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A SOCIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF THE PERCEPTION OF THE 21ST PODHALE RIFLEMEN BRIGADE AS A SOCIAL INSTITUTION BY MEMBERS OF THE LOCAL COMMUNITIES OF THE PODKARPACKIE REGION

Civil-military relations have constituted one of the areas of research in the field of military sociology for a number of years. It is all the more justified as the military, being a social institution, operates in a given local community at the mezzo-sociological level, creating not only a national security protection system but also a social security system for residents of the towns and cities with military home stations. The non-military nature of the relationship is one of the most important elements between the military and members of a local community. The integrating activities carried out in the places where the military units are stationed became the basis for conducting research on the perception of the 21st Podhale Riflemen Brigade in this role by the inhabitants of Rzeszów, Przemyśl, Jarosław, Nisko, and Kłodzko. The research was carried out by means of a diagnostic survey using a questionnaire and the analysis of available documents. The results obtained can be used to better understand the role played by military units in local communities and to establish an appropriate information policy.

Keywords: army, local community, civil-military relations, uniformed public services.

1. INTRODUCTION

The 21st Podhale Riflemen Brigade (hereinafter referred to as 21st PRB) has been part of the landscape of the Podkarpackie region for over a quarter of a century, and as a result of organizational changes, also of the Dolnośląskie Province. Established in 1993 on the basis of the 9th Dresden Mechanized Division, it was initially stationed only in Rzeszów. The subsequent inclusion of the sub-units of the 14th Armoured Brigade in its composition extended the area of its stationing to other towns – Jarosław and Przemyśl (Karp, 2000). In the following years, the 22nd Mountain Infantry Battalion from Kłodzko was included in its composition, and then the 16th Tczew Engineering Battalion from Nisko. After all the changes, the Brigade is stationed in five locations, four of which are in the Podkarpackie region and one in Dolny Śląsk (Lower Silesia). The specific symbolism of the Podhale region, expressed in uniforms and signs, makes the soldiers of the 21st PRB easily noticed and recognized by the civilian community. The time of its existence, especially in the

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periods of numerous significant changes in the society, gives the basis for the conclusion that the relations between the army and the inhabitants were established at that time. It is important to analyze this issue from the point of view of the local community, which is a very important partner of the armed forces. Soldiers, both the commanding staff and the rest of the military, operate in these communities and undoubtedly become part of them.

It should be noted that in many armies in the world, guidebooks and instructions are issued for commanders of military units regarding their relations with the external environment, especially in case of exercises with the use of firearms, artillery, armour, helicopters and airplanes that are burdensome for members of local communities, their everyday peace and may also lead to specific damage to private property. Such guidebooks and instructions are intended to help commanders of military units in creating proper relations with a given community. (*Commander's Guide*, 2012).

The aim of this study is to analyze the civil-military relations in the area of non-military influences that occur between the 21st PRB as a social institution and members of local communities, cities and towns where military units have their home stations.

Therefore, a research question is posed in this study, which is: how are the civil-military relations of an institutional nature manifested between the soldiers of a given military unit and the members of the local community, and what are the opinions of members of local communities about such activities? Thus, this is determined by the layout of the study, which consists of two separate yet closely related parts.

2. 21ST PODHALE RIFLEMEN BRIGADE AS A SOCIAL INSTITUTION

The research on the perception of civil-military relations was carried out in 2018 in all the locations of the 21st PRB home stations. A total of 1064 members of local communities and 843 soldiers from all the units of the Brigade participated in the study, but due to editing restrictions, all data on the studied population and research procedures are included in the monograph titled "Between the army and the local community. A Sociological Study" (Czekaj, 2021).

In order to answer the first part of the research question, the following hypothesis has been formulated: Civil-military relations of an institutional nature, between military units and the local environment, are manifested in various local undertakings, important for both partners in the relations.

In support of this hypothesis, it should be noted that the units of the 21st PRB, unlike most brigades in the Polish Army, are located in many places all over the Podkarpackie region, not concentrating only in the region of Rzeszów. Each battalion of the Brigade is a separate military unit, characterized not only by a defined military specialization, but also having its own banner, i.e. an element that distinguishes them from other units of the Brigade. Such a dislocation is undoubtedly conducive to integration with local communities, although the message that units of the Polish Army "grow into" a given community and feel strongly associated with it is also important.

Therefore, Chart 1 presents the level of satisfaction of the members of the local communities, cities and towns where the unit is stationed, with the presence of a given military unit in a municipality or a county (in polish: powiat).

