and other social assistance.

To sum up, the VFB not only performs civil protection and rescue tasks, but also creates space for the development of local communities by building social ties, developing social and civic competence, the spirit of commitment and building interpersonal relationships. This, in turn, lays the foundation for being able to effectively create a culture of community safety.

3.2. Theoretical determinants of local communities' security

Local communities are a type of systems that function on given areas. The beneficiaries of a local community are all the residents of such an area. Members of this community can influence actively everything that happens in their immediate vicinity. Particularly strong positions in this community are occupied by local opinion leaders, and namely politicians, artists and scientists, who support local development that comprises local actions for the benefit of the community and use of local resources (Birkhölzer, 2006). Members of the community are united by common interests, values and views, and above all by the territory in which they live. Residents take an active part in local life, engage in the activities of various types of organizations, cooperate with each other, as well as with local services, thus contributing to maintaining or improving the level of security among the entire community (Kawecki, 2017). Communities living in a specific area are usually distinguished by common characteristics, values and interests. An element that has a strong impact on the implementation of common community interests, especially in urban communities, are associations, NGOs or community groups operating in the area that are the exponents of these interests. In traditional societies, local communities have greater autonomy, with their own social norms governing their activities. In modern societies, the macro-social normative system begins to prevail, while the boundaries of local communities are established administratively, their cultural boundaries being less important. The factor that catalyses the transformation process of territorial collectives into local communities is the participation of residents of the given territory in social actions, with those with higher social status being more likely to participate in such actions. In summary, it can be said that a local community is a collective living in a separate, relatively small territory, such as a parish, village or neighbourhood, in which there are strong ties arising from a community of interests and needs, as well as a sense of rootedness and belonging to the place inhabited (Rozwadowski, 2014).

According to a researcher on local communities in Poland, "a local community is one that occupies not some local space, but a concrete space that has a name and its own local tradition" (Gilejko, 2002, p. 65). This approach emphasizes the importance of identity and belonging. According to J. Szczepański, "we will use the term local community to designate the totality of families, neighbourhood circles, groups and other collectives located in a specific territory, within the framework of

which the individuals comprising these collectives meet the basic needs of life and are connected by a bond of common relation to the territory in which they live” (Szczepański, 1964, p. 45). S. Ossowski stressed that the basis for the formation of local communities are personal ties (Blok, 2008, p. 18). The bonds of residents in the local environment are: “experiencing and promoting the same values and symbols, objective relationships and relations produced between people, respecting the principles of understanding and cooperation” (Blok, 2008, p. 18).

Taking into account the above definitions, it was noted that the local community is best characterized by the aspects presented in the graphic form below (Fig. 1).

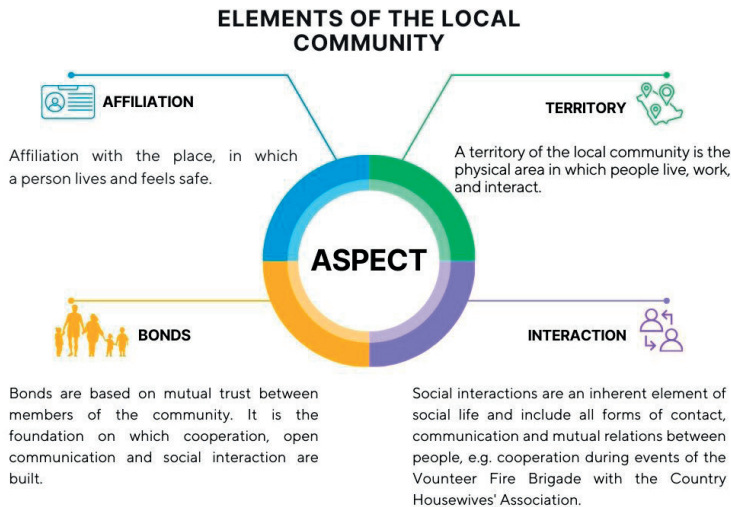


Figure 1. Elements of the local community

The development of local communities is fostered by the individual’s desire to belong and be rooted in the place where they live. Along with families, local communities are basic elements of the social structure, as they are autonomous and show a significant level of independence from the state centre. The settlement of people in an area and the functioning of local communities have different conditions and perspectives. In their article, M. Szczepański and W. Ślęzak-Tazbir distinguish ten such perspectives. For the purpose of this discussion, only a few selected determinants are presented, relevant in the context of the research carried out. They are presented in Table 1.

