



N A T A L I A E W A B E Ł D Y G A

**COMMUNITY RESILIENCE, RISK
PERCEPTION AND UNCERTAINTY
IN POLISH BORDER REGION
COMMUNITIES' RESPONSE TO
CRISIS CAUSED BY THE RUSSIAN
INVASION OF UKRAINE**

D O C T O R A L D I S S E R T A T I O N

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KAUNAS UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY

NATALIA EWA BEŁDYGA

COMMUNITY RESILIENCE, RISK
PERCEPTION AND UNCERTAINTY IN
POLISH BORDER REGION COMMUNITIES'
RESPONSE TO CRISIS CAUSED BY THE
RUSSIAN INVASION OF UKRAINE

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KAUNO TECHNOLOGIJOS UNIVERSITETAS

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BENDRUOMENĖS ATSPARUMAS, RIZIKOS
SUVOKIMAS IR NEAPIBRĖŽTUMAS
LENKIJOS PASIENIO BENDRUOMENĖSE
REAGUOJANT Į KRIZĘ, SUKELTĄ RUSIJOS
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LIST OF DEFINITIONS

Agency – capacity to point to an unlocked and untapped potential of the society for a positive change and an opportunity to replenish through almost a cathartic experience or as new yet chronic normal (Rydstrom, 2019; Moralli & Allegrini, 2021).

Border region – a region with a land border where more than half of the population lives 25 km from a land border (European Commission, 2024).

Civil preparedness has three core functions: continuity of the government, continuity of essential services to the population and civil support to military operations (NATO, 2024); it consists of a set of measures undertaken in advance by governments, organizations, communities, or individuals to better respond and cope with the immediate aftermath of a disaster, whether it be human-induced or caused by natural hazards. The objective is to reduce the loss of life and livelihoods (European Commission, 2024).

Community – a micro space of emotional connections, bonds and relationships, norms, meanings and values through which individual personalities are constructed; a web of emotional relationships which intersect and strengthen each other; a system of values, norms and meanings as well as shared history and cultural identity (Rose, 1999).

Community resilience – a community’s preparedness to act and respond to sudden disruptions or both the capacity to respond to crisis and factors (Zurek et al., 2022).

Collaboration capacity – the ability of a community and its members to respond to threats and minimize the impact of a crisis (Flint & Luloff, 2007).

Crisis – a critical point providing an opportunity for the social system to transform (Polanyi, 1944; Walby, 2022).

Crisis management – the actions that are taken to deal with an emergency or a difficult situation in an organized way (Cambridge Dictionary, 2024).

Human values – guiding posts which help humans choose and evaluate actions and events (Schwartz, 2007).

Local knowledge and leadership – community members as non-experts tackle issues and find solutions to problems on their own (Konsti-Laakso & Rantala, 2018); local knowledge and leadership empower communities to constantly look for solutions to problems and challenges created by the crisis (Helfgott, 2018).

Memoryscape – the construction of memory in spatial contexts (Minta-Tworzowska, 2013).

Polycrisis – a status of contemporary world coping simultaneously with multiple, also intersecting, crises such as environmental, financial, COVID-19 and war (Gaspar et al., 2023; Homer-Dixon et al., 2021).

Resilience – a capacity which involves robustness, an ability to adapt, adjust, persevere, learn and transform in response to crisis and threats (Norris et al., 2008; Paton & Johnston, 2001).

Resources – a useful or valuable possession or quality of a country, organization, or person (Cambridge Dictionary, 2024).

Risk – an active agent which directs attention towards what seems to be the most pressing dangers and uncertainties and which is in power to effect and introduce change (Müller-Mahn (ed.), 2012).

Risk perception – a trigger for community agency and response capacity during a crisis (Flint & Luloff, 2005; Yang et al., 2021).

Riskscape – a framework to navigate the overlapping and mutually strengthening various risks such as natural hazards, technological threats, pandemic outbreak or economic crises (Müller-Mahn, 2018).

Self-reliance – the quality of not needing help or support from other people (Cambridge Dictionary, 2024).

Social networks – an invaluable platform/capital to help actors meet even most unexpected needs required in a crisis situation (House et al., 1988).

Transboundary crisis produces the effect of a cascade and spillover of risks, contingencies and uncertainties in which not just those actors are affected by a crisis who are located where the crisis started was but also others are affected – those who are far away from the source of the crisis (Haas, 1958; Walby, 2022; Henig & Knight, 2023).

Uncertainty – a situation in which something is not known, or something that is not known or certain (Cambridge Dictionary, 2024).

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

COVID-19 – Coronavirus disease/pandemic which started in 2019

FEMA – Federal Emergency Management Agency

HFA – Hyogo Framework for Action

MAXQDA – qualitative data analysis software

NATO – The North Atlantic Treaty Organization

OECD – Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development

OSiR – Ośrodek Sportu i Rekreacji (eng. Sports and Recreation Center)

OSP – Ochotnicza Straż Pożarna (eng. Volunteer Fire Brigade)

PKP – Polskie Koleje Państwowe (eng. Polish State Railways)

UNHCR – The UN Refugee Agency

INTRODUCTION

Relevance of the Research

The reality of different social actors is getting more and more complex. The source of this complexity is risks and threats which increasingly and progressively become more connected and interrelated and which are leading to a situation where crises interact, cause one another or happen simultaneously (Beck, 1992; Polanyi, 1944; Walby, 2022; Moralli & Allegrini, 2021; Grabowska, 2023). This may lead to an interaction of hazards and risks which may, in turn, provoke a new crisis phenomenon of a *polycrisis*, which refers to a status of contemporary world coping simultaneously with multiple, also intersecting, crises such as environmental, financial, COVID-19 and war; these often provoke migration and refugee crises, illustrated by the massive arrival of refugees from Syria in 2015, migration crises on the borders between Belarus and EU member states in 2020 (Gaspar et al., 2023; Homer-Dixon et al., 2021) as well as millions of Ukrainians entering Europe in 2022 after Russia attacked their homeland (Straż Graniczna, 2024). The concept of a *polycrisis* was coined more than two decades ago by the philosopher, sociologist, and complexity theorist Edgar Morin and co-author Anne Brigitte Kern who argued that the key problem was not any single threat but the complex concurrence of challenges, conflicts and crises as well as unmanageable processes. In the 2010s, European scholars and leaders employed the concept to encapsulate the simultaneous migration, financial, and Brexit crises afflicting Europe (Zeitlin et al., 2019). In the months following Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, Columbia University's Adam Tooze and researchers at the Cascade Institute applied the term *polycrisis* to signalize the complex interactions between the effects of the war, climate change, and the pandemic (Lawrence et al., 2022). Those constituent crises are definitely interconnected, though it remains unclear how precise this interconnectedness is.

It may be stated that the present *polycrisis* is characterized by the same already familiar crises. Crisis is just one part of a *polycrisis*; this particular crisis interrelates with other crises. Yet, the current status of a *polycrisis* is unprecedented in many vital aspects. Firstly, the world has become much more interlinked, and the interconnected architecture of global systems is in essence at the bottom of the present *polycrisis*. Secondly, crises not only accelerate and amplify, but they also seem to be synchronizing. This was the case of Poland which was still struggling with the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic when its neighboring country Ukraine was militarily attacked by Russia, and, in a few days after the Russian aggression against Ukraine, Poland experienced the largest intake of people fleeing Ukraine and arriving in Poland. Literally, the whole world was still struggling with COVID-19 pandemic. This is an unprecedented *polycrisis* scenario where, due to some complex and still unrecognized links, everything happens at the same time causing various risks, threats, and global crises in a synchronous manner. Yet the nature of this synchronization and the relation between global crises remains unexplored. Meanwhile, the Russian invasion of Ukraine heightened uncertainty and created many

risks. Those risks – in case of Poland – involved one particularly – Russia’s decision to invade Poland too. Once again, the safety and security as well as the emerging threats due to the existence of a narrow passage of land between Russia (Kaliningrad Oblast) and Belarus, connecting by land EU and remaining NATO member states with the three Baltic states which are also NATO members (this narrow passage is referred to by the NATO as the Suwałki Gap) has become a focal point in the ongoing discussion about the Russia-Ukraine war developments. In this unprecedented *polycrisis* scenario caused by the Russian invasion of Ukraine, a country in the heart of Europe, the global system of security architecture has also been disrupted and threatened as well as the safety and security of local communities, particularly those physically close to the border with Ukraine, as in the case of the Polish border region community in Biecz, and with Russia and Belarus – such as in the case of Suwałki.

Since research tends to silo the analysis of response to crisis situations from the perspective of a single system and since governments tend to focus on single and immediate threats, while contemporary crises are causally intertwined and cannot be comprehended and addressed in isolation, targeted empirical research aimed at studying specific crisis interactions – and not isolated crises – can lead the way for policymakers and other actors willing to manage and navigate a *polycrisis*. As in the case of resilience, there is a need for an integrated study and assessment of all-inclusive interlinked crises involved in constituting a *polycrisis*. A crucial feature of a *polycrisis* is that the combined harms of interconnected crises are generally different from, and worse than, the harms each particular crisis would cause in isolation, where their host systems are not so interconnected (Lawrence et al., 2022). What manifests itself as a separate crisis in different systems, in fact worsens and reshapes one another to form a *polycrisis* and must be comprehended and addressed holistically. According to complexity scientists, a *polycrisis* is an emergent phenomenon which occurs at different levels – local, national, regional, or global – which is a host to any interacting systems. Most attention is given to crises interacting at the global level within which global systems are organized in a way that facilitates disruptions to spread quickly around the world. A *polycrisis* is no longer a sole buzzword but a real framework available for policymakers, scholars and researchers to help them comprehend and address the complex status of contemporary interconnected global crises and challenges and develop strategies to try to prevent their amplification, acceleration and synchronization (Lawrence et al., 2022).

The transboundary status of a crisis in turn produces the effect of a cascade and spillover of risks, contingencies, and uncertainties (Haas, 1958; Walby, 2022; Henig & Knight, 2023), in which affected by the crisis are not just those actors located where the crisis initially started but also others who are located far away from the source of crisis. In the spillover and cascade crisis scenario, it is very difficult to establish which actor should be accounted for a/the response to crisis and for minimizing the impact of the crisis situation. Crisis has become an inherent and fixed state within the social system.

Russia's full-scale military invasion of Ukraine in 2022, leading to the military conflict, humanitarian and refugee crisis as well as the change in the global security architecture, East-West geopolitical division and EU's and NATO's deteriorated relations specifically with Russia and China, has dominated other parts of the *polycrisis*. This unprecedented combination of overlapping and systemic crises, happening consecutively, should be no longer thought of as individual occurrences, but rather as a set of cascading contingencies and interconnected risks (Makarychev & Diez, 2023). Since people are exposed to, confront and manage multiple risks at the same time, not as methodically arranged separate factors, risks cannot be comprehended in isolation, neither experientially nor conceptually, the concept of *riskscapes* (Müller-Mahn, 2018) embraces this complex environment by providing a framework to navigate the overlapping and mutually strengthening various risks such as natural hazards, technological threats, a pandemic outbreak or economic crises (Müller-Mahn, 2018), not to mention the recent global developments caused by the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The complex nature of the transboundary crisis necessitates a multifaceted response system as individual actors will not be able to respond independently. Hence, an alternative scenario of the response to the crisis assumes that the outcomes of such an emergency are dealt with most efficiently at the local level, where the focus should be put on developing the capacities for civilian crisis management (Boin & Rhinhard, 2008). The transformation from a risk society to a crisis society foregrounds a chance to reflect on the nature of a crisis and the ways it could be managed by the society, specifically by civil society in terms of its collective action as well as community resilience in response to a crisis. From the sociological perspective, no concordant agreement has been reached how to approach the phenomenon of a crisis (Šubrt, 2014; Moralli & Allegrini, 2021). Crises exert multiple impacts and effects; they may manifest as a capacity to point to an unlocked and untapped potential of the society for a positive change and an opportunity to replenish through almost a cathartic experience or as new yet chronic normal (Rydstrom, 2019; Moralli & Allegrini, 2021). They provide a chance to firstly enhance agency and bottom-up resilience, and secondly, to point to the vulnerable areas where, again, the local community agency could be exercised. Apparently, in times of crisis, this local activity is highly valuable as it may bring new ways of collective action and resilience, and those active social actors become envoys of community resilience (Moralli & Allegrini, 2021). Crises may be affecting different actors and social units such as individuals, families, groups, communities, villages, towns, institutions, organizations, regions, states and nations (Pawar, 2023). Existing research has indicated that the first actors which become most affected are those on a micro and local scale, namely, on the individual and group level, i.e., local communities.

The response to a crisis and attempts to lessen its impact starts first with the local community as this unit is at the frontline of coping with the outcomes of a crisis (Hendow et al., 2018; Bergman-Rosamond et al., 2022).

The key dimensions forming the community resilience framework to precisely measure community resilience have been discussed, and the relevant research resulted

in the development of various metrics (Powell et al., 2018; Cutter et al., 2010; Peacock, 2010; Lam et al., 2015), which is critical to work on the capacity to prevent and respond to future crises (Eriksson, 2023). Resilience emerges as a capacity which involves robustness, an ability to adapt, adjust, persevere, learn and transform in response to crises and threats (Norris et al., 2008; Paton & Johnston, 2001). Risk perception has also been recognized as a trigger for community agency and response capacity during a crisis (Flint & Luloff, 2005; Yang et al., 2021; Boersma et al., 2018; Drabek & McEntire, 2003; Smets et al., 2017; Rast et al., 2020). Yet what has not been established so far is the practical aspect of how those risk narratives are constructed (Gellwitzki & Houde, 2023). The context of community resilience has motivated practitioners, researchers, and the government to better understand how resilience can be nurtured, supported, and strengthened to understand the civic construct of resilience and the elements that strengthen (Paronen & Oja, 1998) especially that community, which is a key social unit linking individuals with society. This has remained an attractive concept, a point of reference and context which illuminates processes of social change and action which may serve multiple agendas (Titz et al., 2018; Nettleingham, 2018; Qin & Flint, 2010; Traill, 2021). The role of community empowerment in crisis is significant, specifically when considering a suggested best practice that those affected by crisis should be able to recover without external support (Twigg, 2015) as it is not often that actors – such as families, community groups and members – are included in the official crisis management and response planning (Twigg & Mosel, 2017).

In response to concerns about the impact of crises on communities, comprehensive resilience studies have been undertaken to analyze response and recovery capacities of communities and individuals, which may benefit crisis management and response to crisis planning by institutional actors (Sherrieb et al., 2010; Alessi et al., 2020; Roberts & Townsend, 2016; Twigg & Mosel, 2017; Bruneau et al., 2003; Norris et al., 2008). In order to efficiently rise to those challenges, it is necessary to analyze, identify and follow what dimensions make a community resilient in the face of disruption. According to the agenda and priorities set out by the Hyogo Framework for Action and following the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, the existing mechanisms require strengthening in order to provide effective support and achieve better implementation. Hence, it is pivotal to strengthen resilience (“Build Back Better”) by empowering local authorities and communities, by engaging and recognizing the relevant stakeholders and their roles such as, among others, civilian population, including volunteers, communities, national and local authorities, civil society organizations, and the academia to work closely together in implementing policies and plans, by considering location-based experiences and lessons learned on the national and local level as well as to emphasize a broader people-centered multi-hazard, multi-sectoral preventive approach to disaster risk, the importance and the need for pro-active measures to mitigate risk, improve coordination in preparedness, response and recovery, pro-active phases of crisis management (Kanteler & Bakouros, 2024; The Sendai Framework, 2015).

The scholarly interest in border towns, cities, and communities often awakens in the context of geopolitical events that disrupt and transform the security, economic and social landscapes of the country's border areas. The US-Mexico border cities and towns serve as examples of how various international agreements transform larger settlements located near a state border. Another critical area of research is the European integration process and the ways cross-border governance and collaboration transformed European border cities and towns. Recent research in the field has been more in-demand for specific geopolitical settings. The increasing refugee and migration influxes have called to the attention border cities and towns serving as gateways as well as the agency and strategies employed in border cities and towns to address various challenges and outcome of, for instance, transboundary crisis, including forced migration, but these immigrant influxes also bring into focus the usage of resources and knowledge from institutional actors in cross border regions involved in response to transboundary crisis in terms of cooperation and planning. Commonly, border towns, cities, and border regions in general have been recognized as those facing specific challenges because of the proximity to a border and their often-peripheral location within a country. Border regions have been regarded as 'laboratories' where the effects of various policies can be assessed. There is also an issue of border securitization which has been on the political agendas recently. Border cities, towns, and other border regions perform a role of entrances to mass migration as well as a laboratory for new border security measures. In future, a crucial question will be how different borderland cities, towns and communities cope with and take advantage of regional transition, mass migration, and securitization efforts (Orum & Prokkola, 2025).

Generally, crises require a rapid response, which has to be organized in the atmosphere of collective stress and deep uncertainty. When a crisis crosses geographical borders, such challenges become more demanding and more complex to manage as more actors become involved who tend to have more dispersed agendas and who are denoted with different levels of familiarity with the nexus of the crisis. Such transboundary crisis scenario poses both management-level and analytical challenges (Ansell et al., 2010).