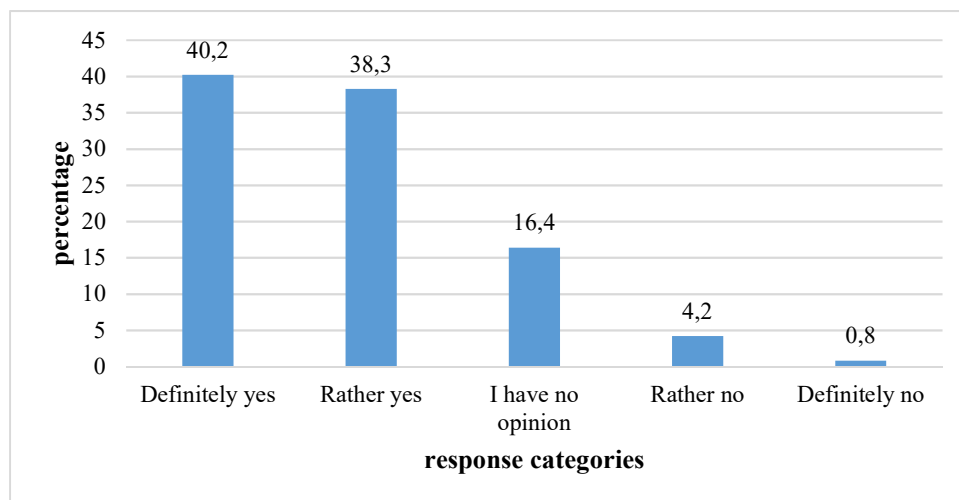


Chart 1. Level of satisfaction with the presence of a military unit in the municipality/county
Source: 2018 own research, civilians (n = 1,064).

The results of the research indicate that the inhabitants of the garrison towns of the region have a positive attitude to the presence of the military in their social environment. Among all the respondents, the vast majority, 78.5%, positively assess the presence of the military in their localities. There are 5% of people expressing a negative opinion about the presence of soldiers of the 21st PRB, and 16.4% of the respondents do not have a clear opinion on this issue. Thus, it allows to maintain the statement that military units, as neighbours, are positively perceived by members of the local communities in which they are stationed.

But for the soldiers' own view on the subjects, this analysis would not be complete. Their opinions in this respect make it possible to build a fuller picture of the surrounding reality and mutual relations or relationships. Therefore, the surveyed soldiers were asked a question regarding their beliefs about how they are perceived by the civilian population. The answer to this question, on the basis of the received feedback, allows to see whether these civil-military relations are authentic or merely institutional, formalized. The answer to this question is presented in Chart 2.

As the presented data shows, the individual feelings of soldiers regarding the perception of the army in local communities indicate a very high rating. As many as 94.1% of the surveyed soldiers expressed a positive opinion on this subject, and only 0.5% of the surveyed had negative experiences in this regard. This confirms the positive opinions of the members of the local community. The most positive responses regarding the perception of the army by given inhabitants were expressed by soldiers from Nisko – 98.6%, soldiers from Rzeszów – 96.9% with positive opinions, from Przemyśl – 94.1%, from Kłodzko – 90.5% and from Jarosław – 88.5%.

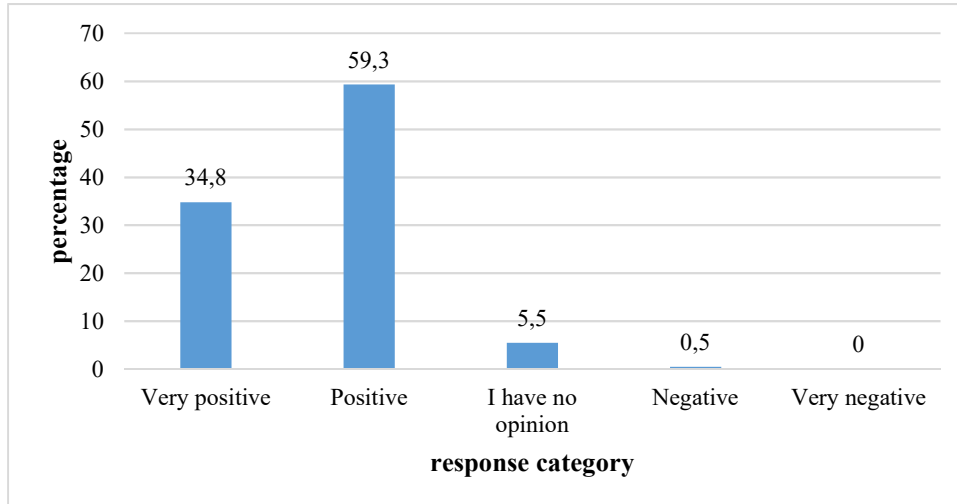


Chart 2. Assessment of the perception of the army by the local community in the opinion of soldiers

Source: 2018 own research, soldiers (n = 843).