Each local community, like each person, has a number of different needs, the satisfaction of which should be guaranteed by the state. S. Pepper rightly argues that “man, shaping the conditions of his existence, first of all shapes the conditions of one’s security. In addition, one’s security is influenced by their social environment, which in the conditions of the modern state is decisively shaped by the law” (Pieprzny, 2007, p. 18).

Table 1. Conditions of local communities

NAME OF THE PERSPECTIVE	SPECIFICITY OF OPERATION	REFERENCE TO THE STATUTORY TASKS OF THE VFB
Sociological perspective	<p>It is distinguished by an individual's experience of a given place, environment, community or culture, as well as by the individual's desire to be part of that place. It includes personal emotions, values and relationships that an individual creates with a given environment, and its desire to actively participate and belong to a given community or culture.</p>	<p>Task: interacting with the community</p> <p>Activity:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> cooperation of the VFB with the Country Housewives' Association during events that integrate the local community <p>Task: undertaking prevention measures</p> <p>Activity:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> implementation of preventive measures such as educating the community about security
Psychological perspective	<p>The desire to belong to a "small homeland" stems from a desire to belong, but there is a noticeable division between communities, which generates a sense of distinctiveness. This distinctive sense of separateness underscores the uniqueness of a local community.</p>	<p>Task: protection of life and property</p> <p>Activity:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> protection from hazards (rescue and firefighting actions are an act of social solidarity and mutual aid) <p>Task: promotion of citizen security</p> <p>Activity:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> preventive actions of VFB (e.g., inspections of fire extinguishers or smoke detectors, chad) aimed at raising public awareness of safe behavior, positively affecting the daily life of the community.

The local state of security is created by meeting various needs of the individual, resulting in an adequate comfort of life, free from fear of threats, and full of values that are important to the residents of the local community. The catalogue of community needs that should be provided is very long. The most important of them are presented below, along with the author's proposals for the scope and availability of needs and practical examples of VFB's activity (Fig. 2).

CATALOG OF SELECTED NEEDS OF THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

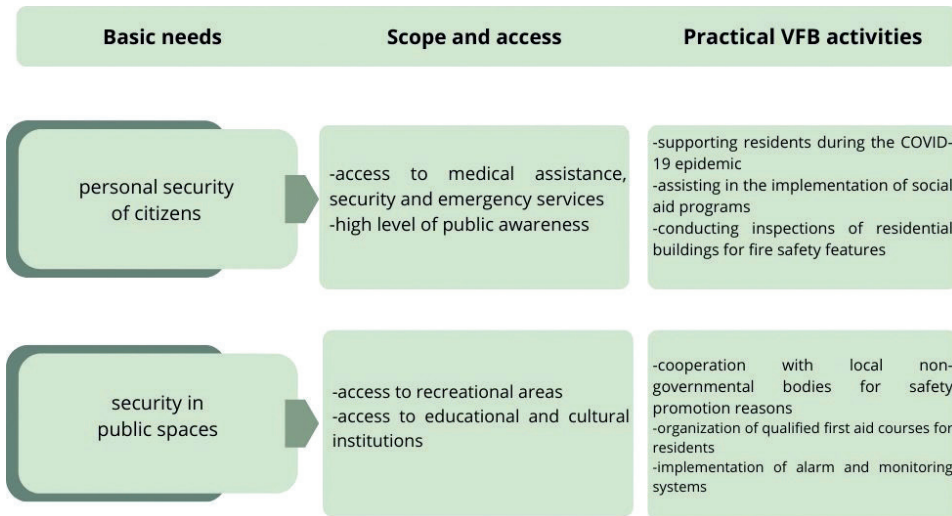


Figure 2. Catalogue of selected needs of the local community

As already mentioned, the above catalogue of community needs is not complete, nor is the list of VFB activities. However, it does provide an excellent summary of this part of the discussion. It shows the importance of activity of VFB, which, thanks to their commitment and responsibility for the common good and, more importantly, the responsibility for protecting the lives and property of local community residents, respond to social needs, while at the same time fitting into every dimension of security culture.

3.3. Practical dimension of local community safety culture on the example of the rural municipality of Tomaszów Mazowiecki

Safety culture surrounds our daily lives, and above all, it serves many purposes and needs of both individuals and social groups. Its formation should be cultivated from an early age, because as the level of individual safety culture increases, the level of safety of social groups and, consequently, the level of national security, also increases (Wojakowska, 2020).