States cooperate more closely across borders to better address the transboundary nature of a crisis. Furthermore, the complexity and interconnectedness of risks and threats also necessitates a closer cooperation and synergies across sectoral, institutional and national borders (European Commission, 2024). Different spatial units get affected by a crisis in a different manner. While a country may respond positively to a particular crisis, some of its regions may be considerably negatively affected. Therefore, an additional regional perspective of resilience in response to a transboundary crisis is relevant and useful.

The 2015 refugee crisis in Europe which reached a staggering number of refugees and migrants, and which directly and severely affected countries like Italy, Greece, Austria, Hungary and Germany and propelled the issue to the center stage on the EU agenda (Spindler, 2015) as well as COVID-19 pandemic have demonstrated that cross-border interactions are fragile (Hippe et al., 2024), and that the outcome of

a transboundary crisis and its management is more complex. Border regions remain vulnerable in terms of cross-border mobility and transboundary crisis management. Resilience and stability in border regions have been an important part of the political discourse. Unpredictable crises, specifically those which are transboundary in nature, trigger various systems which may lead to, for instance, massive mobility, its restrictions or other disruptions. Consequently, the residents of border regions are frequently the first to be confronted with these challenges (Hippe et al., 2024).

At this backdrop, two Polish border region communities, one in Suwałki, in North-Eastern Poland, in the geographical area referred to, in the NATO terminology, the *Suwałki Gap* with a population of circa 70 000, located approximately 30 km from the Lithuanian border and ca. 600 km from the border with Ukraine, and the second community located in South-Eastern Poland, in Biecz, referred to as *Little Kraków*, with a population of circa 5000, located approximately 35 kilometers from the border with Slovakia and ca. 100 km from the border with Ukraine, were exposed to an extreme regional vulnerability and uncertainty in the face of crisis and uncertainty as both were directly affected by the arrival of refugees from Ukraine to Poland, a host country with the largest intake of refugees from Ukraine. According to the Polish Border Guard statistics, from January till December 2022, 9 522 444 individuals with the Ukrainian citizenship crossed the Polish border, and, specifically, at the section of the border with Ukraine, 9 086 946 individuals entered Poland. In the first quarter of 2022, in the most intensive time of the crisis, exactly at the time when the invasion started, there were 3 180 897 Ukrainian citizens crossing the border, and 3 046 762 Ukrainians were at the section of the border with Ukraine (Komenda Główna Straży Granicznej, 2024).

In the light of the still-unresolved conflict and war between Russia and Ukraine, which involved an unprecedented military aggression of Russia against a country in the heart of Europe, disrupting on its way many local and global systems, particularly security-related ones, it was just one of many crises which have been ongoing since then, and which have been affecting Europe and parts of other regions in the world. At the very bottom of this unprecedented *polycrisis* scenario are real people, real victims to this situation, those who remain either in Ukraine, and those who seek refuge and shelter in host countries like Poland. As other examples of migration, humanitarian and refugee crises showcase, the real resilience takes its origin in spontaneous civil society actions, in the individual agency which triggers a collective one. Despite the fear, the uncertainty and risks and other limiting factors, the civilian population is the quickest to act, to react, and to respond. The role of leaders, policymakers, scientists and researcher is to analyze those cases empirically, and foremost holistically, where the experiential knowledge of local actors who themselves were affected by and experienced a crisis situation, have the best practical knowledge and recommendations. Those actors together, in a team effort with the help of experts in the respective fields, such as community resilience, risk perception, uncertainty, *polycrisis* and even security could filter this practically gained knowledge

through already existing theoretical frameworks in order to create a sort of a universal best practice strategy how to deal with a situation emerging from a *polycrisis*. No matter the nature of crisis, the system getting disrupted, whether the outcomes and consequences are created by a *polycrisis* or a transboundary crisis, or any other type of crisis, there is always a human being at the very center of the crisis who gets affected the most and confronts those crises and who needs to respond. It is the common vulnerable people who get affected the most. Hence, the role of a regular citizen should be closely looked at and redefined, as the examples show the role of a regular citizen in a crisis scenario that has somehow naturally evolved into a first responder. The voices of regular citizens, specifically in local vulnerable communities affected by a crisis, who, very often, voluntarily perform the role of a first responder, should be taken into consideration in planning the response to future or potential contingencies. This area of empirical research has not been extensively discussed, and it offers a great potential that its results benefit considerably the academic and non-academic discussion about the way risks are perceived, managed, mitigated, uncertainty is overcome, resilience gets developed, and preparedness is exercised. Both transboundary crisis and *polycrisis* can induce stronger harms and threats; that is why, the resilience of an individual whose decisions and actions can influence their closest environment should be the core element in an attempt to build in a holistic and stronger society.

Novelty

Even though community resilience is an extensively researched concept, the question why response capacity and community resilience vary among communities still needs to be addressed as it has been unclear (Steiner, 2016). Notwithstanding that, the aspect of measuring community resilience has been acknowledged to be a high-priority by various stakeholders (Lam et al., 2016), yet, there is no universally accepted methodology for operationalizing and measuring resilience empirically (Bristow & Healy, 2014; Boschma, 2015). Learning a lesson from a crisis is one of the most unactualized facets in crisis response (Stern, 1997) and an individual experience, perception and recognition of crisis is still un(der)researched. It seems that the insider perspective should be also taken into consideration when discussing the perception of and the response to a crisis (Fassin, 2022). Research demonstrates that actors on the community level, and also those located near the border, are the ones to respond directly to specific difficulties and challenges they face in their communities and neighborhoods (Yeo, 2020).

Since community resilience is a complex and multifaceted notion, a variety of approaches to capture its dimensions should be taken in practice in a specific context set in temporal and spatial settings. Therefore, it is paramount to decide to study the resilience ‘of what’, ‘to what’, and ‘over what period’ (Carpenter et al., 2001). Although much of the discussion and conceptualization of resilience in policy, as well as in the scholarly canon, has mainly revolved around this extraordinary nature of resilience, it is far from fixed and static; it arises not only in the face of significant adversity but is embedded in the ordinary everyday activities and challenges people

encounter, which is a fact that is mostly overlooked in the scholarly canon. Resilience is not limited to the process or outcome of extreme events, but that it also manifests itself in daily struggles and difficulties which are specific to individuals' lives and communities (Ögtem-Young, 2018; Helfgott, 2018).

The holistic approach to measuring community resilience by 'looking at the whole' of an issue (Folke et al., 2010) has not been extensively employed in the resilience studies. The new approach needs to be cross-disciplinary and interdisciplinary (Midgley, 2000; Brand & Jax, 2007) and tailored to a local community context as communities' ability to develop response capacity and resilience potential may differ and get affected by local dynamics and circumstances (Reed et al., 2022). The creation of a comprehensive index of dimensions to establish their impact on community resilience is also challenging (Jordan & Javernick-Will, 2013; Khunwishit et al., 2013; Keck & Sakdapolrak, 2013; Walker et al., 2004; Clarke & Mayer, 2017). There is a need to continue and extend research on community resilience dimensions (Johansen et al., 2016; Añasco et al., 2021). Therefore, the novelty of this study is that it has developed and adopted an integrated/holistic approach in an attempt to investigate complex real-life phenomena set in a specific time frame and context by incorporating sociological conceptualizations of key research concepts essential for this specific research; namely, it investigates the response of geographically vulnerable Polish border region communities to a recent humanitarian and refugee crisis caused by the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 which affected both communities directly. What is most important is that both Polish border region communities are in the proximity of the borders with two countries at war, namely Suwałki (the *Suwałki Gap*) with Russia, and Russia's ally Belarus, and Biecz (*Little Kraków*) with Ukraine, i.e., they are located in two different corners of Poland yet in the same Poland B region, commonly called Poland B which refers to the historical, political and cultural distinction and thus differences between the Eastern and Western parts of the country, where Poland A, West of the Vistula River is considered to be much more developed in the sense that Poland A achieves more growth than Poland B, located East of the Vistula River.

Research questions

The main research questions are “*How does risk perception and community resilience interact in Polish border region communities' response to crisis and uncertainty?*” and “*How are community resilience dimensions activated in Polish border region communities' response to crisis?*”

Aim of the thesis

The main aim of this research is to analyze the role of community resilience and individual risk perception in Polish border region communities' response to crisis and uncertainty caused by the Russian invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022.

Objectives of the thesis

The aim of this doctoral dissertation research will be achieved by pursuing the following research objectives:

- Conducting a comprehensive review of already existing research in the field of crisis, risk perception and uncertainty in order to identify the most relevant theories, methods and gaps;
- Conducting an in-depth literature review of the community resilience studies in order to identify core community resilience dimensions;
- Creating a conceptual framework integrating sociological understandings of crisis, risk perception and community resilience;
- Developing and grounding a methodology to analyze community resilience in response of Polish border communities to crisis and uncertainty;
- Performing a qualitative analysis of the collected empirical data in order to identify the emerging codes/themes about the role of community resilience dimensions and individual risk perception in Polish border region communities' response to crisis and uncertainty;
- Identifying themes, tendencies and patterns related to community resilience in Polish border region communities' response to crisis and uncertainty in order to provide recommendations for institutional actors in charge of crisis management and civil preparedness.

Research methods

This doctoral dissertation research was based on a qualitative research methodology of a case study to gather empirical evidence and obtain results in analyzing a phenomenon unfolding in real life, namely, the response of Polish border region communities in Biecz and Suwałki to the crisis and uncertainty caused by the Russian invasion of Ukraine. For the purpose of carrying out this type of research, the empirical method of qualitative interviews, conducted on site and in person, was applied. In that respect, an interview guide was developed on the foundation of operationalized definitions of key research concepts of community resilience dimensions and individual risk perception. The questions were addressed to three interview groups of *Volunteers*, *Community members*, and *Municipality* (employees of the Municipality and its subordinate units).

Structure of the dissertation

This dissertation is divided into three main chapters which consist of subchapters.

In the *Introduction* part, there is an outline of the relevance of this research and topic as well as its novelty which are followed by research questions. The aim and objectives of the research together with the description of research methods are also presented in this part. The *First Chapter* describes the theoretical background of the thesis which incorporates referenced sociological theoretical understandings and conceptualizations of the key research concepts of crisis, risk perception and community resilience. The *Second Chapter* provides a description of the methodology and the empirical research method applied in order to perform this specific research. The *Third Chapter* presents the findings and discusses the results of the analysis of the collected empirical data during a doctoral research project “Community Resilience

to Crises and Uncertainty in Polish Border Communities” which received approval from the Research Ethics Commission of Kaunas University of Technology confirming that the project does not contradict the general principles of research ethics, as based on Protocol No. M4-2023-03 (see Annex 1). The final part of the dissertation provides the conclusions and recommendations for further research in the relevant fields.

For the purpose of this doctoral dissertation, statements to be defended which link the theoretical assumptions with the expected empirical results have been developed as follows:

Crisis triggers uncertainty, fear and ontological security among individuals who overcome those mainly by the independent decision to act in response to crisis situation.

Individual risk perception affects not only individual agency but also triggers collective community agency and collective action, especially when common values are recognized as being at stake on the community level.

The main community resilience dimensions which get activated in response to crisis are agency and resources.

Border communities, especially in close proximity to the neighboring countries in crisis, are naturally more geographically vulnerable and more prone to share the risk of being affected by the external crisis.

The bottom-up response to a crisis situation is faster and more effective than the top-down response as there is no hierarchical structure or leadership which would limit the decision making-process in the bottom-up response.

1. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND OF RISK PERCEPTION AND COMMUNITY RESILIENCE IN TIMES OF CRISIS AND UNCERTAINTY

1.1. Sociological Understanding of the Concept of Crisis

The definition of crisis was elaborated to approach a critical point of change for the social system.

The vision of crisis itself as well as its outcomes have been the focal point of attention and intense discussion in various environments such as the academia, the Internet community, politics, or simply regular citizens in their daily lives. It is difficult to precisely conceptualize the concept of ‘crisis’ as its interpretations across disciplines are broad and denoted by variability (Dafermos, 2024). Following the *Online Etymology Dictionary*, the origin of the word *crisis* is the Ancient Greek verb *krinein* which stands for “to select, decide, judge”. Whereas, the Latin equivalent of the Greek word *krisis* denotes a critical point for an ill person where this decisive moment could mean either recovery or death, i.e., from the medical point of view, it is a change for better or worse. The former is synonymous with a productive power-triggering action while the latter overlaps with a dystopian vision of a catastrophe. Yet, following the Ancient Greek understanding of the notion, crisis is a much-needed step for the change as, by highlighting a system’s vulnerabilities, it helps build and develop response capacities to resist or mitigate the impact of a disruptive emergency in the future (Bergman-Rosamond et al., 2022). Historically, the comprehension of the notion of crisis has progressively evolved from a more technical perception of crisis as just a natural threat to a more sociological one which interprets the crisis as a process of outside forces such a natural threat or hostility and social environment interplaying between each other. From the standpoint of application-oriented migration and crisis management studies, the notion of *crisis* frequently pertains to humanitarian crises, where actors, affected on an individual, community and state level, are unable to resist and manage the impact of this disruptive emergency (Hendow et al., 2018; Bergman-Rosamond et al., 2022). Crisis is complex and interconnected in nature, and it operates in different spheres of the society where it intersects and converges with other crises and thus, together, they play a role of a precursor or as the outcome of other crises leading to an interrelated chain of crises and thus to a sense of uncertainty. Another function of crisis is that it could be a critical point providing an opportunity for the social system to transform (Polanyi, 1944; Walby, 2022).

It is a phenomenon which may manifest in multiple ways and directions. For example, it may be represented as a capacity to point to an unlocked and untapped potential of the society for a positive change and an opportunity to replenish through almost a cathartic experience or as new yet chronic normal (Bergman-Rosamond et al., 2022; Rydstrom, 2019). Crises do not arise in isolation as they intersect and interconnect with other crises provoking other ones resulting in chains of crises which are set in specific time and space dimensions (Bergman-Rosamond et al., 2022).

Crisis can be defused or sparked off, and it may produce a cascading effect within the society. It could be temporary and inconsequential or long term, total and significant. The consequences of a crisis rely on the features and character of the social system, and on how social systems are interconnected, as well as on their level of vulnerability (Grabowska, 2023; Walby, 2022). This complex nature of crises necessitates a standard approach or practice in facing a crisis, the foundation of which should be a cooperation between different social actors and, foremost, the capacity to cope with crisis through the collective action of individuals and social groups (Moralli & Allegrini, 2021). Crisis is context-dependent as it is formed in and by special circumstances in a specific time and space. Crises have their own tempo; they can be temporary, instant or momentary, they can pass quickly, or become permanent. Crisis is fluid in nature, and not static and uncertain, as it is impossible to determine its outcomes. Even when taking shape as a long-term phenomenon, its present difficulties can be coped with resilience and agency. Crises exert multiple impacts and effects, unlock potentials and create opportunities to elevate collective agency and enter into a dialogue in order to introduce change while in the times and in the aftermath of crisis (Moralli & Allegrini, 2021). Crisis could be interpreted twofold, firstly – as a chance for enhancing agency and bottom-up resilience, and secondly – as pointing to vulnerable areas where, again, local community agency could be exercised where local actions, in turn, necessitate activation of internal and external resources. Apparently, in times of crisis, this local activity is more notably valuable as it may bring new ways of collective action and resilience, and those active social actors become envoys of community resilience (Moralli & Allegrini, 2021). Since, on a worldwide scale, crisis has become our reality, ‘risk society’ (Beck, 1992) has been transforming into a ‘crisis society’ (Moralli & Allegrini, 2021). It implies that contemporary society is witnessing a gradual increase of the sense of uncertainty, one of the main features of the ‘risk society’, which also gets deeply ingrained in human society. Conversely, this transformation from ‘risk society’ to ‘crisis society’ foregrounds a chance to reflect on the nature of crisis and the ways it could be managed by the society, specifically by civil society in terms of its collective action, and also community resilience in response to crisis. When conceptualizing crisis on the societal level, there are those impacting parts of the social system such as politics, economy or culture, and those affecting an entire social system comprehensively. From the sociological perspective, no concordant agreement has been reached how to approach the phenomenon of the *crisis* (Šubrt, 2014; Moralli & Allegrini, 2021). A major characteristic of crisis society is that crisis has transformed into an integral element of human life. This complex embeddedness requires joint and comprehensive solutions alongside underlying cooperation between social actors (Moralli & Allegrini, 2021).

Theoretical conceptualization of crisis should encompass, among other points, an understanding of crisis as real or as socially constructed recognition of what has been affected by that crisis, the scope of change as a result of a crisis, or the cascading effects of a crisis (Haas, 1958; Polanyi, 1944). The crisis is a phenomenon which may potentially lead to a massive and damaging change affecting the social system where

there is no congruity on the cause-and-effect line. Crisis is a disruptive event; it is a short-term occurrence, yet the outcome it produces lasts longer. There is no congruity between the disruption and its outcomes: the consequences are more far-reaching than the event itself, and they need to be at a massive level, in terms of the extent to be defined as a crisis. A crisis may be real or socially constructed or both. In general, crisis is tangible in risk research (Beck, 1992) while crisis as a socially constructed phenomenon is common in the security discourse, specifically where the threat rather than a real physical harm is concerned. Crisis could be both recognized or questioned as well as discussed in public and in the political discourse. The outcomes of a crisis depend on the way the crisis is perceived as the consequences impact how social actors respond, and that it can only be interpreted in the social context within the social system (Bergman-Rosamond et al., 2022). The impact of a crisis relies also on the features of the system affected by the crisis and its links with other systems. A linking element is a notion of a cascade implying that a crisis may cascade into or through a bordering social system or domain, and yet it will remain unknown. The phenomenon of a *cascade* is crucial in an attempt to comprehend a crisis, as the consequences of a crisis rely on the scale of the cascade through social systems in which its particular domains are rather interconnected and do not function or operate independently (Walby, 2022).