The above presented observations may indicate an important role played by the military in the society, and in case of the local community, they can be clearly expressed in relation to the definition of a social institution, both in its narrower sense as an organized and established set of human activities, assuming the existence of the main principle (the goal of an institution), personnel, norms, material resources, functions and actual activity, aimed at satisfying specific needs. It can also be expressed in a broader context as a permanent system of socially established ways and rules of behaviour, sanctioned by social norms (Olechnicki, Załęcki, 1998). The term “institution” itself has several meanings. It can be treated as the basis of order or social order, or as separate, organized types of activity undertaken in order to satisfy the needs of individuals and entire communities. It can also be understood as a reference to forms of social organization that are characterized by a clear and specific order, and in particular are designed to subject people's behaviour to special rigors (Skąpska, Ziółkowski, 1998). Marina Nuciari confirms these observations, writing about the military, and points to:

discipline, obedience to formal norms, formal authority, rationale division of roles and attributes, competence, and loyalty to an impersonal legitimate power, in a word, the typical bureaucratic organization, are all tools provided by Weber in the consideration of the military as a social institution (Nuciari, 2006).

On the other hand, Jonathan Turner points to the attachment of this set of roles and values to specific social structures (Turner, 1997). He believes they ensure the possibility of survival, both as an individual and as a group, being its member (Turner, 1998).

When analyzing the 21st Podhale Riflemen Brigade as a social institution, first of all, attention should be paid to the fact that each of the battalions forming it constitutes a separate military unit, and their commanders act as garrisons commanders and are obliged

to cooperate with local authorities and communities. The research of individual local communities and soldiers was limited to the localities of individual battalions and squadrons in order to make an assessment in the area where mutual contact and relations are direct. Nevertheless, the results are presented in relation to the entire Brigade and the entire community in which individual units operate.

As a result of all the personnel and structural changes that have taken place in recent years, the territorial range of the Brigade covers the five garrisons of: Rzeszów, Przemyśl, Jarosław, Nisko, Kłodzko. In four of them, the garrisons commanders are brigade officers.

The Rzeszów garrison covers the counties of Dębica, Jasło, Krosno, Ropczyce-Sędziszów, Rzeszów, Strzyżów, and towns with county rights: Rzeszów and Krosno. The command headquarters is in Rzeszów, and it is commanded by the Commander of the 21st Podhale Riflemen Brigade. The command and staff of the 21st PRB, the 21st Headquarters Battalion, the 1st Podhale Riflemen Battalion and the 21st Logistics Battalion are stationed in the garrison.

The Przemyśl garrison covers the counties of Bieszczady, Brzozów, Lesko, Przemyśl, Sanok, and Przemyśl town. The command headquarters is in Przemyśl, and it is commanded by the Commander of the 5th Podhale Riflemen Battalion. The 5th Podhale Riflemen Battalion in Przemyśl and the 1st Tank Battalion in Żurawica are stationed in the garrison.

The Jarosław garrison covers the counties of Jarosław, Lubaczów and Przeworsk. The commander's office is in Jarosław, and it is commanded by the Commander of the 14th Self-Propelled Artillery Squadron. The 14th Self-Propelled Artillery Squadron and the 21st Anti-Aircraft Artillery Squadron are stationed in the garrison.

The Kłodzko garrison covers the counties of Dzierżoniów, Kłodzko, Nysa, Strzelin and Ząbkowice. The commander's office is in Kłodzko, and it is commanded by the commander of the 22nd Mountain Infantry Battalion. The battalion's forces are stationed in the garrison.

The 16th Tczew Engineering Battalion is stationed in the Nisko garrison. The 3rd Engineering Battalion is located in this garrison, commanded by the commander of the garrison.

In total, the garrisons commanded by officers from the Brigade cover 14 counties and 3 cities with county status in the Podkarpackie Province; additionally one is located in the Nisko county and 5 counties of the Dolnośląskie Province.