The concept of security culture, according to J. Piwowarski, is “the totality of material and non-material elements of established human achievements, serving to cultivate, recover (when lost) and raise the level of security of specific subjects. It can be considered in the individual dimension - mental-spiritual, social dimension

and physical (material) dimension” (Piwowski, 2016b, p. 13). With this definition in mind, it can be said that safety culture is the protection against emerging threats, but also trying to achieve the desired level of safety. It is also a person’s awareness of the constant need for improvement and education in order to take appropriate action in case of danger. Another definition of safety culture is proposed by M. Cieślarczyk, according to whom it is “a pattern of basic assumptions, values, norms, rules, symbols and beliefs characteristic of a given entity, influencing the way it perceives challenges, opportunities and (or) threats in the closer and further environment, as well as the way it feels security and thinks about it, and the related way it behaves and acts (interacts), which is variously “learned” and articulated by this entity in the processes of education in the broadest sense, including the natural processes of internal integration and external adaptation and other “regulatory” processes, as well as in the process of strengthening defence in the broadest (not only military) sense, serving the relatively harmonious development of this entity and the achievement of security in the broadest sense, for the benefit of itself, but also for the environment” (Cieślarczyk, 2010, p. 210). Therefore a security culture based on the three pillars also creates a space for support and mutual exchange of knowledge and experience. Knowledge from the mental-spiritual pillar is also applied to the organisational-legal and material pillars. Security culture integrates all aspects of social life, which fosters the understanding of security as a value, condition and process (Piwowski, 2016b).

Mental-spiritual culture is related to the subject’s state of consciousness and his potential and level of knowledge. Also of great importance are personality and mental issues, which determine the ability of making use of knowledge and information in providing security. Spiritual culture is often seen as a culture of meanings. The spiritual sphere is all human values, knowledge, morals, religion and ideas. According to J. Czai, the spiritual sphere is the highest good and achievement of man (Piwowski, 2016a). Organizational and legal culture comprise all existing legal regulations that apply to a specific area of life, but also all ways of achieving values and rules of operation, such as bylaws and statutes (Piwowski, 2016a). The functioning of security systems largely depends on the level of organizational culture. All issues related to organizational and legal culture relate to the formation of society, its rights and obligations, which requires continuous expanding of knowledge in this area. Constantly emerging new threats that occur in social life require forming appropriate attitudes and behaviours (Cieślarczyk, 2014). Material culture is nothing more than infrastructure, technology, basic tools and the ability to use them.

Safety culture in the context of people and communities has 4 functions, as presented in the form of a table (Tab. 2).

Table 2. Functions of safety culture

No.	Name of the function	Operating principle
1.	Integrative function	Related to local communities, society and international organizations. It also appears in the security and crisis management system. The integrative function is best seen in crisis situations, when society can unite and build trust. Then all the efforts expended that led to success make sense. In the integrative function, it is the level and nature of the security culture that shows whether a community will emerge from a crisis strengthened or weakened. This will show whether during the next crisis situation the community will be able to survive.
2.	Adaptive function	These are all kinds of qualifications, or lack thereof, possessed by society, including the ability to cope with and overcome any adversity, adaptive or transformational abilities, crucial in the three-dimensional process of building social resilience.
3.	Stimulatory function	A need for self-improvement, and a need of improving systems that ensure safety. This involves using one's skills and knowledge at the right time and in the right way.
4.	Regulatory function	It is wise behaviour and action in various situations. A high level of safety culture helps to achieve satisfactory results.

Source: own study based on (Cieślarczyk, 2014, pp. 38–39)

It should be borne in mind that security culture is a very important part of the security system. M. Cieślarczyk notes that the security culture of a person, community, institution or organization changes more slowly than the culture of the entire security system (Cieślarczyk, 2014). Hence, according to the authors, there is a need to intensively implement a culture of security. This process requires a systemic approach and hard work of all community actors. The authors of the study, basing on the results of their own research, indicate that a special role in this process can be assigned to VFB. Naturally on the assumption that they will be supported by local authorities and other actors participating in the local security system. After all, the quality of a community's development largely depends on the strategy of action adopted by local authorities.

In the Development Strategy for the Municipality of Tomaszów Mazowiecki 2030, reads: "Tomaszów Mazowiecki Municipality is a suburban space of the city of Tomaszów Mazowiecki. The connectivity of development with the city manifests itself in many aspects, including social policy, access to culture, health care, the labour market. The Municipality offers access to residential space and a leisure and recreation zone. These functions the Municipality will strengthen and develop. In particular, the potential of the areas and villages around the Sulejowski Reservoir and the Pilica River should be looked at. The activity related to the development of tourism will be implemented with view to networking and combining potentials

in a functional system, i.e. it will be developed in partnership with neighbouring municipalities” (Tomaszów Mazowiecki Municipality Development Strategy 2030).