This cascading process could be short-term or inconsequential, or else they could be long-term and exert a considerable impact leading to a catastrophe. The consequences of a crisis rely on the characteristics of the social system, its interconnectedness with other systems, and their level of balance (Walby, 2022). The level of adjacency between the systems is an indicator how one crisis in a system could provoke a crisis in a neighboring system. In all probability, in the case of systems which are directly adjacent, a crisis could cascade or spill over through one system to another. Notably, crisis in directly linked or combined systems in more likelihood could be more significant than in those systems which are loosely linked. During a crisis, it is difficult to predict the consequences (Walby, 2022).

The fundamental feature of a crisis is that it tests the previously established approaches and strategies towards the crisis, threatening not only the physical security but also the ontological security. Facing both physical and ontological security is the most important purpose of one's existence (Kinnvall & Mitzen 2018). During the last decades, the understanding of some aspects of crises have also been transformed, for instance, the regularity or the recurrence of crises. A definition of '*polycrisis*' has been developed to describe a status of the contemporary world coping simultaneously with multiple, and also intersecting, crises such as environmental, financial, COVID-19, and war, which often provoke migration and refugee crisis, as illustrated by the massive arrival of refugees from Syria in 2015, migration crises on the borders with Belarus and EU member states in 2020, as well as millions of Ukrainians entering Europe in 2022 after Russia attacked their homeland (Zeitlin et al., 2019; Lawrence et al., 2022). Crisis has become an inherent and fixed state within the social

system, and social actors are currently living in times of cascading risks and effects, contingencies and uncertainties (Henig & Knight, 2023). However, Russia's full scale military invasion of Ukraine leading to the military conflict, humanitarian and refugee crisis as well as the change in the global security architecture, the East-West geopolitical division and the EU's and NATO's deteriorated relations specifically with Russia and China, have dominated other parts of '*polycrisis*'. This unprecedented combination of overlapping crises, happening consecutively, should be no longer thought of as individual occurrences, but rather perceived as a set of cascading contingencies and interconnected risks. Hence, Russia's full-scale military invasion of Ukraine in 2022 sparked off and caused other crises and disruptions, for instance, the above-mentioned humanitarian and refugee crisis in the heart of Europe (Makarychev & Diez, 2023). Frequently, crises are the outcome of multiple hazards and/or risks rather than a single risk which may happen concurrently and/or in a sequence. This may lead to an interaction of hazards and risks which may, in turn, provoke a new crisis phenomenon which transcends the social system referred to as '*polycrisis*' (Gaspar et al., 2023; Homer-Dixon et al., 2022). Crises may be affecting different actors and social units such as individuals, families, groups, communities, villages, towns, institutions, organizations, regions, states, and nations (Pawar, 2023).

It is noteworthy that, in essence, crises differ from regular emergencies which are events requiring immediate action, such as traffic accidents or fires, and yet they involve rather routine issues. Naturally, the circumstances of the urgent situation may be new – and yet professionally trained first-responders know to handle such an emergency, which therefore seldom leads to further consequences (Perry & Quarantelli, 2005; Perry, 2007). Despite the efforts, it seems impossible to prevent a crisis from happening. Even if societies could hamper, prevent or mitigate the outcomes of recognized potential threats, new unthought-of hazards will appear. Certain apprehension and understanding of crisis awareness have increased greatly since, among others, the attacks of September 11, 2001. However, such events have triggered the awareness of prevention rather than preparedness. Crises do not arise abruptly as they emerge as a result of an escalation, and which require an effective response from the government (Hart et al., 1993). Response to crisis necessitates openness, flexibility, improvisation as, to a considerable degree, an effective response to a crisis is the outcome of a natural process. Learning a lesson from a crisis is one of the most unactualized facets in crisis response (Stern, 1997). The impact of a threat is usually difficult to predict, and the crisis management strategy is effective to a limited extent as the crisis scenario was presumably never described. Nonetheless, it does not denote that crises are impossible to manage. In the current context of the contemporary society being vulnerable to emerging new threats and even more complex crises, crisis preparedness is essential.

Nowadays, a local emergency in one part of Europe may lead to a crisis surpassing geographical and functional boundaries, and it may thus affect the whole region or even the entire world, as it has been illustrated by most recent events such

as, among others, the migration crisis in Southern Europe, COVID-19 pandemic, or the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Since a transboundary crisis may unfold quickly and in an unpredicted and unexpected way, and because its nature is fluid, it is practically not possible to be ahead of a transboundary crisis in order to absorb the impact. Furthermore, this type of crisis is more difficult to face as it is uncertain who is responsible for a transboundary crisis and who should resolve it. As this phenomenon surpasses and transcends from one geographical and functional border to another, it is difficult to both delegate and accept the responsibility. Governments are challenged to reevaluate and probably remodel the mechanism of response on the organizational, legal, and policy levels. The complex nature of the transboundary crisis necessitates a multifaceted and multilateral response system as individual countries will not be able to respond independently. Yet, an alternative scenario of the response to a crisis assumes that the outcomes of such an emergency are dealt with most efficiently at the local level, where the local actors are mostly affected. Such a scenario implies that the focus should be put on developing the capacities for civilian crisis management (Boin & Rhinard, 2008; US Senate, 2006).

The persisting power of crises which societies encounter poses the question and requires the reflection not only regarding the type of these crises and their commensurate transformations, but also concerning the capacity of societies to go through them. Instead of reflecting about the nature of crises which are affecting social actors and society, society itself should be investigated in terms of what kind of society leads to these crises. Moreover, the overlay between these who create crises, and these who must respond to them are encountering a major challenge (Innerarity, 2022). The concept of crisis society has been framed to emphasize that contemporary society has been a witness to a magnification of the fundamental features of ‘risk society’, including uncertainty and how those elements get increasingly embedded in human life. Yet, on the other side, crisis society also underlines the possibility of reimagining how those issues can be responded to, by, for instance, studying what types of ‘we orientation’ have been rising out of civil society with regard to collective actions (Moralli & Allegrini, 2021). Most recent crises, such as the refugee movements in 2015 and 2016, COVID-19 pandemic, and the current war against Ukraine show the increasing scale and intensity of crises (Brakman et al., 2020; Gong et al., 2020). In that respect, resilience is a central concept for political, public, and academic discussion to understand the way in which various regions respond to external crises, and especially border regions (Lara-Valencia et al., 2023; Hippe et al., 2024).

The following subchapter will discuss the sociological understanding of the role of risk perception and uncertainty in response to crisis in order to build an understanding how those phenomena may affect the way threats and risks are selected and perceived, and how these, in turn, may affect the response and thus the community resilience.

1.2. Risk and Uncertainty Perception in Response to Crisis

Risk and uncertainty are connected when it comes to the ways the future is imagined and the ways the present needs to be organized so that this future could be either prevented or dealt with. There could be direct links from the past about something which happened somewhere else or a long time ago, and it is assumed that it may happen again in the future, possibly at an even larger scale. There could be indirect links from the past, such as the anticipation that an event could be even worse than anything that has already happened in the past. Another connection between risk and uncertainty is the attention the anticipated event raises, and the immediate calls for action or reaction it sparks. When a risk has been identified, it requires the assessment, categorization, and, subsequently, management. Similarly, uncertainty necessitates the arrangement of the present to prepare for the unwanted future. Both risk and uncertainty are active agents which direct attention towards what seems to be the most pressing dangers and uncertainties, and both are in power to affect and introduce change (Müller-Mahn (ed.), 2012).

Magnification of the features of risk society, witnessed by crisis society, gives rise to *transboundedness* which affects long-established and standard crisis management issues. This transformation necessitates an examination and analysis of what procedures are required to respond to these combined challenges. Generally, crises, disasters and other emergencies call for a prompt response, usually made under collective stress and considerable uncertainty (Rosenthal et al., 1989). These challenges are difficult to manage when a crisis transcends geographical borders as more participating actors get involved, become more dispersed, follow different agendas, and are not familiar with each other. Such a situation is notably challenging both on the management and the analytical level. Management wise, dispersed participating actors are compelled to rapidly distribute information and coordinate their actions cross-border between different stakeholders. From the analytical perspective, it is still not known what type of factors contributes to a proper execution across a network of the participating actors. The demands for transboundary crises management remain un(der)researched as well as the very nature of transboundary crises itself. Many crises affect geographically defined units, such as a town or a country, and yet some crises are cross-border, and they do threaten several cities, regions, countries or even continents, creating chaos across the globe. Some crises are explicitly demarcated in time: they have a specified beginning and ending. However, many crises transcend the temporal boundaries, and their outcomes and consequences are long-term (Birkland, 2009). The reason may be that they are not isolated events, but rather a series of interrelated events. They may also lead to multiple consequences which arise in various timelines. Hence cross-boundary crises are hard to manage as the response needs to be somehow fragmented and extended in time due to a significant uncertainty created by such a crisis as different capacities are mobilized at various times. Such crises are also a source of complex interdependencies cross-cutting various participating actors and stakeholders, which calls for joint action in order to respond to them (Ansell et al., 2010).

Uncertainty poses an enormous challenge for actors in charge of crisis management in terms of the source and the cause of the crisis, of the evolution of the crisis situation, of what happens next and the possible consequences, as well as about how and in what way the crisis can be mitigated and responded to. When all those various types of uncertainty are combined, they seriously affect the effectiveness of the actors in charge of crisis management. In case of a transboundary crisis, uncertainty is expected to heighten greatly, and the cause of such a crisis is harder to comprehend. An efficient and effective response to a crisis as well as its coordination is one of the most challenging aspects of crisis management. In order to respond to a crisis situation and to mitigate its consequences, many participating actors need to join forces to identify, mobilize, and distribute resources. The mechanism of an effective response to crisis encompasses two vital elements. One is the mobilization of people and resources as well as the coordination of such mobilization, both organized by participating actors. Especially, coordination presents a significant challenge (Hart et al., 1993). The motivation and the resources may differ among the participating actors who, in times of crisis, need to – unexpectedly and immediately – work as a team under high stress while possessing very limited information. Due to an unpredictable nature of emerging crises, they seldom accurately reflect crisis management plans and procedures, and the ‘ownership’ of a crisis is difficult to establish. Even when agreement is reached that joint cooperation is crucial, it is not always transparent who should be in charge of orchestrating the collective work. Crisis coordination research indicates that forms of bottom-up self-organization on the local and community level tend to exceed top-down cooperation plans. As soon as a crisis transforms into a transboundary one, it gets problematic to demarcate its geographical, temporal or practical boundaries. The responsibilities get dim, and the number of actors in need of coordination rises. As a result, it is difficult to determine what actors should be mobilized, and to assign their role and priority in the response. In case of the escalation of the crisis, other actors, such as states, governments, private organizations, the military and international organizations, may all become key stakeholders. In such a scenario, the duties, tasks and relations between these actors are not clearly designated and established, and yet they must be determined in a way that these actors can work and cooperate instantly in unison. Research reveals that it is challenging to locate and procure the necessary resources or workforce and direct them in due time, especially when the crisis is transboundary in nature. For the response to a transboundary crisis to be effective, it needs to be organized simultaneously and multiscale. Hence, it is important to research what capacities make an effective response mechanism which operates effectively across boundaries in an efficient and timely manner (Ansell et al., 2010). As a general rule, a lot of regular procedures within organizations are designed to operate under a time frame of months or years, whilst the timeframe of crises should operate in hours, days, and weeks. The mobilization and allocation of resources requires an immediate adaptive capacity to rapidly circumvent bureaucratic procedures and mechanisms designed for the sake of a more ‘undemanding’ decision-making process. Studies repeatedly report that such flexibility is not inherent in public institutions,

which usually function better with tried-and-fixed routines. A response to a complex crisis necessitates the presence of an integrated command center to manage the crisis with a location which is designated and organized in advance and prior to the crisis (Militello et al., 2007). Yet, it is not clear what this interconnectedness looks like in practice. All these elements, in order to be able to function in response to a transboundary crisis or threat, need an organizational capacity, namely, the capacity to swiftly restructure organizations and their activities. Research on management recommends that organizations should establish routines to help them respond swiftly to changing circumstances (Teece et al., 1997). This body of literature indicates that adaptive capacity is dependent on ‘combinative capabilities’, i.e., on the capability to rearrange the current know-how and skills in order to create new responses to emerging crisis situations (Kogut & Zander, 1992). The crisis response mechanism requires specific routines helping to respond swiftly. The success of a response to a crisis or a threat is characterized by the stakeholders’ swift support, which is critical to the response, as well as their participation and cooperation, i.e., public, private and interest groups, as well as communities. A collective effort is needed to coordinate teamwork between organizations which probably have no experience in previous cooperation with each other. It is difficult to achieve such coordination in front of uncertainty, urgency and stress and without clearly established relations. There are two approaches to systems of coordination. One advocates the in-advance creation of a hierarchical and top-down system of response across different organizational actors. The second approach supports the idea that a bottom-up, self-organizing system will be more effective than established-in-advance hierarchical and top-down systems which will be not suitable to respond to a crisis anyway. The first school also maintains that coordination of cooperation of various emerging networks of the participating actors demands trust, which is usually built over time and prior crisis situations. It is not simple to build relationships across organizations impromptu (Kapucu, 2006). The second one contends that it is not possible to manage or coordinate a complex response in a top-down manner from a central office (McEntire, 2005), and suggests that a self-organizing system of response should be monitored and facilitated by a political leadership leader instead of being control-based and top-down commanded. It is not always transparent who is in charge of which decisions as crises are non-routine occurrences. Most top-down hierarchies were not designed with the aim to cope with emerging crises. The solution could be in the development of formal hierarchies that can tackle these unforeseen crisis situations. Transboundary crises make necessary a great adaptation and out-of-the-ordinary cooperation under challenging conditions in which the response capacity is scattered across multiple stakeholders. The response needs to be resilient and flexible. Meanwhile, the participating actors should be able to rapidly adapt, reorganize, and reinterpret their course of action (Ansell et al., 2010).

A crisis with a profound impact calls for an all-encompassing comprehensive management strategy which would include all phases, namely, mitigation, preparedness, response, and which will engage various stakeholders, such as, for instance, the state/government, the first responders, humanitarian organizations, and

crisis management agencies. Crisis management consists of four phases: mitigation, which concentrates on preventing crises, the preparedness phase, which puts the focus on minimizing the harm, the response, which prioritizes the delivery of aid during a crisis, and the recovery phase to restore the damage. There are several reasons why the preparedness phase is important, as, firstly, it can help reduce the impact of disasters by enabling a timely and effective response. Preparedness measures, such as hazard mapping, risk assessments, capacity building for local responders, and early warning systems can help identify potential hazards and enable communities and responders to prepare for and respond to disasters in a more effective manner. Preparedness, in particular, is essential to ensure an effective response to a crisis as it helps build resilience, which is especially needed during the recovery phase. The preparedness stage involves proactive strategies and measures which are assumed to enhance coordination, help build response capacity, and mitigate the risks involved. The central role of the preparedness stage in crisis management as well as the need for proactive measures has been systematically accentuated by scholars and researchers (Ansell et al., 2010).

Cross-border crises affect multiple countries and communities. They are challenging in terms of the coordination and cooperation between diverse stakeholders. Present-day crisis management cuts across the sole response to a crisis, and its core aspires to prevent crises in every feasible way, with an emphasis being placed on the preparedness phase which furthers a timely and effective response to crisis situations. The preparedness phase encompasses such measures as anticipation, hazard mapping, risk assessments, mitigation, training response exercises, and recovery strategies as well as early warning systems which help communities and responders to proactively anticipate and face crisis. The fundamental crisis management is effective coordination between the participating actors, among others, government agencies, humanitarian organizations, and the private sector. A crucial factor for an effective response is a thorough understanding of the local context and fostering relationships with the local communities. In the social reality affected by multiple and global crises, with a special attention to cross-border regions, the academic and research community is at a critical juncture in addressing the need to produce tangible evidence and concepts in preparedness and management. Cross-border regions pertain to shared risks, greater vulnerability, coordination challenges, and displacement induced by conflict-induced displacement; also, they involve multiple stakeholders from various sectors and states. In the most recent decades, ‘borderland studies’, a multidisciplinary field of study, has emerged to meet the urgent matter of the cross-border dimension from the geographical, political, sociological, and organizational angle, to examine the influence of cross-border, along with the interconnectedness and complexities involved. In the context of globalization and in the case of a cross-border crisis, border regions perform a significant role of the first point of contact between countries and other stakeholders (Kanteler & Bakouros, 2024).

As a rule, response to crisis is made in the dynamic context of uncertainty with no previously gained knowledge or internal perception of this new external reality. The process of decision-making in the crisis response context is triggered by

a stimulus on the physical level, a physical reaction, followed by a cognitive map drawn on the basis of the available information, as well as interpretation of circumstances. The outcome of this process is situational awareness. In times of unpredicted, sudden emergency, disruption, turmoil and uncertainty, people feel and demonstrate the need to make sense and gain understanding of the new circumstances by making observations which are further integrated and interpreted. In this cognitive process, new information is placed in the context, while also applying the already existing knowledge and mental models. What is noteworthy is that the nature of this cognitive process is dynamic and stimulated and internalized individually (Laurila-Pant et al., 2023). Risk perception and assessment of vulnerability are underlying parts of crisis management.