Garrison commander is a kind of connector between military units, local authorities and the garrison community. His competences lie within the framework of crisis management, combating natural disasters and eliminating their effects, and co-participating in organizing projects with the engagement of the Polish Army sub-units. He cooperates with governmental and self-governmental administration bodies in the maintenance of memorial sites, cemeteries and military graves. He manages the participation of military honorary assistance in state, patriotic and religious ceremonies and funerals. He is authorized to cooperate as a representative of the military with non-governmental organizations and other social partners as part of activities for the defence of the state.

It should be mentioned that local communities also identify with the Brigade units, both those stationed in their area and others. An example of this is the foundation of banners by the societies of individual cities and towns in the Podkarpackie region, both for the commands and for units of the Brigade. It is an expression of commitment, trust and identification of the society with the military unit. At the same time, it obliges the military to support the communities that launch such initiatives. The banner of the 21st Podhale Riflemen Brigade was the first to be funded by the society of the City of Rzeszów. The

handing over was made on May 22, 1994 in the Rzeszów Market Square. The banner was awarded by the President of the Republic of Poland, Lech Wałęsa, and the handing over was made by the Commander of the Kraków Military District, Maj. Gen. Zenon Bryk (Karp, 2000).

The banner for the 1st Podhale Riflemen Battalion was funded by the inhabitants of the Sądecki Region and combatants of the 1st Podhale Riflemen Regiment. The award was made on December 8, 1996 in the Nowy Sącz Market Square. The battalion directly inherits the traditions of the 1st Podhale Riflemen Regiment, which was stationed until 1939 in Nowy Sącz (Karp, 2000).

The banner for the 5th Podhale Riflemen Battalion was funded by the Krosno society and awarded on September 30, 1995 in the Krosno Market Square. On behalf of the President of the Republic of Poland, Lech Wałęsa, the banner was presented by Brig. Mieczysław Karus. During this period, the battalion was stationed in Rzeszów (Karp, 2000).

The banner for the 21st Headquarters Battalion was funded by the inhabitants of the Boguchwała municipality and awarded on June 22, 1997 in Boguchwała. On behalf of the President of the Republic of Poland, the banner was presented by the Secretary of State in the President's Office, assisted by the Deputy Commander of the CMD Brig. Gen. Piotr Makarewicz (Karp, 2000).

The banner of the 1st Tank Battalion was funded in 1996 by the inhabitants of Żurawica. The banner of the 14th Self-Propelled Artillery Squadron was taken over by the squadron after the disbanded 14th Jarosław Rocket Artillery Squadron. This, in turn, was funded by the community of Jarosław and Radymno, and awarded in 1997. The banner for the 21st Anti-Aircraft Artillery Squadron was funded by the Strzyżów community and awarded on April 19, 1998 in the Strzyżów Market Square. The banner for the 21st Logistics Battalion was funded by the community of the Sanok region and awarded on October 5, 2012 at the Galicyjski Market Square in Sanok (Surmacz, 2001).

The cooperation of military units with the civilian environment is not limited only to participation in state ceremonies or providing aid in the event of flood. These are important activities, but they do not cover the entire range of activities carried out at the interface between the army and society. A specific category of these activities is cooperation with non-governmental organizations and other social partners. An example is the support of uniformed classes and units of the "Strzelec" organization by the Brigade units. The cooperation is carried out on the basis of a formal agreement signed by unit commanders with the institution, and the details are annually included in the Plan of cooperation of the military unit with non-governmental organizations and other social partners.

On August 22, 2013, the Commander of the 5th Podhale Riflemen Battalion signed a cooperation agreement with the School Complex in Bircza. As part of the agreement, the unit supports the uniformed class, which was created for the first time in the 2013/2014 school year starting from September. The cooperation assumes that the interest in military service will increase and that it will contribute to the development of patriotic and civic attitudes based on combat traditions and the history of the battalion. The battalion, in turn, supports education in the field of military subjects. One day in each month of the school year, soldiers conduct classes with students of the uniformed class.

The 5th Podhale Riflemen Battalion carries out regular cooperation with the Rifle Unit No. 2009 of the Józef Piłsudski "Strzelec" Rifle Association under the agreement concluded on May 21, 2014. The cooperation includes supporting all initiatives related to cultivating the tradition of the Polish Army, developing patriotic attitudes among the members of

“Strzelec”, helping organizations in organizing training in military disciplines, exchanging experience, and preparing members for military service (Surmacz, 2001). The cooperation means both joint activities and participation of shooters in patriotic and military celebrations.