The Tomaszów Mazowiecki Municipality is in the eastern part of the Łódź Voivodship, in the district of Tomaszów. The municipality borders to the north and east with the city of Tomaszów Mazowiecki, to the north with the municipality of Lubochnia, to the east with the municipality of Inowłódz, to the west with the municipalities of Wolbórz and Ujazd, to the southeast with the municipality of Sulejów, while to the south with the municipalities of Mniszków and Sławno. In the vicinity of the municipality three large urban centres are located, which are also industrial centres: Tomaszów Mazowiecki – bordering the commune area to the north, Opoczno – at a distance of 20 km, and Piotrków Trybunalski – at a distance of 28 km. Large urban centres, i.e. the city of Łódź and Warsaw are ca. 45 km and about 115 km away, respectively. The total area of Tomaszów Mazowiecki Municipality is 151 km² and is divided into 24 villages (*sołectwa*). According to the data of the Tomaszów Mazowiecki Municipality Office, at the end of 2020, the municipality was inhabited by 11104 people. The municipality has an agricultural and industrial character, and the areas around the Sulejowski Reservoir are of a tourist and summer resort character. In the eastern part of the municipality, apart from agricultural areas, there are also areas of exploitation of natural deposits. A large area of the municipality is located on the border of the Piliczańsko-Radomszczański Protected Landscape Area (<https://www.gminatomaszowmaz.pl/pl/polozenie-gminy>).

The municipality faces significant challenges related to social policy, which will be determined by the aging of the population. “Challenges also include the need of adapting to climate policy and improving environmental quality. (...)The model of functional and spatial transformations assumes the formation of distinct zones of development: economic, tourist and residential” (Tomaszów Mazowiecki Municipality Development Strategy 2030).

The Tomaszów Mazowiecki municipality is very active in the field of promoting regional culture. Particularly great importance is attached to nurturing old traditions and customs. In the Tomaszów Mazowiecki Municipality there are 5 folk ensembles: folklore groups “Smardzewianie” from Smardzewice and “Sami Swoi” from Twarda, the “Cieblówianie” Song and Dance Group, the “Cieblówianie” Children’s Song and Dance Group, the “Mali Smardzewianie” Children’s Song and Dance Group and the “Kalina” Folk Group from Wąwał. The promotion of culture, especially in the field of culinary arts and folk handicrafts, is carried out by Country Housewives’ Associations, operating in almost every village. Also worth mentioning is the high activity of brass bands operating at the Zawada and Smardzewice VFBs.

Cultural institutions include the newly established Community Cultural Centre in Wiaderno and 12 rural community centres operating in the villages of Cekanów, Cieblowice Duże, Chorzęcin, Godaszewice, Komorów, Kwiatkówka, Łazisko, Smardzewice, Sługocice, Swolszewice Małe, Wąwał, Zawada, as well as the Smardzewice Municipal Public Library with branches in Twarda, Wiaderno,

Komorów and Zawada. All of these centres organize numerous activities for children and young people, including holiday meetings with books, games, cultural activities and activities within interest circles. In addition, the village community centres are meeting places for children, young people and seniors alike. In the field of culture, the municipality cooperates with the District Social Animation Centre, the Municipal Cultural Centre in Tomaszów Mazowiecki, and the District Governors.

In the municipality of Tomaszów Mazowiecki there are 3 Volunteer Fire Brigades within the National Firefighting and Rescue System (NFRS): VFB Smardzewice, VFB Twarda and VFB Chorzęcin, 4 units outside the NFRS: VFB Zawada, VFB Wiaderno, VFB Wąwał, VFB Godaszewice, and supplementary units: VFB Łazisko, VFB Jadwigów (Tomaszów Mazowiecki Municipality Development Strategy 2030).

In 2020–2022, NFRS units in the Tomaszów Mazowiecki municipality, namely VFB Smardzewice, VFB Chorzęcin and VFB Twarda, were dispatched to a total of 432 missions. Over the three years, the firefighters had 122 fire related missions. However, data regarding the missions of the units shows that most frequently occurring reasons were local threats - 268. There were 12 mission trips that turned out to be false alarms (Summary of missions of NRRS Units of Tomaszów Mazowiecki Municipality).