There has been a tendency among the general public not to perceive crises as a real threat up to the time a crisis sparks off. Such an attitude reinforces the hesitation to get involved in prevention activities and preparedness trainings (Eriksson, 2023). Since collective risk perception may influence the public response (Flint & Luloff, 2005; Leiserowitz, 2005), the way in which risk – as well as future risk – is perceived should also be taken into consideration, along with demography and topography, in crisis management (Wood et al., 2010, 2015). The construction of individual risk perception depends not only on the reality set in a specific geographical context but also on the social one (Tierney et al., 2001). Risk perception is also recognized as a trigger for community agency and response capacity. For instance, on the community level, the place and the geographical location could contribute to the construction of risk perception as disruption may also affect a physical territory. In this sense, ‘place’ relates to attachment, values, symbols, beliefs, worldviews, emotions and other meanings associated with a specific territory which is a center of social life for a specific group of people (Flint & Luloff, 2005; Greider & Garkovich, 1994; Gustafson, 2001; Manzo, 2005). Meanings related to a place are subject to change as they may differ depending of the social group (Greider & Garkovich, 1994). Moreover, they do not surface in an empty space but are determined by the physical, social and historical features of a specific locality (Stedman, 2003; Jacquet & Stedman, 2013; McKnight et al., 2017). Although locality and community are separate concepts, they are also interrelated, especially in the crisis context (Amsden et al., 2010). When combined, they reflect the community of a place with a shared sense of identity, a “geographically bounded social community” (McKnight et al., 2017). Hence, risk perception involves fear of a loss of place and is associated with all the involved meanings (Lewicka, 2008; Shtob, 2019). Individual risk perception may significantly affect the response and adaptive capacity during a crisis (Nygren et al., 2020). Specifically, community capital, shared knowledge and learning increase awareness of threats, and, as a result, community resilience (Yang et al., 2021; McEwen et al., 2017; Shao et al., 2018). Threats are defined as a set of real or possible scenarios putting valued objects at risk and the need to be perceived and recognized collectively in order to mobilize collective action taking in response (Almeida, 2019; Van Dyke & Soule, 2002). A highly useful theoretical framework allowing to navigate various risks on the individual level is provided by

the relational theory of risk. Social mobilization in response is visible once group interests and values are at stake because of this threat (Almeida, 2019; Van Dyke & Soule, 2002; Scott, 2023). Central for our behavior is the balance in the construction of individual and collective identity between ‘self’ and ‘others’. This awareness of ‘I/me’ in conformation with ‘others’ plays an essential role in recognizing and embracing both individual and collective agency. Ontological security, introduced into social sciences by Anthony Giddens, implies that not the physical parts are safe and protected but the ‘I/me’, an internal understanding of oneself, which triggers individual decision and action taking (Bachleitner, 2023). Ontological security is understood as the security of one’s identity as well as a coping mechanism to overcome fear and uncertainty (Gustafsson & Krickel-Choi, 2020). Such a capacity empowers individuals to exercise their agency, namely, to make decisions and take action (Mitzen, 2006). Thus, there has been an ongoing discussion how individuals can ensure a sense of ontological security threatened in times of crisis, which usually provokes emotional upheaval (Homolar & Scholz, 2019), manifesting, among other aspects, in uncertainty and fear as well as disruption of individuals’ sense of identity and blocked individual agency (Mitzen, 2006). Ontological security relies on a reflexive approach to the creation of the self which originates from autobiographical stories and past experiences (Giddens, 1991). In order to comprehend the reality disrupted by a crisis, individuals attempt to self-reflexively construct positive narratives about themselves (Chernobrov, 2016). Such constructed narratives can be ruptured by a crisis which may lead to an existential anxiety among individuals. The capacity to reconcile the past and current narratives of the self with the newly constructed ones helps to build a coping mechanism in times of a crisis. Narratives are an instrumental coping mechanism to overcome fear and ensure a feeling of ontological security. Yet what has not been still established is the practical aspect of how narratives are constructed (Gellwitzki & Houde, 2023). Response to a crisis necessitates a diverse set of abilities demonstrated by many different actors involved in the response as one individual actor is not able to acquire all those abilities (FEMA, 2019). Nonetheless, the capacity to cooperate interdependently at times of sudden disruption is challenging because of, among other factors, a diverse cultural background and know-how of the actors involved (Turoff et al., 2008). On that account, the competence to cooperate conjointly should be developed beforehand. Crisis preparedness trainings are believed to be a crucial instrument in improving and affirming coordinated response capacities (Borell & Eriksson, 2013). Moreover, well-defined capacities are instrumental in planning and organizing crisis preparedness trainings and crisis management, which is divided into phases, such as mitigation, preparation, response, and recovery. Yet, there is no established framework or strategy to exercise joint crisis management capacities. Joint crisis management is a network of systems with each system being compatible with an actor in charge of a specific aspect of the response to the crisis. In the period between one crisis and another, this network of actors is loosely interrelated; yet, in times of emergency, there is a mobilization of actors in this network to respond to the crisis. Their role in response may differ as it is contingent

upon the circumstances. This type of the system and mechanism of response originates from cooperation in place of the top-down approach to cope with a crisis (Bodin & Nohrstedt, 2016). Crucial crisis management and response capacities have been discussed and pinpointed in various ways. In the majority of cases, this entails continuous knowledge acquisition to remain aware of the circumstances, communication and cooperation between the actors involved in response in order to ensure successful coordination by facilitating joint actions as well as command and control to adapt the response to a dynamic context of an emergency (Comfort, 2007). Capacities should also foster adjustability, versatility and improvisation as well as transferring practical knowledge stemming from past emergencies to be applied in the current crisis. Resilience emerges as a capacity which involves robustness, an ability to adjust, persevere and transform (Olsén et al., 2023). It is critical to work on the capacity to prevent and respond to future crises (Eriksson, 2023). As in the case of natural disasters or human-induced crises, individuals might express the need to receive resources in order to respond to an emergency such as, for instance, information. Individuals may assess the situation as a challenge they can cope with as long as their own resources are evaluated as sufficient. In the second scenario, they may find the situation difficult to respond to with their own resources if these resources are regarded as insufficient or even inexistent. The latter scenario includes crises such as COVID-19 pandemic, natural disasters, climate change, wars and military conflicts (Gaspar et al., 2023). However, an individual experience, perception and recognition of a crisis is still un(der)researched. It seems that the insider perspective should also be taken into consideration when discussing the perception of and the response to a crisis (Fassin, 2022).

A conceptual model of community action taking and response capacity has been designed, which consists of indicators affecting community action-taking and response capacity (Flint & Luloff, 2005), namely, its geographical vulnerability and socioeconomic status versus risk environment, collective socially perceived or constructed risk, as well as capacity for joint cooperation to solve community issues and problems. Risk environment is a mix of vulnerability factors such as the geographical location or the socioeconomic status which are measured objectively and technically in order to establish the community level of exposure to risk. Since risk is socially constructed, individual and collective perceptions of risk are crucial for the way risks are narrated at a community level. Risk perception on the community level occurs when its members jointly feel a sense of uncertainty and fear as well as when they recognize potential threats to their community. In response, community members assumably demonstrate higher cooperation capacity, get involved in community activities, and mobilize resources once risks are considered to be genuine and serious. There are a few aspects which considerably affect the way communities perceive risk, such as geographical vulnerability and risk proximity, community efforts and engagement in action-taking, past crises experienced by the whole community. These aspects increase the awareness of potential threats and foster community response capacity and agency in times of an emergency. Community activity and leadership underpin community cooperation

through which continuously collective risk narratives are constructed, problems and issues are solved, identities are recreated, and actions are taken in response to a threat or a crisis affecting a specific community. In cases where community members mutually look after each other and the place they live, the response to a threat or a crisis will be more effective and efficient. One of the reasons will be the mobilization of joint resources. This type of community action, which stems, among others, from cooperation, is rather spontaneous in nature. It indicates that the risk perceived through the lens of community and from the perspective of community members is important. There is a need to develop and deepen an awareness of the connection between risk perception and action at the community level as well as to improve the understanding of the way risks are socially constructed. Moreover, there is a need to enhance local community capacities which are integral and essential in response to an emergency, such as among the agency of others along with cooperation in that community, on the basis of which, the community members can respond to threats and minimize the impact of the crisis (Flint & Luloff, 2007).

The meaning assigned to risk may differ as it relies on one's own personal experience. Therefore, it is essential to study the subjective first-person role of risk awareness which springs from a specific point of view, a distinct state of 'being here-and-now' of each individual, as well as to gain understanding of agency in everyday life and sense-making, and to uncover the individual reality of lived experiences in everyday practices of risk. Such broadened knowledge could help to understand the ambivalence in relations between the individual/subjective and the collective/structural. The actor is not simply a passive agent reduced to the experiences of everyday life, social status and positions. These are the resources which provide the actor with a sense of agency – an agent who makes sense of the world around and its uncertainty, according to the available resources. Risk and uncertainty both create moral dilemmas and opportunities for decision-making, action-taking, and action (Nygren et al., 2020).

The next section shall discuss the sociological understanding of a community in order to comprehend the way the community may play a role in the context of the response to a crisis.

1.3. Sociological Understanding of the Concept of Community

Georg Simmel, who is an acknowledged pioneer of the structural approach to studying social life (Chayko, 2015), explored how modern social groupings and networks connect, operate, and develop intricate web-like patterns and how, within a larger societal group, smaller ones emerge and overlap extensively, allowing for the emergence of multiple separate and diverse personal individualities thus creating both connection and separation within society (Stoetzler, 2016). Group affiliations could be described by a pattern of circles with a common center group (i.e., a family, a neighborhood, a church and its parish) which consist of, mostly, the same people. In the past, due to technological and other factors leading to fewer opportunities to travel and communicate, people were more oriented towards group affiliations where

they were treated as members of a group rather than as individuals. Along the acceleration of industrialization leading to the advancement of transportation and communication technology, people could belong to multiple groups at the same time. Thus, membership in multiple intersecting groups became crucial as it boosted people's opportunities for developing social connections. Individuals who are members in different groups have to navigate a complex set of social networks, and often experience tensions and conflicts in the process. Yet, they also benefit substantially from the resources, information, and social capital (Chayko, 2015). The nature of social groupings was also explored by the German sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies who draws a distinction between the *Gemeinschaft* (communal society) and the *Gesellschaft* (associational society). In the *Gemeinschaft*, what unites people, in the rural, peasant societies, is personal relationships which are built and fostered on the fundament of the traditional social rules. Meanwhile, people in the *Gemeinschaft* have simple and direct face-to-face relations with each other which are influenced by *Wesenwille* (natural will), a unity of human wills, i.e., natural and spontaneously arising emotions. This sense of unity remains even when people get separated. Real, organic life is the essence of community. The *Gesellschaft*, in contrast, is a mechanical aggregate based on *Kürwille* (rational will) which is represented by contemporary, cosmopolitan societies influenced by, among others, government and industrial organizations and their hierarchical structures. In the *Gesellschaft*, human relations are more impersonal and indirect, as they are rationally and purely mechanically constructed for the sake of or in exchange of. In the *Gesellschaft*, like in the *Gemeinschaft*, people live alongside each other, but they are not organically united; they are rather detached. In the *Gemeinschaft*, people remain together no matter what separates them, while, in the *Gesellschaft*, they continue to exist separately in spite of everything which unites them (Tönnies, 1887; Britannica, 2025; German History Intersections, 2025). The concept of the loss of tradition and the need to regenerate community, as well as the rise of individualism, and hence the transformation of the nature of social organizations from the community *Gemeinschaft* to the society *Gesellschaft* has been continuously reflected since the late 19th century by sociologists, moralists, and politicians. Apart from being a geographical, social and sociological space, community is a micro space of emotional connections, bonds and relationships, norms, meanings and values, through which individual personalities are constructed. There are two features which define community: one is a web of emotional relationships which intersect and strengthen each other, whereas the second one is a system of values, norms and meanings as well as a shared history and cultural identity. Since communities are networks of loyalty and commitment, they offer a relationship which is more direct and natural and less remote and less superficial. A new sense of community emerges as zones to be researched, interpreted, classified to become an alternative means, remedy and solution for the problems which society is not able to address and solve (Rose, 1999).

The concept of *communitas* denotes a social bond formed to create together the sense of security within a group. Such bonds are created *ad hoc* in a spontaneous manner. They refer to the improvisational social bonds and spontaneous out-of-collective support in response to an emergency. It has been revealed that calamity triggers community action translated into activation of agency as well as values such as mutual caring, support, selflessness, kindness, and altruism (Prince, 1920). Also, emergencies and crises stimulate prosocial attitudes among community members and communities. *Communitas* manifests itself in various forms and notions, for instance, as an ‘emergency togetherness’ (Drury et al., 2009). *Communitas* reflects the core nature community, its essential characteristics, which are, among others, unity, connectedness, collective effort and group action as well as equality. *Communitas* somehow deconstructs the myth and the universal conviction of the individuals’ attitudes in the face of a calamity, a common belief, that of a panic and collapse of a society when hit by a crisis which does not fit to the image and narratives created by the media (Dynes & Quarantelli, 1977). The role of community empowerment in a crisis is significant, specifically when considering a suggested best practice that those affected by a crisis should be able to recover without external support (Twigg, 2015) as it is often that actors such as families, community groups and members are not included in the official crisis management and response planning (Twigg & Mosel, 2017). Accordingly, it is crucial to enhance the dimensions or factors which affect *communitas* as well as acknowledge the potential of this framework for the community’s recovery after the calamity, which may benefit crisis management and response to crisis planning made by institutional actors (Twigg & Mosel, 2017).

In the recovery after a calamity, there is considerably more focus on the physical functions which ensure the survival of a social system such as various infrastructures, transportation and energy networks, as well as communication by contrast on the social function which is considered to be an optimal resilience factor (Aldrich & Meyer, 2015). A gradual emergence of *communitas* is observed during a crisis, and it is a crucial means for disaster planning and preparedness (Matthewman, 2015; Matthewman & Uekusa, 2021). Those types of communities retain distinguishing features. Firstly, their strong identity is established as a result of the collective acknowledgement of a joint shared impending hazard to be dealt with. Secondly, there is an increased integration which originates from this mutual danger as well as collective readiness to respond. Another factor is the time span of the emergency meaning that a short-term single occurrence will not contribute to the development of such a community. The inevitable exposure to a threat and direct experience of such an emergency necessitates adequate resources to respond to that emergency. Social capital, relations and other practices, through which a community is more connected, develop a strong identity within this community (Baehr, 2005). Very often, research on disaster and resilience applies the theory on the social capital in an attempt to get an explanation for *communitas* by reasoning that the social capital is a link which connects the community members together and provides an effective aid in response to and recovery from the calamity. The social capital brings enormous

benefits, and one of them is the capacity to gain access to resources and to act jointly in order to overcome the crisis. On the contrary, communities with less established social networks in all probability will be more affected by the crisis and will find it hard(er) to return to a normal state. The social capital could be organized into three distinct embodiments or configurations, namely, *bonding*, which occurs within close-knit groups, networks or communities, *bridging* among more distant communities, and *linking* between informal and formal actors (Bourdieu, 1986). Any social capital is recognized as a resource which can be financial, for instance, in the form of money, cultural (for instance, values, worldviews, competencies, experience, knowledge), social (for instance, connections and networks), and symbolic (for instance, the power of position, status, conventional standards). Those capitals can intersect and reshape. Access to capital has an impact on the social status (Bourdieu, 1986). Similar trends are observed in a crisis situation and in areas affected by a calamity. Moreover, the accumulation, quality and interaction of capitals affect the resource scope and base, as well as the individuals and communities facing a crisis. Individuals who have considerable (personal) resources are believed to have and demonstrate a greater resilience (Obrist et al., 2010). In addition to alerting us to the resilient system of a social structure, Bourdieu's theory offers another important element: the role of symbolic capital (defined as standing, value, recognition, prestige). By developing a social infrastructure and social capital, we build resilience and we create a potent force for disaster recovery (Matthewman & Uekusa, 2021; Zarembo & Martin, 2024). When a community is exposed to a sudden disruption such as, for instance, a natural disaster or a pandemic, in many cases, community members ask other community members for help and assistance (Norris et al., 2008).