The Brigade Command cooperates on the basis of relevant agreements with the Rzeszów University of Technology in order to promote the acceptance of the state defence policy, shape the image of the Armed Forces and recruit candidates for military service. One of the tasks carried out jointly is the integration of the military community and the university students.

Therefore, there is a trend of increasing interest of social partners in establishing cooperation with the military. This is especially visible during anniversaries, national holidays, or other celebrations, when the army adds splendour to such celebrations, and members of the local communities can meet “their soldiers”, familiarize themselves with military equipment, talk to soldiers, slightly get to know the military environment. This is also visible in other activities. One of them is schoolchildren, because often the main beneficiaries of civil-military relations are educational institutions, which is related to the interest of young people in learning in the so-called “uniformed classes” (Sirko, Kozuba, Piotrowska-Trybull, 2019).

To sum up, as regards this part of arguments, it can be indicated that the analysis of the presented data shows that in fact the civil-military relations of an institutional nature between military units and the local environment are manifested in various local undertakings, important for both partners of this relation.

3. THE IMPORTANCE OF SOCIAL INSTITUTION IN THE OPINION OF MEMBERS OF LOCAL COMMUNITIES

In order to answer the second part of the research question, the following hypothesis was formulated: The opinions of members of local communities as regards the civil-military relations are positive, the more so as they are fostered by both relationship partners and relate to situations connected with their everyday life.

The military, as a social institution, carries out various activities not limited to satisfying its own organizational needs, but fulfilling a specific social role. It cannot act on its own, but performs specific tasks in order to meet the needs of the entire community and is inextricably linked with it by mutual relations. As Herbert Spencer pointed out, this role is assigned to a given institution as an organ in the human body (Szacki, 2002). Searching for the basic role of the army as an institution, one can, following Jonathan Turner, pay attention to the sources of the emergence of social institutions, which he identifies with “structures that arise to solve basic problems of people and organizations” (Turner, 1998). From this point of view, the primary and most important role of the military is to ensure security. Anthony Giddens identifies institutions with those elements of society that are responsible for ensuring the continuity of the functioning of societies (Giddens, 2006).

A lot of local residents still find the history of World War II and the post-war period to be alive. These memories create the lack of security and constant uncertainty about their future. Hence, the location of the units is, in a sense, a kind of “guarantor” of security for local communities. The residents identify with the units in their region. This is confirmed by the results of research, which indicate that ensuring safety is the category that the respondents rated the most. As many as 84.2% of the respondents considered this category

important from the point of view of the local community, while the lack of such a role of the military is mentioned by only 2.1% of respondents, which indicates their marginal percentage, and thus allows to maintain the hypothesis about the significant influence of the military on this area of social functioning.

The analysis of the influence of the military on the selected elements of the functioning of the local community is illustrated in Chart 3.

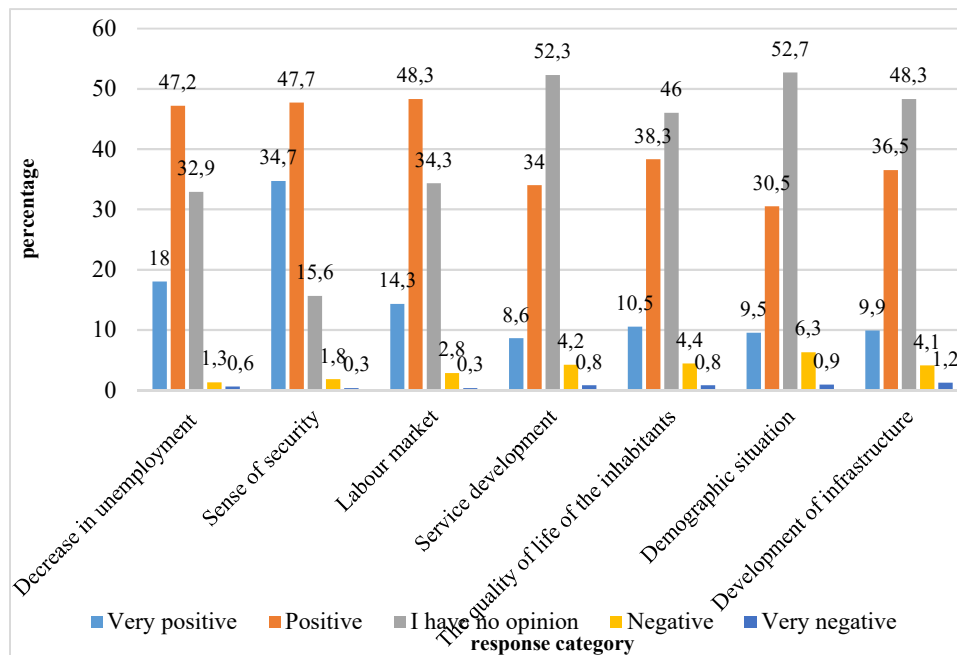


Chart 3. The influence of the military on the selected elements of the functioning of the local community