The above data testify to the high potential of the surveyed local community. The local government is aware of socio-economic problems, unfortunately, it pays somewhat less attention to the issue of security. In the strategy document, one can only come across an emphasis on problems arising from social risks. However, there is optimism that the authorities recognize the potential of social capital, in the form of resilient VFBs, Country Housewives' Associations (CHAs), Cultural Centres or rural community centres. Residents are also of a similar opinion, rating the activities of local VFBs very highly. They appreciate both their activity and their openness to help.

When asked to rate the performance of local VFBs, and the vast majority gave a very high rating, with 58.7% of respondents giving a *very good* rating and 32.7% giving a *good* rating.

A similar level of satisfaction was noted when asked to rate openness and willingness to help. Almost all of the residents participating in the survey confirmed that they can always count on the help of the local VFB unit. This was the answer given by 95.2% of respondents.

The compiled research material also made it possible to see that the assessment of the role of the VFB by the municipality's residents is not only limited to admiration and respect. Residents are able to perceive specific activities that they believe significantly affect their sense of security. When asked which activities most notably affect their sense of security, respondents selected respectively: 87.5% of respondents opted for *securing local incidents*, 35.6% of respondents indicated *participating in important local events*, and 31.7% selected *running Youth Fire Brigades*. This was followed by selecting presence in schools and kindergartens under the prevention programs, and presence and assistance at various types of investments and events.

How do you rate the activities of the VFB on a scale of 1 to 5 (where 1 is very bad and 5 is very good)?

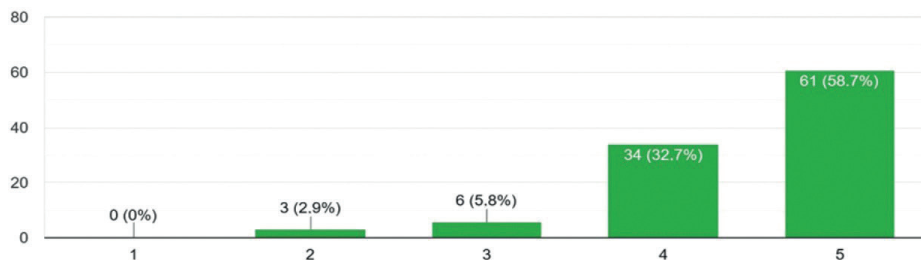


Figure 3. Graphic summary of respondents' opinions in the context of assessing the activities of local VFB

According to you, can one count on the assistance of the VFB when the need arises?

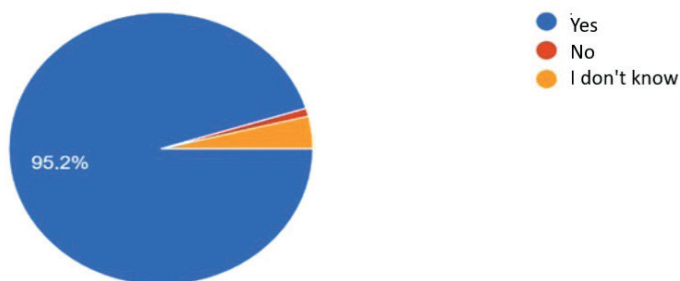


Figure 4. Graphic summary of respondents' opinions in the context of assessing the readiness and openness to help of local VFB

According to the authors, an interesting result is the high level of awareness among residents of the studied municipality, which can help enhance the activities of VFBs in the context of shaping the safety culture of their local community. First of all, they are aware that all preventive activities require adequate financial resources, but also the involvement of residents and cooperation of VFBs with other entities and institutions participating in the local security system. As a key factor in the process of improving the activities of VFB to raise the level of safety culture, respondents indicated *greater funding for VFB from the municipality* (74% of respondents), 43.3% of residents chose the need for *greater involvement of residents in the development of local VFB units*, and *the conduct of training by local VFBs* was selected as the third – by 38.5% of respondents.

In your opinion, which activities of the local Volunteer Fire Brigade have the greatest impact on your sense of security? Please select a maximum of 3 answers.