In times of an extensive disruption affecting the economy, society, and sometimes the infrastructure, resources managed by the government and other formal actors and organizations are scarce (Aldrich & Meyer, 2015; Carlsen et al., 2021; Kyne & Aldrich, 2020). This signals that community members need to rely on each other within the community increasingly in order to address the unexpected needs being the outcome of a sudden disruption. One of the ways a community may be more resilient towards a crisis is the local social networks which are formed out of the community ties that surpass relations such as a family or a household. Everyone has their own individual social network which influences the type of support and the way it could be received in times of an emergency (House et al., 1988). The omnipresence of the social media extending communication into the online space connotes that a great deal of social networks established by individuals transcends the local level (Quan-Haase & Wellman, 2017). As the majority of prosocial attitudes to practically help others in need relies on physical closeness, specifically, local social networks are crucial. In the disaster resilience research, in times of a sudden disruption leading to a crisis, a local social network established by individuals is a vital dimension of community resilience (Aldrich & Meyer, 2015; Norris et al., 2008; Pfefferbaum et al., 2005). In crisis situations, social networks allow community members to access numerous and diverse resources, among others, information, financial support or any kind of assistance as well as emotional reassurance

(Aldrich & Meyer, 2015). In all probability, those who are socially excluded or who are outside of their social network will find it more difficult to access such resources. Hence, there is an agreement that local social networks are crucial in granting access to support and assistance during emergencies, and yet it has not been established so far what kind of social networks is the most efficient and how this process works. The general interpretation of local social networks within disaster research is that they are an integral part of the social capital, a concept with many facets, for instance, values and norms (Sherrieb et al., 2010) which can be introduced and developed on the individual or collective level (Wu, 2020). Community values such as, for instance, solidarity or altruism, are highlighted in disaster research as resilience dimensions which activate pro-social and helping behaviors towards other people (Aresi et al., 2022). It has been observed that, in many crisis situations (Aresi et al., 2022) directly affecting local communities, at the onset moment, there is a massive wave of informal mutual help and support (Kaniasty & Norris, 1995). Again, disaster resilience studies reveal that social networks are activated and used by community members, and that these networks meet the unexpected needs which emerge because of the crisis situation (Kaniasty & Norris, 1995; Wellman & Wortley, 1990; Horak & Vanhooren, 2024). Commonly, strategic planning is implemented predominantly by applying the knowledge demonstrated by researchers, scientists and experts, while the knowledge applied by local communities and non-experts is experiential, practical and related to a particular location. The role of local knowledge in community resilience is that its community members as non-experts tackle issues and find solutions to problems on their own (Konsti-Laakso & Rantala, 2018). In essence, border regions are geographically isolated and marginalized and could be envisioned as hybrid spaces in between. Cross-border regions, characterized by shared risks, an increased vulnerability, coordination challenges, and conflict-induced displacement, beckon a coordinated and collaborative approach involving multiple stakeholders from diverse sectors and countries (Kanteler & Bakouros, 2024). Moreover, inhabitants in border regions are often the first to be confronted with these shocks. A long-term ability to adapt the border regions' institutional and economic structures to critical impacts is crucial (Hippe et al., 2024).

The next chapter shall discuss in more detail the role of spatial factors of communities in navigating risk and uncertainty as well as resilience of such regions, and specifically border regions.

1.4. Spatial Communities – Risksapes

Since people are exposed to, confront and manage multiple risks at the same time, and not as methodically arranged separate factors, the social practice approach is that risks cannot be comprehended in isolation, neither experientially nor conceptually (Müller-Mahn et al., 2018).

Space serves both as the territory where multiple risks overlap in specific places and regions, as well as an analytical tool to conduct risk analysis and an empirical tool to manage risk by locating, evaluating, mapping and regionalizing specific risks.

The framework of *riskscape* is introduced with the objective to study how risk is visualized, to create risk narratives in people's everyday lives, and to translate these risks into a territorial setting and how the geographical territory is shaped and reshaped from an actor-oriented perspective. *Riskscape* links the notion of the landscape, a territorial unit with risk, a phenomenon which shapes the landscape into a 'riskscape' (Müller-Mahn (ed.), 2012).

Since risks are created and selected by actors, they may be seen by those in a different way, for instance, as real risk, destiny, or an opportunity. Even though there exists a societal awareness of the potential risk of different events and activities, it is impossible to anticipate all the scenarios and prepare scenarios for intervention. Hence, societies have started to choose what poses a risk and is worth addressing, and what is not. Space and time emerge as the factors which influence this process of selection of risks. For this reason, any risk which directly threatens someone's space and happens in time directs more attention than a risk that seems to be somewhere remote. It is essential to explore what major social organizations and actors, such as, for instance, communities select as risks and what problems are identified by them as having its source in risk and uncertainty. It is preparedness trainings that offer an awareness and orientation to anticipate and predict risk. Among the plethora of risks which have been receiving attention in the public discourse, the spatial factors of risk are becoming prominent. In general, people select risk in reference to their knowledge about the place they inhabit, and also with reference to whatever these people are aware of within the history and narratives of the specific region they inhabit. However, *riskscapes* are not fixed to one inhabited place; rather, they are understood from the perspectives of individuals or groups. Landscapes correspond to points of view; it might be the same stretch of land, but what is perceived and actively apprehended depends on the viewpoint or perspective of the observer (Renn & Klinke, 2013). Hence, the concept of *riskscapes* embraces this complex environment by focusing on the overlaps and mutual strengthening of various risks such as natural hazards, technological threats, pandemic outbreaks or economic crises, not to mention the recent global developments caused by the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Researchers have already applied before the concept of *riskscapes*, for instance, eventual and incremental *riskscapes*, while the difference between them is illustrated as tsunamis, which are unexpected and sudden events, which can happen or not happen, and air pollution which is not an event, but rather a process dependent on trespassing boundaries (Tironi & Calvillo, 2016, as cited in Müller-Mahn et al., 2018). Furthermore, various terms and concepts related to the concept of risk have been coined by different authors that include the -scapes affix to either metaphorically illustrate its globally interconnected meanings, or to practically denote a physical space or landscape which can be analyzed from a thematic standpoint (Müller-Mahn et al., 2018). *Riskscapes* can also be seen as global, regional, local, or networked. Global, regional and local *riskscapes* should be assumed as not only overlapping territories of numerous and various risks but also as outcomes of mutual interference and amplification between these specific risks (Blok, 2016, as cited in Müller-Mahn et al., 2018). Moreover, *riskscapes* can act as maps and navigate various

actors and decision-makers involved in the process of the creation of new futures (Appadurai, 2013, as cited in Müller-Mahn et al., 2018). *Risksapes*, similarly to cognitive maps, constitute shared imaginations of risk settings which overlap, are diverse and complex. Similarly, to maps, their purpose is to, first of all, identify dangers and secure passages in space, and, second, to provide orientation in a potentially dangerous area. ‘Orientation’ may be interpreted in the literal sense of finding one’s way, but also symbolically as efforts to find joint understating of managing those complex risks (Müller-Mahn et al., 2018).

It is argued that certain dimensional dynamics (e.g., in the correlation between plate tectonics and the selection of earthquake hotspots) create risks but, at the same time, risks also contribute to the production and transformation of geographical settings (e.g., development of earthquake-resistant buildings). *Risksapes* are not merely a dangerous ground to be maneuvered, but also a socially constructed concept (Lupton, 1999) as they emerge out of a “social amplification of risk” (Kasperson et al., 2010) which may occur through society’s or social groups’ collective risk perceptions, discussion and collective action (Müller-Mahn et al., 2018). It is evident for some places with visible imminent threats, but some may contain unseen danger which can become visible through the risk discourse, calculation or visualization (Aradau et al., 2008, as cited in Müller-Mahn et al., 2018).

The risk research has been interpreting the concept of risk in very different ways, such as, for instance, the ‘dread risk’ factor encompassing the observed lack of control and potential for a catastrophe, and as the ‘unknown risk’ factor, which exhibits the level of scientific understanding, its visibility, knowledge and awareness of a given phenomenon (Fischhoff et al., 1978; Slovic, 2016). Various sociocultural perspectives also analyze risk, but the priority is given to the social and cultural context where this risk is manifested, experienced, comprehended, and mediated (Lupton, 1999).

Since risk perception shapes agency, the individuals’ freedom to act and shape the society and social action (Nygren et al., 2020), it is pivotal to acquire knowledge of the way(s) how people perceive threats and create risk narratives, and how this process affects their agency, with focus on the spatial dimension of risk. These perceptions are affected by a large number of factors, ranging from the individual’s psychology or the societal and cultural context (Fischhoff et al., 1978; Wachinger et al., 2010). These perceptions are also contingent upon people becoming aware of the potential of and exercising their agency to act. Therefore, the perception of the shock itself plays a vital role because it triggers the reaction to the shock event (Hippe et al., 2024).

The next chapter shall discuss theoretical approaches to community resilience as well as the ways how it relates to the concepts already discussed in previous sections.

1.5. Sociological Understanding of the Concept of Community Resilience

Humanity has always been coping with a variety of challenges and adapting to new circumstances (McIntosh et al., 2000) while humans, when confronted with adversity, will be able to adapt, as adaptability is their inherent capacity (Engle, 2011).

Acceleration of global changes and trends in all areas of the social life setting of human communities in the new realities and contexts globally has been causing deep concerns about the resilience as well as the response and recovery capacities of the contemporary communities (National Academy of Sciences, 2010). In response to concerns about the impact of potential disruptions on communities, comprehensive resilience studies have been undertaken to analyze the response and recovery capacities of communities and individuals. Seemingly, the threats will remain and present further challenges. In order to efficiently rise to those challenges, it is necessary to analyze, identify and follow what dimensions and capacities make a community resilient in the face of a disruption (Alessi et al., 2020). The primary definition of resilience encompassed the concept as the persistence and the ability of systems to absorb change and disturbance while still maintaining the same social relationships or state characteristics (Holling, 1973). A more recent concept frames resilience as “the ability of a system to absorb disturbance and adjust while experiencing and adapting to change so as to maintain basically the same function, structure and identity” (Walker et al., 2004). Resilience seems to be a proper subset of the capacity to respond. The capacity of response includes not only the resilience of the system (maintenance within a basin) but also coping with the impacts produced and taking advantage of the arising opportunities. The system’s coping capacity (Turner et al., 2003), or the capacity of response (Gallopín, 2003), is also called *adaptive capacity* (Adger, 2006; Smit & Wandel, 2006). Adaptive capacity is a latent property of an individual, community, or a social-ecological system, which is activated in response to a crisis or an opportunity (Engle, 2011). Adaptive capacity in resilience studies, which is often described as ‘adaptability’, the capacity of actors in the system to manage and influence resilience (Walker et al., 2004), a core attribute of resilient social-ecological systems (Nelson et al., 2007), an inherent ability of an individual, a community, or a social-ecological system, is activated in response to a crisis or an opportunity (Engle, 2011). A highly adaptive capacity boosts resilience on an individual and community level as well as in a social-ecological system so that they are more prone to be able to maintain a desired condition, or facilitate positive transformation when the present condition is undesirable (Folke et al., 2006). Following a socio-cultural approach, adaptive capacity is seen as the “capacities of institutions which empower social actors to respond to short- and long-term contingencies and disruptions either through planned in advance measures or through fostering creative responses from society” (Gupta et al., 2010). The notions of adaptive capacity, adaptation, coping ability, management capacity, robustness, flexibility vulnerability and resilience are interrelated (Smit & Wandel, 2006; Smit et al., 1999; Jones & Ludi, 2011; Brooks, 2003). They have wide application in the paradigm of the global change science (Kelly & Adger, 2000). Particularly, the connection between the notions of adaptive capacity and resilience is ambiguous due to diverse approaches where some researchers regard adaptive capacity and resilience as the same concept, while others find adaptive capacity to be a component of resilience which represents the capacity to learn in response to a disturbance (Carpenter et al., 2001) or resilience, and adaptive capacity is found to be different

manifestations of more general processes of the response to a disturbance (Engle, 2011). The nature of adaptive capacity is specific context- and region-dependent (Yohe & Tol, 2002; Smit & Wandel, 2006). Hence, there is no universal and fixed definition of adaptive capacity (Prysmakova & Pysmenna, 2024). Resilience also denotes a capacity to learn from past experience, from own experience, from the experience available in the community or society, and thus it entails acting prior (ex-ante), and not only in the aftermath (ex-post). Moreover, resilience entails planning, preventing, evading, mitigating, avoiding as well as coping with and reacting to challenging situations. It refers to proactive capacities like capabilities to anticipate, change and search for new options. Hence, the practical approach to resilience includes analysis of not only the contingency planning phase empowering communities by developing and strengthening their coping capacities (Roberts & Townsend, 2016; Sherrieb et al., 2010). Naturally, community resilience dimensions are not static as they are context-dependent (Titz et al., 2018). The mere presence of dimensions within a community do not make this community resilient. It implies that there are capacities which may enhance the community's resilience in times of a crisis situation or a sudden disruption. In order to enhance community resilience, among other resources, solid social networks will be necessary (Cole & Habashi, 2020).

The concept of community resilience has been introduced and applied in various contexts with shifting emphasis and understandings. Yet, the main common consideration among researchers has been whether community resilience denotes a community's preparedness to act and respond to sudden disruptions, or both the capacity to respond to a crisis and the factors of response (Zurek et al., 2022). Whereas, community preparedness means its capacity to withstand an adversity without undergoing a disruption or change in the system (Robinson, 2022). There remain other dimensions to study, for instance, by what means communities can accommodate change caused by a sudden disruption (Glass et al., 2022).

In order to build community resilience and preparedness in an effective way, the measurement of community resilience has been acknowledged to be a high-priority by various stakeholders (Lam et al., 2016). There have already been in place regularly conducted measurements of community resilience, mostly in the area of geography and environment (Cai et al., 2018). Additionally, research has been done to develop frameworks to thoroughly measure community resilience dimensions (Cutter et al., 2010). Moreover, research has been conducted to analyze other factors impacting community resilience such as individual perceptions of risk.

In spite of different approaches to the concept, it has been jointly agreed that community resilience primarily denotes a community response capacity to both accommodate change or sudden disruption and reshape its functions (Fischer & McKee, 2015; Robinson, 2022). Even though community resilience has been an extensively researched concept, the question why response capacity and community resilience vary among communities still needs to be addressed as this issue is not sufficiently clear yet (Steiner & Markatoni, 2014; Wilson, 2013). Since community resilience is a complex and multifaceted notion, a variety of

approaches to capture its nature and dimensions should be taken. One of the feasible ways is to analyze the currently existing dimensions which may help estimate the community resilience potential and response capacity (Sherrieb et al., 2010). Moreover, the community resilience potential may be studied by examining those dimensions or factors which enhance community resilience, and which, in practice, in a specific context, are set in temporal and spatial settings. It is essential as community resilience is understood as a process which takes place over a period of time during which response capacities are being acquired or developed. Considering that there is no single exhaustive universal definition of the concept of community resilience due to extensive variety of interpretations of the concept as well as underlying resilience dimensions made by different actors (Zurek et al., 2022), examination of the community resilience dimensions in a way to measure them and to accurately compare the results across communities in practice poses a challenge (Zurek et al., 2022). Hence, the approach to examine the community resilience dimensions should be tailored to a local community context as the ability of communities to develop their response capacity and resilience potential may differ and get affected by the local dynamics and circumstances (Glass et al., 2022; Yang et al., 2021).

Community resilience research can be found in an extensive literature which falls into three main categories, specifically:

- community resilience and its dimensions (Hosseini et al., 2016), for example, community activities and collective response capacity strengthening resilience (Ainuddin & Routray, 2012);
- community resilience measurement frameworks (Jain et al., 2018; Sharifi, 2016), acknowledged as critical in community preparedness and risk mitigation (Orencio & Fujii, 2013; Fox-Lent et al., 2015; Cutter et al., 2014);
- community resilience planning and development (Xerandy et al., 2016; Valenzuela-Venegas et al., 2018; Xu et al., 2020).

Whereas different dimensions of community resilience have been identified and analyzed, the creation of a comprehensive and complete index allows to establish the connection between a specific dimension and community resilience, and, as a result, it enhances the community resilience when presented with a major challenge (Jordan & Javernick-Will, 2013; Khunwishit et al., 2013; Xu et al., 2020). While resilience research has been increasingly developing, concurrently, reservations have been expressed that the dimensions which either hinder or enhance community resilience, community response and recovery capacity, adaptation and transformation from which communities can learn and prepare for the future have still been undertheorized (Keck & Sakdapolrak, 2013; Walker et al., 2004; Clarke & Mayer, 2017).

There is also a need to continue and extend research on analyzing the community resilience dimensions (Moreno et al., 2019; Johansen et al., 2016; Adger et al., 2005; Añasco et al., 2021).

The ability of a community to evaluate its own resilient dimensions such as, for instance, social networks, resources, exposure to threats and risks, enhances and strengthens its response and recovery capacity. As a rule, the timing, location and magnitude of sudden disruptions are rather difficult to predict, and therefore

a community's resilience and preparedness level (Moreno et al., 2019) is vital (Mohanty et al., 2019; Cutter et al., 2008). Civil preparedness is as crucial as resilience in responding to and minimizing the outcomes of a sudden disruption (Añasco et al., 2021).

The concept of community resilience and its dimensions may also be framed with reference to the social capital described as a feeling of social connection, the sense of 'We' instead of 'I/me', which also fosters strength to endure, unity, togetherness, and success. One of the main social components of the social capital is the sense of community, where community members show interest in each other, share values and concerns, as well as citizen participation (Norris et al., 2008) where community members are active in, among other factors, mutual support groups and networks (Cole & Habashi, 2020).

The social capital is a fundament-level constituent of resilience setting a framework to analyze the role of social networks in generating and cumulating resources which can be mobilized in times of a sudden disruption and crisis situation. It encompasses, among other aspects, knowledge, norms, values and mutual support which underpin social networks (Woolcock, 1998). The social capital is produced collectively and is held by individuals linked by those social networks as well as through group membership. It is an assemblage of real and potential resources generated by a specific social network (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988). The key premise of the social capital theory attaching it to the concept of community resilience is that the social capital describes resources which are present and ready for use within the community as well the community's capacity to access and mobilize them in case of an emerging need. Hence, the more tight-knit are the social networks, such as, for instance, ties within the family, among neighbors or friends, the easier is the process of mobilization and distribution of available resources throughout the whole community.