Source: 2018 own research, civilians (n = 1,064).

Apart from the main role assigned to the military, it also performs a number of other functions that have been developed over the years and which result from its organization. These include the impact that a military unit exerts on the labor market, including unemployment, the services market, the demographic situation and the development of infrastructure. Although these categories are not directly related to national security (state defense), nevertheless all the aforementioned factors create a social security system that ensures stability in the social, economic and economic areas. It should also be noted that the security guaranteed by the military, presenting its readiness to repel acts of external enemies, is related to economic security, which in everyday pragmatics affects the functioning of individuals and social groups living in a given local community.

The Brigade as a whole and its individual units is a significant employer in the Podkarpackie region. The Brigade is composed of over 4,000 soldiers and civilian employees. Most of the soldiers serving in it, especially non-commissioned officers and

privates, come from the region, and the remaining staff often settle in the Podkarpackie region for the period of their service. While for the capital of the province these several thousand jobs do not change the situation diametrically, in smaller towns such as Przemyśl, Nisko, Jarosław or Żurawica the military is often the second or third largest employer. Due to the organization of the military, the largest part of the Brigade personnel are privates and junior non-commissioned officers. As a rule, they are young people, with the average age of about 30 years of age for privates, who have recently completed their education. For many of them, the service is a chance to stay in their homeland, when plenty of their peers leave the province or leave the country in search of work.

Also, an important role of a military unit in a given location is to stop the trend of the outflow of young people from a given area. Stopping the outflow of young people and providing them with conditions for development provides both personal human resources for units and augmenting their manning positions. Furthermore, from the perspective of local communities, it ensures development and stops the social aging process of the local communities concerned, which can be observed in many localities that cannot offer jobs for the young. Therefore, such an important aspect of the functioning of military units is building a system of social ties with given residents, because members of the local community are directly related to the military as an institution and represent both the military and the local community in it. The assessment of the impact of the stationing of the military unit on stopping the outflow of young people is shown in Chart 4.

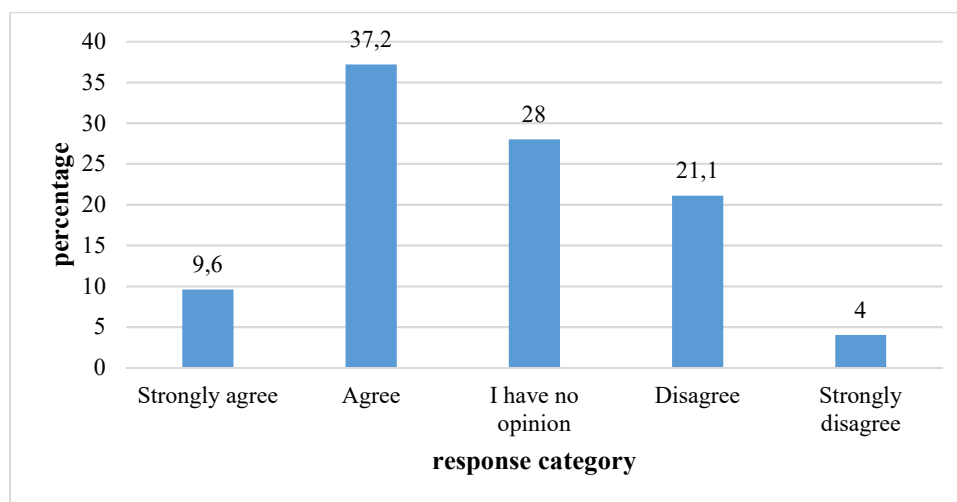


Chart 4. Assessment of the impact of the stationing of the military unit on stopping the outflow of young people

Source: 2018 own research (n = 1,064).