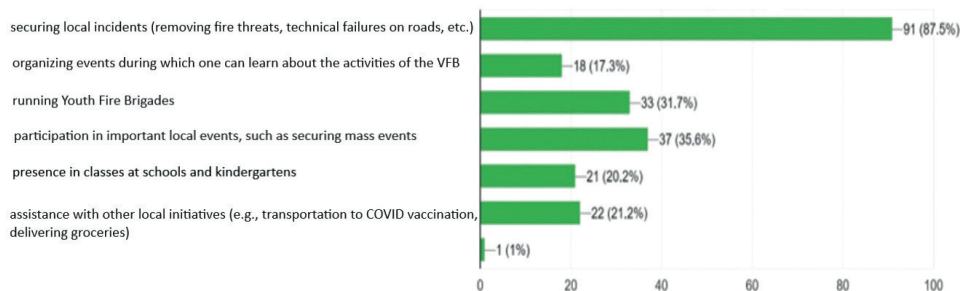


Figure 5. Graphic summary of respondents' opinions regarding local VFB activities that most increase the sense of security of the local community

What do you think could improve the VFB operations in terms of shaping the safety culture of your local community? Please select a maximum of 3 answers.

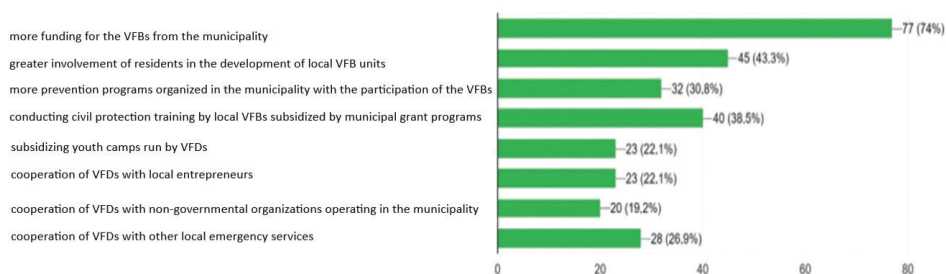


Figure 6. Graphic summary of respondents' opinions regarding proposals for improving VFB activities in the context of shaping the safety culture of the local community

In addition, the validity of such a high assessment of residents can be proven by numerous activities that have been identified through the conducted research, undertaken especially by the VFB and the Country Housewives' Associations. Below are presented only selected activities, which are also examples of the practical dimension of shaping the safety culture of the local community in the rural municipality of Tomaszów Mazowiecki (Table 3).

Table 3. Activity of volunteer fire brigades in the context of safety culture

No.	Example of VFB activity in the rural municipality of Tomaszów Mazowiecki	The statutory task of the VFB into which the implemented measure fits	The safety culture pillar, under which activity has been undertaken	Local community need met by the activity implemented	Safety culture function realised as part of the activity undertaken
1.	<p>"It tastes better together - a traditional feast in a modern style"</p> <p>The cooperation of the Chorzęcin VFB together with KGW during an integration picnic, for the inhabitants of the Chorzęcin sołectwo. During the picnic, KGW prepared a variety of dishes. The VFB organised a demonstration of its vehicle and fire station. There were many attractions for children, such as foil painting, inflatable slides and soap bubbles.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To organise educational and cultural projects to promote knowledge and skills in the field of fire protection; - To promote and support cooperation between local social and economic partners in the field of fire protection; - To support the municipality in the implementation of assistance to the local community; -To integrate the local community; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - spiritual and organisational pillar 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -the personal safety of each member of the local community -the flow of information from inside the local environment to outside and vice versa -respect for the law by members of the local community -local culture 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -integrative, adaptive, stimulatory, regulatory function
Commentary					
<p>This seemingly unrelated project is, firstly, a project in the area of social prevention and therefore in the area of safety. Secondly, it perfectly illustrates the idea of shaping a community safety culture in both spiritual and organisational dimensions. In the spiritual dimension, it helps to nurture local traditions while strengthening local bonds. It also builds local identity, responsibility and involvement. The activity of the local VFB, in cooperation with the KGW, ideally demonstrates the effects of community participation and the practical organisational dimension of safety culture. It is worth adding that a sense of connectedness makes it easier in times of trial for effective cooperation and efficient self-organisation; as demonstrated by the many grassroots initiatives undertaken by local communities that know each other well.</p>					
2.	<p>-new boots and protective helmets;</p> <p>Thanks to the support of the Bank Pekao S.A. Foundation, the Volunteer Fire Brigade in Chorzęcin has acquired new boots and protective helmets for its firefighters. The personal equipment purchased has significantly increased the safety and effectiveness of rescue operations. It was a great step forward for the whole community and proof that together we can achieve more.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -promote and support interaction between local social and economic partners in the field of fire protection; -supporting the municipality in the implementation of assistance to the local community -integrating the local community; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -material and organisational pillar 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -the personal safety of each member of the local community -the flow of information from inside the local environment to outside and vice versa -respect for the law by members of the local community -local culture 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -stimulating, regulatory function
Commentary					
<p>This project perfectly demonstrates the idea of corporate social responsibility and the sense of responsibility of volunteer firefighters for their own safety and that of those they rush to help. For a safe rescuer means safe victims. Only with good individual protection (including specialised footwear or helmets) can firefighters effectively remove the effects of hazards. It is also an activity that demonstrates the practical dimension of safety culture in the material and organisational pillars. The VFB has demonstrated how important the marketing of relations with business representatives is in shaping a safety culture and the benefits of an engagement dialogue, leading not only to sources of funding, but also to demonstrating that safety is a matter for all members of the community, not just those who physically risk themselves during rescue operations. The problem of subsidising the needs of VFBs is quite widespread, so assistance from the Foundation is an expression of social responsibility, but also of respect for the mission carried out by volunteers towards the local community.</p>					