The social capital is a resource base at a community's disposal through their own social networks which provides its members with, among others opportunities, knowledge, norms, and support (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988). Social networks do not happen naturally. Rather, they are an outcome of the social activity of individuals within communities (Bourdieu, 1986).

The theory of social capital has been applied, among other theories, to answer questions about the way resources are activated and organized by communities. It has been acknowledged that, in times of response to a sudden disruption, a crisis situation as well as during the preparedness phase, the social capital is a most important resource. Disaster and resilience research indicates that the mobilization of various social networks and diverse resources generated in the form of the social capital constitute a critical dimension of the community resilience which is manifested in the process of returning to the 'normal' after a disruption (Eisenman et al., 2007; Mathbor, 2007). Every community demonstrates local knowledge which is a precious resource and a dimension of resilience in response to a crisis.

An efficient and successful response to a crisis depends on the action taken and the roles assumed by local community members who may have resources and who,

most importantly, demonstrate the determination and abilities to respond to a crisis. Community members should be able to relate to their own values and to whatever is important for them. Identification with local human values, attitudes and worldviews is fundamentally important. By sharing such a common ground, communities can tackle together their own issues and cope with challenges by exercising leadership in order to respond to a crisis situation. Local leadership empowers communities to seek help and support independently in alignment with their values. Enhancement of self-reliance is achieved by building on and increasing the already present community capacities and strengths to become self-sufficient in response to crisis situations, specifically in those cases where the support from external actors is not always available, and, ultimately, where community members need to remain self-reliant. Collaboration capacity within a community by joining forces in order to use to the maximum advantage the available resources and abilities inside and outside of the community is a core dimension of the community resilience planning and strategy. Recognizing, identifying and including the local knowledge, and also the traditional one, which is obtained divergently in any response to a crisis, may strengthen community resilience planning and any resilience intervention. As each community is unlike others, those community resilience dimensions which prove efficient in one community may not be manifested in another one, and therefore it is vital to identify and develop community resilient capacities and dimensions by cooperating together with local communities which are well-aware of their own strengths and vulnerabilities. Such capacities and dimensions can be then tailored to meet the specific needs of such a community in times of a crisis situation (Helfgott, 2018).

Another community resilience dimension which triggers action and which is vital for a resilient community response is the human values which, in research, are recognized as an underlying feature of humans (Verplanken & Holland, 2002).

Key theorists in various disciplines have highlighted the role of people's most prioritized values in an attempt to understand and predict their conduct, decisions, and actions. Values are the guiding posts which help humans choose and evaluate actions and events (Schwartz, 2007). In social sciences, values are regarded as a key motivator of human action and behavior as people aspire to think and act independently. Conceivably, some distinct values can be a moral or ethical fundament for the human conduct. Interestingly, situations or information against which people are confronted may activate certain values. It could be presumed that, in most cases, there is the need for values to be activated to make an impact as it is requisite for the values to respond to the needs and options which are present in their environment (Welzel & Inglehart, 2009). It is noteworthy since values could be viewed as essential truths about the most expected outcome of the human conduct, which is crucial in the activation of motivation and not the activation itself. Since human societies adapt, organize and orientate themselves by following patterns on an individual micro-level, societies may undergo changes once such change happens in the individual through values or behaviors transmitted in a bottom-up manner (Barber, 2008). Consequently, if there are many micro-level individual changes, they can create a macro-level trend which then introduces a social change (Welzel & Inglehart, 2009).

Table 1. Summary of the core community resilience dimensions

Agency	An individual's freedom to act and shape society helps to make sense of the world and its uncertainty. According to the available resources, an individual is dependent on the free will, which leads to an independent decision to act. Collective/individual action, triggered by crisis, translates into the activation of agency in times of crisis. Local activity is very valuable as it may bring new ways of collective action and resilience while active social actors become envoys of community resilience.
Resources	An assemblage of generated, mobilized and cumulated real and potential resources generated by a specific social network. A resource base or social capital at a community's disposal through their own social networks, which is present and ready for use within the community/social network A community's capacity to access and mobilize resources in times of a sudden disruption and crisis situation in response to the sudden disruption, crisis situation and during the preparedness phase. Social capital is a community's most important resource.
Self-reliance	The presently available community capacities and strengths to become self-sufficient in response to crisis situations, specifically in cases where the support from external actors is not always available, and, ultimately, community members need to remain self-reliant.
Collaboration capacity	On the community level, it translates into cooperation together to optimally allocate the available resources and abilities within and outside of the community. At the center of the recovery stage is the capacity of the community members to join forces to endure the crisis situation.
Social networks	In crisis situations, social networks allow the community members to access numerous and diverse resources, among other aspects, information, financial support or any kind of assistance, as well as emotional reassurance. Social networks are activated and used by community members to meet the unexpected needs which emerge because of the crisis situation.
Local knowledge and leadership	They are experiential, practical, related to a particular location. This is the knowledge applied by local communities whose members, as non-experts, tackle issues and find solutions to problems on their own and who are aware of their own strengths and vulnerabilities. Community members should be able to relate to their own values and to whatever is important for them. By sharing a common ground, communities together can tackle their own issues and cope with challenges by exercising local leadership in response to a crisis, which empowers communities to seek help and support independently in alignment with their values.
Human values	These are dimensions which activate pro-social and helping behaviors towards other people. The guiding posts help humans choose and evaluate actions and events.

Source: developed by the author

1.6. Theoretical Synthesis Incorporating the Key Concepts

In order to synthesize the points discussed in previous chapters, which are the key research concepts for the purpose of empirical research and its further qualitative analysis, the concept of 'crisis' is conceptualized as a non-routine occurrence as well as a short-term disruptive event which produces long-term consequence. The negative aspect of the crisis is that it exposes vulnerabilities in various social systems, yet the positive outlook on the role of the crisis is that it may bring a positive change alongside transformation and development of response capacities of those systems. It tests the previously established approaches and strategies established towards an unexpected emergency. With respect to another key concept of this research, specifically, community, as well as community resilience and its dimensions, such a disruption can enhance bottom-up resilience and trigger the local community's agency. A crisis leads to a heightened sense of uncertainty and threatens not only the physical security but also the very ontological security of social actors. The ontological security is conceptualized as a coping mechanism to overcome fear and uncertainty by empowering individuals to exercise their agency, namely, to make decisions and take action. From the theoretical perspective, uncertainty and risk perception, which is another key concept of this research, are linked to the ways in which the future is imagined and to the ways how the present needs to be organized in order to deal with that future. Both risk perception and uncertainty raise the attention to the anticipated event and call for action or reaction, and both have the power to inflict change. Risk perception and uncertainty are active agents that direct attention towards what seems to be the most pressing dangers and uncertainties.

Of significance here is the first-person perspective of risk awareness: this is an awareness that always starts from a particular point of view, a particular 'here-ness' specific to the individual practices of risk; individual and collective perceptions of risk are crucial for the way risks are narrated at a community level. The risk perception itself is, largely, like a crisis, a trigger for community agency and response capacity during a crisis situation. The perception of shock itself triggers the reaction to the shock.

At a community level, it occurs when the community members jointly feel a sense of uncertainty and fear and recognize potential threats to their community. Since a crisis may affect a physical territory, and be specifically inflicted on a community level, the place and geographical location could contribute to the construction of risk perception. Risk perception is an underlying part of crisis management.

When a crisis starts to intersect and interconnect with other crises and they multiply, it creates even more uncertainty as the crisis becomes unpredictable, more complex, fluid and transboundary in nature, and it ends up producing cascading and spillover effects. Such a state requires a prompt response, usually made under considerable uncertainty, which is especially challenging for actors in charge of crisis management.

In such a scenario, the ‘ownership’ of the crisis is difficult to establish. It seems that contemporary society has turned into a ‘crisis society’ in the world affected by a *polycrisis*, in which the crisis has emerged as an integral element of human life.

The concept of community resilience, which is also a key concept of this research, frames that a local community is a unit at the frontline of coping with the outcomes of the crisis. In a crisis situation, local activity brings new ways of collective action and resilience, and active social actors become envoys of community resilience. Bottom-up self-organization on the local and community level tends to exceed top-down plans to manage the crisis. Specifically, actors on the community level, and also near the border regions, are the ones to respond directly to specific difficulties and challenges they face in their communities and neighborhoods. Communities in cross-border areas share risks, an increased vulnerability, coordination challenges, and conflict-induced displacement (*riskscapes*). The crisis management phase of preparedness helps build community resilience and helps the community to cope with a crisis during the response phase and recover in the recovery phase. Enabling factors which enhance community resilience are among the community resilience dimensions of agency, resources, social networks, collaboration capacity, self-reliance, local knowledge and leadership, and human values.

A conceptual framework has been developed in order to navigate the empirical research. Yet, it needs to be underlined that, although this framework may be employed to describe a wider phenomenon of the community resilience and response to a crisis, it has been developed specially to research the specific case of the Polish border communities’ response to crisis caused by the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

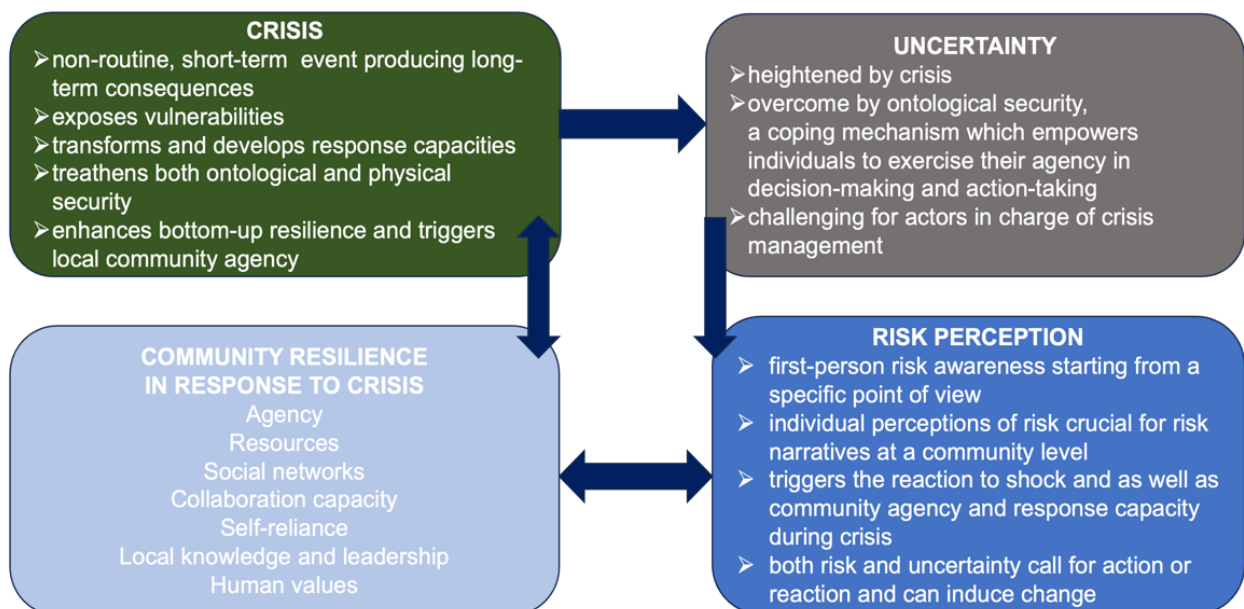


Fig. 1. Conceptual framework of the research (developed by the author)

2. COMMUNITY RESILIENCE IN RESPONSE TO CRISIS AND UNCERTAINTY: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This doctoral dissertation research utilizes the social constructivism paradigm, a learning theory which holds that knowledge is best gained through a process of reflection and active construction in the mind (Mascolo & Fischer, 2005). Thus, knowledge is an intersubjective interpretation. The learner must consider the information being taught and – based on past experiences, personal views, and cultural background – construct an interpretation. Constructivism is split into two main camps: radical versus social. The first form, i.e., *radical* (or *cognitive*) constructivism proposes that the process of constructing knowledge is dependent on the individual's subjective interpretation of their active experience. The second form, i.e., *social* constructivism, affirms that human development is socially situated, and that knowledge is constructed through interaction with others. Social constructivism is concerned with the micro-level processes of individual learning and knowledge acquisition. Knowledge is not passively received but, instead, actively constructed by individuals within a context. Another key principle of social constructivism is the relational nature of knowledge which affirms that knowledge is best gained through a process of action, reflection, and construction. According to this perspective, knowledge does not exist in isolation, but is constructed through relationships between individuals and their environment. Social constructivism focuses on the micro-level processes of individual cognition and learning within a social context. It is concerned with the way how individuals come to understand the world through their interactions with others. While social constructivism acknowledges the influence of social structures, its emphasis remains on individual development within a social environment. This theory adopts a more realist or pragmatic approach to knowledge and acknowledges that knowledge is constructed through social interaction; yet, this theory does not deny the existence of an external reality. Social constructivism focuses on the way how individuals come to understand and engage with this reality (Easy Sociology, 2025). There is an interesting tendency in social science research that local actors play an important role in their research projects. The interactive approach shifts focus from the researcher investigating how a risk came about, to the understanding of, and reflection on, the process of making sense of social problems by local actors involved in the problem – and this includes the researchers themselves as well. Brown, Moerman, and Bröer (2019) find the interview to serve as a means of exploring risk of a lived experience by excavating the roots of everyday meanings, experiences, and practices. The study of what can be learned by institutions, organizations and agencies when working together to provide the groundwork for international catastrophe management benefits from the use of the qualitative approach. Qualitative techniques are critical for understanding *how* and *why* things happen. According to unique perspectives and experiences, objects are described and comprehended in qualitative research (Kanteler & Bakouros, 2024). This research employs inductive reasoning and adopts a qualitative approach.

The social constructivism paradigm is employed for the purpose of this study because it empowers the researcher to seek to understand the pattern of response in an unprecedented context on a micro-scale level with the help of local actors who are directly immersed in this context. The researcher is positioned in the role of a both passive and active receiver of experiential and practical knowledge passed by the informants actively participating in response to an ongoing crisis which they experienced by themselves. This knowledge is further interpreted to contribute to the existing research which highlights the holistic approach to study community resilience to a crisis.

A case study research design and strategy were adopted for this particular research because of the exploratory focus of the research, the tight relationship between interorganizational collective action and contextual conditions (Yin, 2003; Yeo & Huang, 2019). There are two key approaches that guide the case study methodology, one of which was proposed by Stake (1995) and the second one suggested by Yin (2003) (Baxter & Jack, 2010). First, both Stake (1995) and Yin (2003) base their approach to the case study on a constructivist paradigm. Constructivists claim that truth is relative, and that it is dependent on one's perspective. This paradigm "recognizes the importance of the subjective human creation of meaning, but doesn't reject outright some notion of objectivity. Constructivism is built upon the premise of a social construction of reality" (Searle, 1995). One of the advantages of this approach is the close collaboration between the researcher and the participant, while enabling the participants to tell their stories (Crabtree & Miller, 1999). Through these stories, the participants are able to describe their views of reality, and this enables the researcher to better understand the participants' actions (Lather, 1992). While according to Yin (2003), a case study design should be considered when: (a) the focus of the study is to answer the 'how' and 'why' questions. Yin (2003) and Stake (1995) use different terms to describe a variety of case studies. Yin categorizes case studies as explanatory, exploratory, or descriptive. He also differentiates between single, holistic case studies versus multiple-case studies. Stake identifies case studies as intrinsic, instrumental, or collective. This doctoral dissertation research project is based on case study, an approach adopted by Robert K. Yin (2009), where the research focuses on the recent phenomenon of an unprecedented massive inflow of refugees to Poland, which is not isolated, and which has emerged out of a concrete scenario, while the researcher pursues the avenue of an in-depth analysis of the already published research in the field. It also frames research questions and objectives in order to perform a thorough analysis of this new phenomenon. The main reasoning behind adopting a case study as an empirical research method is that it allows researchers keep, in a holistic way, all the relevant features of real-life accounts – such as, for instance, small-group actions and organizational practices. The nucleus of a case study is that it attempts to comprehend the decision-making process or a set of decisions, such as why these particular decisions were reached, how they were implemented, and what was the result (Schramm, 1971, as cited in Yin, 2009). Hence, the suggested approach to a case study focuses on the decisions reached on the individual and institutional levels.

A case study is an empirical research method which facilitates an in-depth study of a contemporary phenomenon set in a real-life context, and, most importantly, it provides an explanation of the topics in a descriptive manner. The method of a case study may also be employed to provide a better understanding and greater knowledge of the situations in which the occurrence or the emergence has no clear, single set of outcomes. The method of a case study is very commonly employed out of an urgent need to understand complex social phenomena related to individuals, groups, and organizations (Yin, 2009). The case study method chosen for the empirical study of community resilience, risk perception and uncertainty in response to a crisis allows for holistic study of this recent phenomenon.