As the presented data indicate, in the opinion of 46.8% of the respondents, the stationing of the military in their place of residence has a positive impact on counteracting the outflow of young people. On the other hand, 25.1% of respondents do not see the direct impact of the presence of the military on the outflow of young people to larger urban centers. The attitude of the residents to military service as a potential workplace changed depending on

the age of the respondents, which may be associated with the expectations of young people towards the place of future work and its conditions. The lowest positions in the military service are intended for people with a relatively low professional preparation, and better educated people will look for a job in line with the field of study, hence the offer of the military will naturally be directed to people less competitive on the labor market. The results of the research in individual age groups are as follows: a) group 18–24 years: 41.7% of positive responses, 35.5% of negative responses, b) group 25–34 years: 39.4% of positive responses, 28.2% of negative responses, c) age group 35–44: 51% of positive responses, d) age group 45–54: 50% of positive responses, e) age group over 55: 55.7% of positive responses.

A clear decrease in the range of 25–34 years of age shows that people who have either completed their studies or already have achievements and professional experience look for employment in other areas. With the increase in age, positive opinions in this respect grow above 50%, and negative opinions remain around 20%. This can be interpreted as the need for stability and guarantee of safe future related to starting a family.

The economic factor related to the dislocation of the Brigade units is of significant importance for local communities. The military community consists not only of soldiers, but also their families, and it can be assumed that the military community is about 10,000 people, which is a large percentage of the population. This group supplies local economies by spending their income on daily living, buying housing and other goods. They pay taxes and local fees. Despite the centralization of some purchases for the military, many of them are carried out by local companies and enterprises that not only supply food products, but also provide various types of services, e.g. transport. After joining the military, many young people complete their education by starting their studies. They constitute a large group of students of local universities.

The assessment of the importance of a military unit for the conditions of economic development of a given local community is presented in the Chart 5 below.

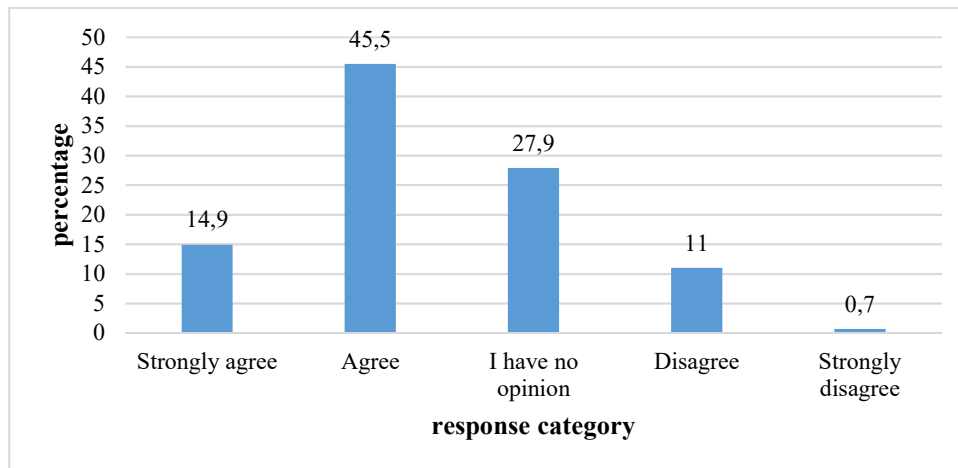


Chart 5. The assessment of the importance of a military unit for the conditions of economic development

Source: 2018 own research (n = 1,064).

As the research results show, the presence of a military unit (and soldiers) in a given locality, in which it is deployed, is not without significance for the economic conditions that prevail there. The scale of this impact depends on local conditions, in particular on the size of the community and the local labor market. More than half of the respondents positively assess the influence of the military on economic development - 60.4%. The negative aspect of the stationing of the military is indicated by a relatively small number of respondents – 11.7%. The differences in responses and a relatively large percentage of respondents who did not have an opinion on this topic indicate a lack of information or public interest in this issue. Among the respondents, the total number of positive responses increases with the age of the respondents. In case of analysis of the answers from the point of view of the respondents' education, a similar tendency can be observed. The higher the education, the higher is the rated category. Among the respondents with primary education, the influence of the military on economic development is responded positively by 40.0% of respondents, and with lower secondary or vocational education – 42.9%. This tendency is clearly maintained among people with secondary education, when the number of positive responses increases to 58.5%, and higher to 66.5%. Much better ratings are given by the respondents who have completed military service and those who have friends in the military environment. On average, the results are 6% higher compared to the respondents who did not have such contacts. This confirms the previous statement that proper knowledge or information on the functioning of institutions contribute to a better understanding of what was reflected in the research results.