Table 3 continued

3.	<p>Free eye test</p> <p>Provision of a square in front of the VFB fire station where there was a minibus in which a FREE computerised eye test was carried out.</p>	- supporting the municipality in the implementation of community-based aid;	- material pillar	-personal safety of each member of the local community -safety in public spaces	-integrative, regulatory function
4.	<p>Temporary vaccination point</p> <p>Organisation of a temporary vaccination point against COVID-19 at Chorzęcin VFB.</p>	- supporting the municipality in the implementation of community-based aid;	- material pillar	-personal safety of each member of the local community -safety in public spaces	-integrative, regulatory function
Commentary					
<p>These two activities show perfectly how great the correlation and interdependence is between the VFB's statutory tasks, social needs and safety culture functions (which are incidentally almost identical to those of the state). In these two cases, the VFB merely provided its fire station or the area around it. However, when viewed from the perspective of shaping a culture of safety, these are actions that promote an attitude of responsibility, support and assistance in carrying out the municipality's statutory tasks. Moreover, they testify to the openness and servant role of VFBs towards the local community. The health of local residents, ophthalmic prevention or acting in the response phase of the COVID-19 vaccination issue, are excellent opportunities to build a sense of shared responsibility, integration and bonding. They also provide evidence that community members can count on each other's support during difficult times. It is also an example of building community resilience.</p>					
5.	<p>100th anniversary of VFB</p> <p>Celebrations to mark the 100th anniversary of the establishment of Chorzęcin VFB (awards, presentation of the history of the VFB, parade, joint celebration and tasting of food prepared by the KGW.</p> <p>celebration and tasting of dishes prepared by KGW; generous participation of sponsors)</p>	- to organise educational and cultural projects to promote knowledge and skills in fire protection; - to promote and -to promote cooperation between local social and economic partners in the field of fire protection; - to support the municipality in the implementation of assistance to the local community; -integrating the local community;	- spiritual and organisational pillar	-the personal safety of each member of the local community -the flow of information from inside a given local community to outside and vice versa -compliance with the law by members of the local community- local culture	-integrative, adaptive, stimulatory, regulatory function
Commentary					
<p>Events such as the jubilee celebrations not only promote an attitude of gratitude and mutual respect, but are also an excellent lesson in history and fire safety education, exemplifying the spiritual dimension of safety culture. It is also an excellent opportunity for community integration and cooperation, so it fulfils the prerequisites of the organisational dimension of safety culture.</p>					

Table 3 continued

6.	<p>Sports competition in Smardzewice</p> <p>The commune sports and fire-fighting competition of VFB units from the Tomaszów Mazowiecki municipality. The competition was attended by 12 teams, including 2 women's teams and a children's team from VFB Chorzęcin.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - organising activities to promote sport and physical culture; - integrating the local community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - spiritual and organisational pillar 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -the personal safety of each member of the local community -the flow of information from inside the local environment to outside and vice versa -respect for the law by members of the local community -local culture 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -integrative, adaptive, stimulatory, regulatory function
Commentary					
<p>This is a typical example of the implementation of the VFB's mission to promote sport and social integration. It is an excellent form of realising the spiritual and organisational dimensions of safety culture. This form of activity not only influences physical development, but also develops fighting spirit and internal discipline. This is because sport has always been the best way to protect against destructive boredom or laziness.</p>					
7.	<p>Training for residents</p> <p>The VFB in Chorzęcin organised a safety training course on operating petrol chainsaws for wood.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - to promote the principles and good practices of fire protection for buildings, other structures and grounds; - to support the municipality in carrying out community assistance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - spiritual and organisational pillar 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -personal security of each member of the local community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -integrative, adaptive, stimulatory, regulatory function
Commentary					
<p>With this undertaking, the VFB has shown that, in carrying out its mission of providing assistance to the local community, they are able to come forward to help with prevention and ensuring the safety of the local community's work, even in areas that are not obvious, such as working with a saw. Not obvious to outsiders, of course, as the VFB, serving locally, is very familiar with local needs.</p>					