2.1. Background Context

This doctoral dissertation research project was conducted in the author's home country, i.e., Poland, the country which experienced the largest intake of refugees from Ukraine after Russia's military invasion of Ukraine. According to the Polish Border Guard statistics, from January till December 2022, 9 522 444 refugees with the Ukrainian citizenship crossed the Polish border, of whom, specifically, at the section of the border with Ukraine, there were 9 086 946 refugees, and, in the first quarter of 2022, in the most intensive time since the invasion started, there were 3 180 897 refugees with the Ukrainian citizenship crossing the border, and 3 046 762 at the section of the border with Ukraine (Komenda Główna Straży Granicznej, 2024). The Republic of Poland, with its approximately 37 million inhabitants, is a country in Central Europe with the capital city Warsaw, which is the largest city as well. Poland is bordered by the Baltic Sea in the North and the mountain ranges of the Sudetes and the Carpathians in the South. Poland shares its border with 7 countries: to the West with Germany, to the South with the Czech Republic and Slovakia, to the East with Ukraine and Belarus, to the North with the Russian territory of Kaliningrad Oblast, and to the North-East with Lithuania. Poland's other main cities are Katowice, Białystok, Gdańsk, Gdynia, Lublin, Łódź, Kraków, Poznań, Szczecin and Wrocław. The three-tier administrative territorial structure divides Poland into: *Voivodeships* (a first level, similar to provinces), *Powiats*, including *gminas* that are cities with the *powiat* status (a second level, similar to counties or districts), and *Gminas* (a third level similar to communes or municipalities). The main cities in Poland maintain the status of *Powiats*, and, at present, there are 16 *Voivodeships* and 314 *Powiats* comprising 66 cities with the status of *Powiats* and 2477 *Gminas* (including 302 urban *gminas*, 711 urban-rural *gminas*, and 1464 rural *gminas*) (Local Government Portal, 2024; GUS, 2024).

For the purpose of analyzing the role of community resilience dimensions and individual risk perception in the Polish border region communities' response to crisis and uncertainty caused by the Russian invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022, two cases of response in Polish border region communities, geographical territories and border regions, were selected, one of which is located in the Northeast of Poland, in Suwałki, in the geographical area often referred to as the *Suwałki Gap*, with a population of circa 70 000, at a distance of approximately 30 km from the Lithuanian border and ca. 600 km from the border with Ukraine, whereas the second community

is located in South-Eastern Poland, in Biecz, referred to as *Little Kraków*, with a population of circa 5000, located approximately 35 kilometers from the border with Slovakia and ca 100 km away from the border with Ukraine.

Border regions are characterized by such decisive features as a geographical location in the proximity to a border, a peripheral status in comparison and in proportion to other regions of individual states, socio-cultural aspects, including the presence of other nationalities and the ethnic nature of the population (Miszczuk & Jakubowski, 2019). Both geographical territories of Suwałki and Biecz are denoted by many of the features of the typical border regions.

Border region community in Suwałki

Suwałki is a town with the Powiat status, the capital of *Powiat Suwalski*, as well as the historical Suwałki Region, and the seat of Gmina Suwałki, situated in Podlaskie Voivodeship in North-Eastern Poland, on the Czarna Hańcza River. After Białystok, it is the largest town of Podlaskie Voivodeship and the largest town of the historical Suwałki Region. It is one of the three subregional centers of Podlaskie Voivodeship and the administrative, economic, scientific and cultural center in the North-East part of the region. Suwałki is an important transit city with major transport routes passing through the town, i.e., from Berlin via Warsaw to Saint Petersburg, and from Warsaw to Helsinki (the future *Via Baltica* expressway connecting the Baltic states with Western Europe) and a railway route (the future *Rail Baltica*). According to the NATO military planners, the Lithuania – Poland border region is known as the *Suwałki Gap*, which is a narrow strip of a territory between Belarus and Russia's Kaliningrad Oblast which is the only land connection between the three NATO-member Baltic States and Poland and the remaining NATO member countries (Urząd Miejski w Suwałkach, 2025).

Border region community in Biecz

Biecz is a town and the seat of an urban-rural gmina located in Powiat Gorlicki on the Ropa River in the Lesser Poland Voivodeship. Gmina Biecz comprises of 11 localities: the town of Biecz and the following villages: Binarowa, Bugaj, Głębocka, Grudna Kępska, Korczyna, Libusza, Raclawice, Rożnowice, Sitnica, and Strzeszyn. It is located in Gorlice Depression on one of the hills of the Carpathian Foothills in Southern Poland, in the historical Lesser Poland in the Kraków Region. Due to its rich history, it is often called the 'Pearl of Subcarpathia' or *Little Kraków* as well as the 'Polish Carcassonne', because of the preserved elements of the medieval city walls and buildings (Gmina Biecz, 2025).

The main argument for selecting these two specific border region communities was that the first community in Suwałki (the Suwałki Gap) is a community to which a researcher belongs by origin, which allowed for an instant, unlimited, easy, and direct access to potential and, later, the already selected research participants. Another important argument was the vulnerable geographical location of Suwałki,

due to being located in the proximity of the borders with Russia (Kaliningrad Oblast) and Belarus, forming a narrow passage of land providing the only land connection connecting EU and remaining NATO member states with the three Baltic states which are also NATO members, in the NATO terminology, is referred to as the Suwałki Gap. Due to an increased attention of the media and other actors to the Suwałki Gap in the context of the developments of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the author decided that the response of the border region community in Suwałki would be an interesting case to examine.

The second community in Biecz (*Little Kraków*) was considered and selected upon a recommendation.

The author decided that, in order to study the response of the border region community in Biecz, in the proximity of the borders with Ukraine and Slovakia as well as the Polish city of Rzeszów, which, since the Russian invasion of Ukraine, has become a major military hub, unlocks the potential of not only to examine two border region communities, but also to provide a comparative analysis of these responses. As in the case of Suwałki, access to the community in Biecz to approach and invite research participants was unrestricted. It is also worth highlighting that both communities in Suwałki and Biecz are geographically located in the commonly called 'Poland B', which refers to the historical, political and cultural distinction, and thus the differences between the Eastern and the Western part of the country, where Poland A, which is to the West of the Vistula River, is considered to be much more developed, and which achieves more growth than Poland B, located to the East of the Vistula River.

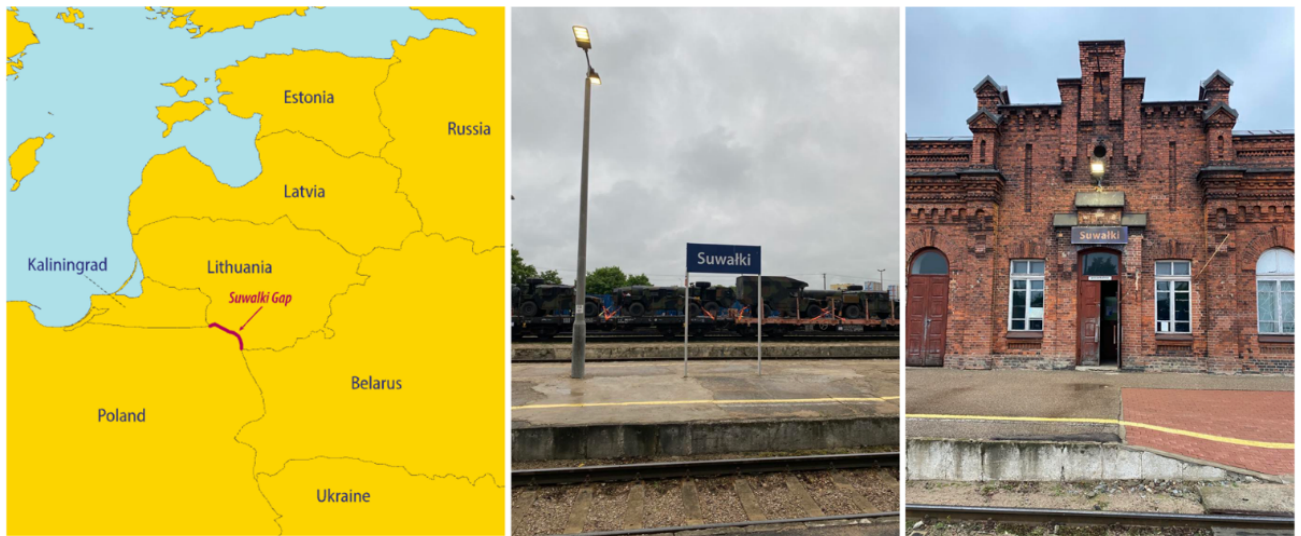
Therefore, this research examines two responses of geographically vulnerable Polish border region communities, located in two different corners of Poland yet in the same Poland B region, one in the proximity of the borders with two countries at war, namely, Suwałki (the Suwałki Gap) with Russia, and Russia's ally Belarus, and Biecz (Little Kraków), bordering Slovakia and Ukraine.

At this backdrop, both Polish border region communities in Biecz and Suwałki were exposed to an extreme regional vulnerability and uncertainty in the face of a crisis in a disturbed reality themselves, and both were affected by the arrival of refugees from Ukraine who came just a few days after the invasion. The communities spontaneously joined forces to help, without any prior planning or institutional support people from Ukraine who have been arriving to Poland, a country with the largest intake of refugees from Ukraine, who also started to quickly arrive in Suwałki and Biecz literary just a few days after the invasion. According to the Polish Border Guard statistics, from January till December 2022, 9 522 444 Ukrainian citizens crossed the Polish border, and, specifically at the section of the border with Ukraine, there were 9 086 946 cases of Ukrainian citizens crossing the border, and, in the first quarter of 2022, in the most intensive time since the invasion started, there were 3 180 897 citizens of Ukraine crossing the border, and, specifically at the section of the border with Ukraine, there were 3 046 762 citizens of Ukraine who crossed the border (Komenda Główna Straży Granicznej, 2024).



Source: UNHCR

Fig. 2. Geographical location of Polish border region communities in Suwałki and Bieczęc



Source: Arin Burgess, Military Review

Source: author's private archive

Source: author's private archive

Fig. 3. Location of Suwałki Gap. Façade view of Suwałki Train Station



Fig. 4. Reception point created by Angels (volunteers based at Suwałki Train Station)

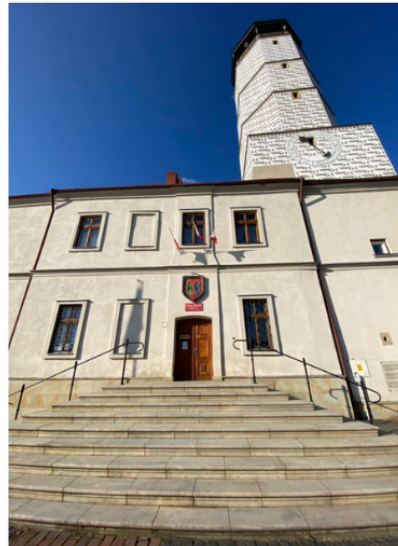


Fig. 5. Biecz (Little Kraków)



Source: author's private archive



Source: author's private archive

Fig. 6. Biecz (Little Kraków)

Since the main concepts of this research are risk perception and uncertainty, in order to explore the way how risk perception and community resilience interact in the Polish border region communities' response to a crisis and uncertainty, the rationale to choose these specific geographical areas was their unique geographical location of both, as well as their proximity to countries at war and in conflict, namely, Russia and Ukraine. Hence, the only criteria applied for the sampling was direct involvement in response to the crisis in order to focus on the interaction of risk perception and community resilience.

2.2. Research Participants and Sampling

For the purposes of this study, it was essential to approach those actors who were directly involved in response to the crisis. In order to gain as much comprehensive understanding as possible about the pattern of response in both Polish border region communities, the decision was made to approach a wide spectrum of local actors involved directly in the response, and who were coming from different social environments, namely, community members, volunteers and Municipality (i.e., employees of the Municipality and its subordinate units).

For this purpose, this study utilized two sampling techniques – the purposive nonprobability sampling technique, and snowballing sampling. Purposive nonprobability sampling is employed to select those respondents who, in all probability, are to yield relevant and valuable information (Kelly, 2010). Purposive sampling allowed the selection of research participants who had factual and useful information on the response to the crisis and factors which may affect community resilience (Prysmakova & Pysmenna, 2024). The selection of the research participants was based on the informants' relevance to and experiences in the researched topic

(Murphy et al., 2022). The interviewees were either those who were contacted by the researcher or referred by other informants (Yeo, 2020). The research participants were selected through purposive nonprobability sampling, where the selection of the research participants is based on their specific characteristics relevant for this particular study, namely, these were community members who were privately or professionally involved in helping Ukrainian refugees arriving in Poland. These individuals were approached and invited to participate in this research. The second method employed was snowballing sampling, where the researcher approached the already selected research participants to ask directly for recommendations and suggestions regarding other potential participants who could be of representative value for the study. Criteria as the age, gender, and marital status were not used and did not affect the research. The only criterion adopted in both communities was the personal involvement in helping Ukrainian refugees arriving in Poland.

The total number of research participants who met the criteria of personal involvement in response to the crisis who accepted the invitation to participate in the research was as follows:

- Volunteers: Biecz (5), Suwałki (6); in total: 11;
- Community members: Biecz (7), Suwałki (7); in total: 14;
- Municipality (employees of the Municipality and its subordinate units): Biecz (14), Suwałki (13); in total: 27.

The research participants were approached directly by the researcher via a telephone call or in person (offline), as well as through their e-mail and social media platforms (online) in order to invite them to participate in this research project. The informants were divided into 3 interview groups, specifically, volunteers, community members, and Municipality (employees of the Municipality and its subordinate units) from the two case areas in Suwałki and Biecz. The informants in the interview group of community members were regular community members, inhabitants of Suwałki and/or Suwałki County who were involved in helping refugees from Ukraine arriving in Suwałki. However, community members were not part of any volunteer group which existed prior to or after the crisis. Moreover, they were single individual helpers not associated with any group of volunteers which emerged in response to a refugee and humanitarian crisis caused by the invasion. The activity of community members was either constant/continuous, or incidental.

The informants selected for the interview group of Volunteers were helpers who were also inhabitants of Suwałki and/or Suwałki County, but they either already belonged to a previously active voluntary group, or represented a group which had already focused on volunteering in the activities and operations prior to the crisis, such as scouts, or else they joined in and became members of groups of volunteers which emerged in a bottom-up manner out of the need to respond to the refugee and humanitarian crisis. The main difference between both interview groups is the manner in which the informants helped the refugees. In the first case, it was individual action, whereas, in the second case, this was collective action.

Each participant from each interview group was given a code, and, in the case of Biecz, the codes were: B_INF_V for Volunteer, B_INF_CM for Community member, and B_INF_M for the Municipality (employees of the Municipality and its subordinate units) whereas, in the case of Suwałki, the codes were S_INF_V, S_INF_CM and S_INF_M, correspondingly.

Table 2. Coding – research participants

Community	Interview group	Code
Biecz	Volunteer	B_INF_V
Biecz	Community member	B_INF_CM
Biecz	Municipality	B_INF_M
Suwałki	Volunteer	S_INF_V
Suwałki	Community Member	S_INF_CM
Suwałki	Municipality	S_INF_M

Source: created by the author

It may seem that the snowball sampling technique could bias the data collected in relation to the questions of community, identity, shared values, and social networks, and, as a result, limit the research. Yet, it is important and meaningful to note and emphasize that the initial idea for this research project was that, since it analyzed the response to the crisis, the actors to be approached and invited to participate in this study should be the ones who were involved in such a response. Hence, it may mean that the group of various research participants with a different status, age and social background, and, most importantly, different experiences and roles in the response, could, at the very onset of this study, already and somehow by default share certain values, viewpoints, etc.

The intention was to invite those research participants who were involved in the response, but they were selected from different environments and groups. In the case of informants from the Volunteer interview groups, they indeed belong to the same group of helpers. It is also worth noting that the study took place in small communities, and that the research participants could be by default familiar with each other in such small communities. The references originating from the snowballing technique were either because people knew about each other's actions, or else they had heard about those and suggested to approach the individuals in question. A conscious choice was made to interview those who took action and decided to get involved in the response, and this could be interpreted in some way as a potential imitation in the approach to investigate fully what makes communities resilient in

times of crisis, and to find out if non-active members of the community could be of help, too.

This research, including the interview guide, has been approved by the Research Ethics Commission of Kaunas University of Technology confirming that the project does not contradict the general principles of research ethics; see Protocol No. M4-2023-03 (presented in Annex 1).

2.3. Data Collection Methods and Procedures

In order to collect empirical data, qualitative interviews were conducted with the selected research participants divided into three interview groups – volunteers, community members, and municipality.

Upon arrival, the researcher discussed the research procedures with the research participants, and the informants had a chance to ask any research-related questions. Later, they were asked to fill in the *Informed Consent Form*. Additionally, the research participants were notified that there is no compensation to be paid for the time spent and the expenses incurred, and that their participation in this research will not give them any financial/material benefits, yet that the non-material benefits of taking part in this research are that their answers were helping to develop the scholarly understanding of the research gaps and methods for identifying and displaying those research gaps. Their contribution was to help better understand the current phenomenon of community resilience, risk perception and uncertainty in the Polish border region communities' response to the crisis caused by the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The research participants were also informed that they could stop participating in the study at any time without specifying any reasons. The informants' personal data as well as the provided answers were anonymized for the purpose of coding and using their quotes in the manuscript.

The research participants were then personally informed about the aim and objectives of the research, and about the researcher conducting the research. Moreover, they were also informed why they were specifically selected for this study; they were given a form of information about the research so that they could familiarize themselves in detail with the project to help them decide whether to give consent or not to take part in this research.