To sum up, in order to show this issue from a different perspective, and thus to present a more complete picture of the mutual relations between the military and the local community, soldiers were asked about their willingness to permanently connect with the current place of their service, taking into account also subsequent service assignments in other locations. This is shown in the Chart 6.

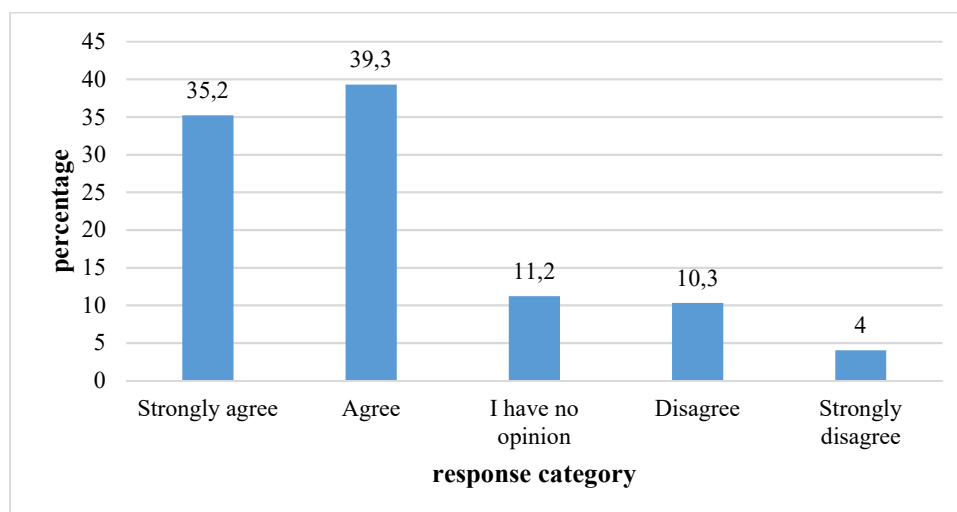


Chart 6. The willingness to permanently connect with the current place of service

Source: 2018 own research (n = 843).

The obtained results confirm that soldiers are willing to connect with the current places of service also after its completion. As many as 74.5% of the respondents expressed their willingness to stay in their current places of residence, regardless of possible professional changes, and thus the change of the place of service. Although they express their readiness to leave their families in their current localities, they also express their readiness to return to them after retiring from duty. In case of this category, a much smaller percentage of respondents, only 14.3%, expresses a lack of willingness to be associated with the current place of residence and service for life. Among the respondents, the tendency to change their place of residence is more often expressed by single people as well as those with better education. Married respondents show a greater need for stabilization. The size of the urban center was not without significance for the decisions made. Larger centers were chosen more often by the respondents, which undoubtedly results from access to the labor market, education and culture, as well as the possibility of taking up professional activity after completing their military service.

Therefore, it is noticeable that the opinions of both local community residents and soldiers serving in given military units on civil-military relations are positive, the more so as they are fostered by both partners of the relationship and relate to situations connected with their everyday life.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Based on the role played by the 21st Podhale Riflemen Brigade in the state defense system, as well as the role that emerges from the answers given by the respondents, it can be concluded that a military unit, as a social institution, satisfies numerous different social needs. Civil-military relations are also important, as in many cases they play a significant integrating role, and their relations with the local community are much deeper and rely on a mutually servant role. The military serves society, and society supports the military, for instance by joining it. The perception of military units, and more broadly the army as a social institution on a macro-sociological level, is beyond any doubt. The above-mentioned research results also indicate the existence of mutual relations and the playing of a significant role of military units in local communities. Social expectations on the macro and mezzo-sociological level in the area of security are similar. After narrowing the research area to the level of the local community, it can be noticed that there are new social roles that the military plays, which result from the specificity of the local community in which the military unit is stationed. These roles may be different for each community, although their "depth" results from the expectations of the inhabitants, the local situation on the labor market or historical conditions. This confirms the assumption that the military unit is an important social institution on the mezzo-sociological level.

The research hypotheses are confirmed, the first of which recognizes that in fact institutional civil-military relations between military units and the local community are manifested in various local undertakings, significant for both partners, and the second, that the opinions of local community residents, as well as soldiers serving in given military units on civil-military relations are positive, the more so that they are implemented by both partners of the relationship and concern situations connected with their everyday life.

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