The presented VFB activities were developed in a matrix system to show the correlations and relationships that exist between the statutory tasks of VFB, the needs of local communities and the functions and dimensions of security culture. The juxtaposition of just a few examples of activities, according to the authors, captures the essence of the considerations and organizes the issues in question. The demonstrated system of interdependencies is presented in graphic form (Fig. 7)

SYSTEM OF INTERDEPENDENCE

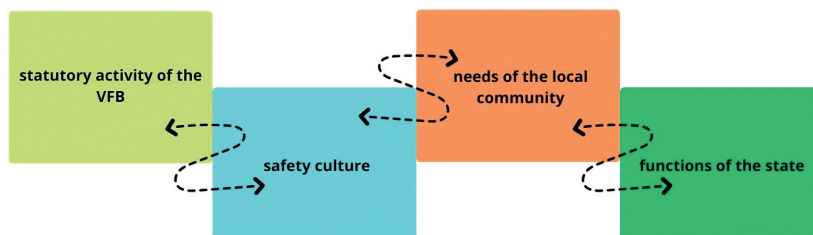


Figure 7. System of interdependence

The results of the research presented here make it clear that the VFB has a definite impact on the formation of community safety culture. It influences the local community in various dimensions of safety culture. In the spiritual dimension, VFBs contribute to raising the level of public awareness of hazards, civil protection, both among young people in the framework of the conducted Youth Fire Brigades and other residents of the municipality. They also participate significantly in the process of building local identity and a sense of local ties. In the organizational dimension, they help in the efficient organization of security measures for mass events or in responding to all types of incidents resulting from forces of nature or human activity. In the material dimension, they shape the culture of safety by taking care of their fire station and firefighting equipment, thanks to which they can save the lives and property of the local community in case of fire or other adverse events.

4. Summary

Awareness of the unpredictability and high dynamics of the development of modern security threats makes it the duty of a democratic state to have a system that is capable of countering them and responding effectively when they occur. Ensuring security is considered the basis of a well-functioning society (Choenni, Leertouwer, 2010). "A prerequisite for the proper functioning of the security system at the local level is the cooperation of local authorities, services responsible for security and public order, and local communities" (Lis, 2015, p. 394). P. Mickiewicz is of the opinion that: "Community security is both the levelling of threats and the estimation of the risk of their occurrence in the immediate environment of a community. (...) It should be aimed at providing the local community with a sense of security covering all its stages, i.e. survival, preservation of identity and independence, a sense of certainty and tranquillity, and the right to own and develop. The essential form of this process should be the programming of activities and their successive implementation to the satisfaction of the recipients, that is, again, the local community (...)" (Mickiewicz, 2020, p. 5). Security, therefore, is an integral element through which a local community can function. It is expressed by meeting the fundamental needs of a local community. If a community of people living in a particular area is safe, it automatically becomes a more attractive community (Wojakowska, 2020). A sense of security fosters the creation of bonds and identity that make the local community a cohesive, supportive organism capable of actively creating and protecting the common good. T. Biernat and J. Gierszewski go a step further, stating that "local security is a desirable state of conditions conducive to development, care and education" (Biernat, Gierszewski, 2012, p. 16). In their local activities volunteer fire brigades fulfil these and many other conditions. Not only do they raise future generations of volunteer firefighters, they also educate the entire community, promoting a spirit of generosity and sensitivity to the needs of

others. They build a sense of local identity and community ties. In carrying out their mission of service: “For the Glory of God, for the rescue of the people”, they inspire others to help and take shared responsibility for the local community.

To sum up, in its activities the state, through various forces and means, especially through public administration (including local government) and through the involvement of the local community, should try to create favourable conditions for the creation of a culture of security. It should strive to regulate social relations in such a way that each citizen feels safe in their environment and can function with a sense of respect for their rights, values and personal property. The above reflection is in line with the tasks that the state should carry out, with regard to the applicable functions of the state, namely the adaptive, organizational, regulatory or innovative functions, among others. These functions are also subordinated to the activities carried out in the various pillars of security culture, distinguishing an integrative, adaptive, stimulative and regulatory function.

We trust that the material presented will inspire similar research to be undertaken in more local communities, and, above all, that it will provide an opportunity to implement and promote the idea of community safety culture.

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