The empirical data was collected by following the research method of a qualitative interview in the three groups of research participants – Volunteers, Community members and Municipality (employees of the Municipality and its subordinate units). A year after the invasion, in February and March, between 27 February and 04 March 2023, and, in the month of May, between 27 and 31 May 2023, two field trips were made by the author of this thesis (in person) to the border region community in Biecz, located ca. 700 km from Suwałki in order to conduct on-site, in-person qualitative interviews with those who were involved in helping Ukrainian refugees arriving in Poland – Volunteers, Community members, and Municipality (employees of the Municipality and its subordinate units). Interviews with the research participants from the community in Suwałki (Suwałki Gap) did not require field trips as the researcher herself is local, and she could access the informants directly and arrange for the interviews more easily.

Qualitative interviews with the Suwałki community were conducted in March, between 09 and 31 March 2023, and in April, between 03 and 14 April 2023.

Upon explicit consent of the research participants, the interviews were audio-recorded by the researcher (Yeo, 2020). All the interviews were conducted at the interviewees' preferred place and time by employing their preferred methods of communication, which resulted in two interviews conducted online (via *Google Meet*), and fifty interviews being conducted on-site and in person.

The duration of the research participants' participation in the qualitative interview was approximately from 30 minutes to 3.5 hours. The variation of the time stems mainly from the personalities and speaking skills of the research participants. Some informants were able to provide precise, full and detailed answers to all the questions from the questionnaire efficiently and in a short timeframe, while some others were more talkative, and also needed more time to answer the interview questions. Some answers were short and facts-oriented, while others were more elaborated and involved not only facts but also anecdotes, stories, etc. There is no limitation associated in this matter as each of the 52 research participants was offered such an amount of time which they needed to be able to provide full answers to all the questions. Some interviews were postponed and rearranged, or were resumed at a later time to allow the informants to pause, take a rest, or continue when they were available for an interview again.

The informants were not rushed to provide their answers as quickly as possible. The research participants were listened to patiently and carefully with respect for their experiences in helping the refugees from Ukraine. At times, they were subtly guided and navigated back to the main threads of the interview and questions in the questionnaire so as not to lose the track of and make a detour away from the main aim of the interview with them. The research participants were offered to take a break anytime they felt they needed one. Also, if they wished to no longer take part in the research, they could request to revoke their consent to participate in the research, or terminate the interview at any time. There were no such instances during the whole process of the research project.

For the purpose of capturing the very essence of the answers provided by the informants, as well as keeping the account as detailed as possible, together with all the verbal and emotional expressions, the interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed with the consent of the interviewees. The argument for audio recording and transcription was that it is unfeasible to do a good quality transcription during the interview as most information critical for the research may be lost after the completion of the interview.

In order to conduct research with the employed research method, the researcher developed an interview guide with questions reflecting each operationalized definition of the concepts to be analyzed, namely, the core community resilience dimensions, the role of individual risk perception in response to a crisis as well as the stages of crisis management in the proactive phase of reconstruction and recovery as well as civil preparedness.

2.4. Measurements and Operationalization

The interview guide and the respective questions developed by the researcher were divided into three parts with the objective to reflect the division of the three interview groups – Volunteers, Community members and Municipality (employees of the Municipality and its subordinate units). Each section started with a background question, with which, all the research participants were addressed. The interview guide covered the topics related to the research concept of community resilience, namely, its core dimensions of agency, resources, self-reliance, collaboration capacity, social networks, local knowledge and leadership, and human values. The topics of individual risk perception, crisis management cycle – reconstruction and recovery – and civil preparedness were also covered by this guide. Each interview group was asked the same questions, yet, for each interview group, some questions were framed in a way to correspond to the specific context in which each interview group was set. For the purpose of the qualitative interviews with the Volunteers, there were 50 questions, in the case of Community members, 46 questions were listed, and, in the case of the Municipality interview group, 55 questions were prepared.

Table 3. Measurements and operationalization

Variable*	Sub-variable	Community members interview group	Volunteers interview group	Municipality interview group
Agency	Taking action	Q5	Q5	Q5
	Offering support and contribution	Q6	Q6	Q6, Q11, Q10, Q8
	Awareness of other helpers	Q7	Q7	Q9, Q12
	Motives for joining initiatives	Q8	Q8	
	Role taken	Q9	Q9	Q7
Resources	Type of resources provided	Q9	Q10	Q13
	Type of access to resources	Q10	Q11	Q14
	Ability to support without resources	Q11	Q12	Q15
Self-reliance	Ability to remain self-reliant	Q12	Q13	Q16
	Community ability to remain self-reliant	Q13	Q14	Q17
Collaboration capacity	Cooperating actors	Q14	Q15	Q18
	Type of cooperation	Q15	Q16	Q19
	Experiences in cooperating with other actors	Q16	Q17	Q20
	Changes in collaboration since the invasion	Q17	Q18	Q21

Social networks	Experiences of using personal or/and professional social network	Q18, Q21	Q19, Q22	Q22, Q25
	Experiences of using networking	Q19	Q20	Q23
	Cooperating actors	Q20	Q21	Q24
Local knowledge and leadership	Experience in similar response	Q22	Q23	Q26
	Knowing what to do	Q23	Q27	Q27
	Decision making process		Q24	
	Presence of a group leader/leading organization	Q24	Q25,Q28	
	Type of leadership		Q26	
	Being approached to receive information	Q25	Q29	Q28
	Being approached to solve a problem	Q26	Q30	Q29, Q30
	Approaching other actors to receive information			Q31
	Approaching another actor to solve a problem			Q32
	Own role in response	Q27	Q31	Q33
	Role of other actors in response	Q28, Q29	Q32	Q34
Human values	Motivation to help Ukrainian refugees	Q30	Q33	Q35
	Motivation to join a group of other helpers		Q34	
First reactions and perceptions of risk	Describing the day of the Russian invasion of Ukraine	Q2	Q2	Q2
	Describing living in Suwałki/Biecz	Q39	Q43	Q47
	Naming the biggest risks in Suwałki/Biecz	Q40	Q44	Q48
	Dangers related to the Suwałki Gap	Q41	Q45	Q49
	Western media narratives about the Suwałki Gap	Q42	Q46	Q50
	Reaction about a missile landing on the Polish territory	Q43	Q47	Q51
	NATO membership	Q44	Q48	Q52, Q53
	World War III	Q45	Q49	Q54
Crisis management cycle	Reconstruction and recovery phase			
	Updates on the situation of Ukrainian refugees in Suwałki/Biecz	Q31	Q35	Q40

Further support for Ukrainian refugees	Q32	Q36	Q41
Changes in Suwałki/Biecz	Q33	Q37	Q46
Reaction if the crisis repeats	Q34	Q38	Q36
Asked/asking for recommendations	Q35	Q39	Q42
Biggest challenges	Q36	Q40	Q37
Lessons learned	Q37	Q41	Q38
Recommendations for better preparedness	Q38	Q42	Q39
Plans for preparing long-term integration strategy (Ukrainian refugees)			Q43
Plans for preparing a civil preparedness program			Q44
Suggesting which organization should be in charge of civil preparedness			Q45

Source: created by the author

* complete lists of the interview questions are provided in Annex 2, Annex 3, and Annex 4.

Complete interview guides are included in the Annex section.

2.5. Data Analysis Methods

The collected empirical evidence was coded, analyzed and interpreted in an inductive manner in order to identify the emerging patterns, themes and connections in order to determine what can be discovered in relation to the aim and objectives of the research and the researched phenomenon. Qualitative content analysis, which is the fundamental qualitative data analysis method for this type of research, was to be used in order to analyze the collected empirical data. Since qualitative data is unstructured, it offers more depth and is more complex to analyze, the author pre-established a code structure in order to identify, structure, and interpret subcodes/themes on the grounds of which, through qualitative analysis, the author could derive insights, build an understanding of the researched phenomenon, and, finally, report on the insights.

The collected empirical data was analyzed with the use of the qualitative data analysis software *MAXQDA*. The research results were collected in two Polish border region communities in two different corners of Poland, one in Suwałki, located in the proximity of the borders with Russia, Lithuania and Belarus, referred to, in the NATO terminology, as the Suwałki Gap, and providing the only land connection between the Baltic states, which are also NATO members countries, and the rest of the European Union and the remaining NATO member states where there is a highly intensive level of transit, whereas the other community in Biecz, in proximity to the border with Slovakia and Ukraine as well as close to the Polish city of Rzeszów, which, since the

Russian invasion of Ukraine, has become a military hub. The research results may serve as recommendations for crisis management organizations and other organizations in charge of national security to enhance community resilience and civil preparedness in response to a crisis, risk and uncertainty in the future. Empirical data, based on direct, experiential and local knowledge, collected during the interviews with the research participants who responded to the crisis and uncertainty in the two Polish border communities, can be a valuable source of information for gaining a deeper understanding of the way community resilience and civil preparedness could be in practice developed and enhanced, and also for helping the community to reach its resilience potential in times of a crisis and uncertainty. Hence, the research findings may be applied by organizations which prioritize community resilience and civil preparedness, such as the NATO, and all of its member states, as well as all the countries of the European Union, particularly those involved in receiving and supporting the largest numbers of Ukrainian refugees, while among other aspects, implementing long-term programs of their integration in the host countries. Additionally, the research results may be used by national and international humanitarian organizations as well as non-governmental organizations helping Ukrainian refugees.

2.6. Limitations of the Chosen Conceptual Approach and Research Design

A limitation of this study is that, despite the potential of the research concepts and the selected topics, its scope is not very broad due to the fact that it covered only two Polish border region communities instead of, perhaps, a few more, and the research was performed by only one researcher. Hence, the nature of the results and findings about the community resilience, uncertainty and response to a crisis can be both very universal and very specific, and yet restricted only to two communities from only two regions of Poland, in the context of many other different communities across Poland, among them, also border ones, which were also affected by the humanitarian and refugee crisis caused by the Russian invasion of Ukraine. This study offers an analysis of the response in a micro perspective, which has a considerable and unfulfilled potential. To the best of the author's knowledge, very few studies have been pursued in this field, and still, this research has not been extensive and in-depth. That is why the author firmly maintains that any further and future qualitative research and analysis of community resilience, risk perception and uncertainty in the local context necessitates the involvement of a team of researchers as well as an additional empirical study of mass accommodation and/or reception points across Poland, where the very first response was also organized, in which, a very broad spectrum of stakeholders and actors were involved in the response. For ethical reasons, the researcher decided not to interview refugees from Ukraine who arrived in Poland as it was too a sensitive topic to discuss during a *de facto* ongoing crisis. Yet, in order to provide some refugee perspective, a small group of former refugees from Ukraine who arrived in Poland and already settled and were residing in Suwałki since the Annexation of Crimea were approached to conduct the interview, to which all those informants agreed.

The methodology chosen and developed for this specific study may have been extended by the focus group data collection method which would benefit this study substantially. A focus group would facilitate collective participation of informants from all interview groups in the respective communities in Biecz and Suwałki, where the actors involved in response could enter into a dialogue with the actors, especially from the Municipality interview group, first of all to share the experience and feedback, and also to discuss together the way the community responded, and how community resilience capacities could be developed and enhanced. Such a discussion could provide research material along with empirical data for even more recommendations based on the pool of experiential knowledge of the actors involved in the response under discussion. It could have been especially significant in the view of the fact that the interviews were conducted circa one year after the invasion, when the majority of the helpers were still quite active while continuing the support offered to the refugees from Ukraine. Another limitation is that non-responsive and passive citizens were not selected for the purpose of this study. It was a conscious decision to approach only those research participants who were actively involved in response to the crisis. Yet, the author is also aware that the feedback and the perspective provided by passive non-responsive research participants in this crisis situation would benefit and enrich greatly this research by extending an understanding of the main concept of community resilience.

3. THE ROLE OF COMMUNITY RESILIENCE AND INDIVIDUAL RISK PERCEPTION IN POLISH BORDER REGION COMMUNITIES' RESPONSE TO CRISIS AND UNCERTAINTY: EMPIRICAL RESEARCH RESULTS

The empirical evidence collected during qualitative interviews was analyzed by applying both a pre-established coding structure and based on the data codes. The results will be discussed by following the structure of the interview guide. The first group of questions, i.e., the background questions, was developed in order to initially learn more about the context of both communities and the first reactions of their representatives directly involved in the response, as well as to examine whether, at the very onset of the crisis, the individual risk perception affected this response. Meanwhile, the second group of questions covers the concepts of community resilience dimensions, the third part deals with the crisis management cycle, and the fourth group investigates the concepts of risk and uncertainty. This section of the thesis will present and discuss the findings related to the response to the crisis in both Polish border region communities. Comparative analysis of the response of both Polish border region communities will be presented in a separate section. It is relevant to note that, even though, since 2015, there have been other similar humanitarian/migration/refugee crises affecting Europe in general and communities in the neighboring and/or host countries, with a major intake of refugees and migrants (UNHCR, 2025), the inflow of people fleeing Ukraine after it was attacked in a military campaign by Russia in 2022, was unprecedented. The full-scale Russia's invasion of Ukraine has caused the fastest and the largest displacement crisis in Europe since World War II (Podgórska et al., 2023; Spindler, 2025). Poland has been a host country with the largest intake of people from Ukraine, and it witnessed the most massive exodus through the Polish border since the start of the invasion in February 2022 (Deloitte, 2024). Other aspects which magnify this unprecedented context is that the Russia-Ukraine war takes place in Europe, and that Poland borders not only with Ukraine but also with Russia's ally Belarus and Russia itself (i.e., Kaliningrad Oblast). Additionally, due to its geographical location in the Suwałki Gap region, the Polish border region community in Suwałki has become more vulnerable. The other Polish border region community of interest to this research, i.e., the community in Biecz was perhaps less vulnerable, and yet it remained affected by those new circumstances due to its close proximity to the City of Rzeszów which has been serving as a military hub near the Polish-Ukraine border. In the first weeks of the invasion, the informants in both communities could hear and see military aircraft patrolling the airspace along the borders with Ukraine, Belarus and Russia (Kaliningrad Oblast). Against this background, the research project was conducted in the unprecedented context of time and space in two vulnerable communities approximately one year after the full-scale invasion. However, the informants' answers were not affected by the passing of time as their accounts were still vivid, comprehensive, and detailed.

3.1. First Reactions and Perception of Risk

Following the already existing crisis and risk research, a crisis is a triggering event which threatens the physical and ontological security as well as heightens uncertainty, which as a consequence, together with risk perception, empowers individuals to exercise their agency (Moralli & Allegrini, 2021). Moreover, a crisis requires a prompt response (Rosenthal et al., 1989), whereas the individual perception of risk is crucial for the way in which risk is narrated at the community level and responded to (Flint & Luloff, 2005; Yang et al., 2021; Boersma et al., 2018; Drabek & McEntire, 2003). Each interview started with a question asking to describe the day when the informant learned about Russia's invasion into Ukraine in order to firstly learn about how Russia's military aggression against Ukraine, causing the exodus of people to Poland, was perceived, and how this perception affected their decision- and action-taking, as well as how they coped with uncertainty, and how this affected the decision- and action-taking process at the community level.

The results reveal that the full-scale Russia's invasion of Ukraine *did* trigger various reactions and responses at the individual and community level. The first reactions upon having learned about the Russian invasion of Ukraine were diverse in both Polish communities, but they were also similar to each other (see Table 4). Many research participants anticipated that the escalation of the Russia-Ukraine conflict would be difficult to avoid (see Table 4), especially because of the awareness of the fact that Russia had already invaded Ukraine in 2014, leading to the Crimea crisis and its Russian occupation:

I make no secret of the fact that, at my home, in my husband's family home, we expected this war to come, because we had been following this geopolitical situation for some time (B_INF7_CM), where everyone was afraid it would go further. Yes. Everyone was afraid that Putin would set off nuclear weapons. That was also so real. Seemingly unreal, but in all the craziness it could have become real. (B_INF11_CM) In another Polish border region community located in the Suwałki Gap, community members raised questions about their own safety and security in the context of an ongoing war which was so physically close to the border with Poland: *Is it still far from us, or close? What is the danger of that? And, even more so, won't they move here? (S_INF8_V and S_INF9_V)*

Other informants' first reaction was that of not being greatly surprised that Russia, recognized by many research participants as an/the aggressor, invaded Ukraine: *I know who in this war is the aggressor, who is defending themselves, and I know who was running away, and I know that this should never have happened. (B_INF1_V)*

Table 4. Code: first reaction about having learned about the Russian invasion of Ukraine

Subcode	Quote	Number of informants
Natural thing to act to help Ukrainian refugees (also in free time and after-work time)	<i>And my daughter, who also helped selflessly, completely what was, it was normal, and I didn't even have to ask her, because I knew that she, that she would help. (B_INF11_CM)</i>	14
Chaos and frenzy after the first days of the Russian invasion of Ukraine	<i>It was impossible to refuel the car. (B_INF7_CM)</i>	9
Anticipation that the invasion will impact Poland	<i>What should we do? (...) If a war broke out in Poland, then, momentarily, something would happen here at our place, and here we knew that something would definitely start happening. Because, looking at the fact that, as I studied at the National Defense Academy in Warsaw, if conflicts break out in neighboring countries, well, then, we as the country closest to the border are exposed to the so-called migration crisis. (B_INF10_M)</i>	8
No surprise/ no disbelief	<i>No, I didn't really remember it at all. I just remembered what it meant. Somehow, I think everyone got so used to this war over these ten, eight years (...) It's just like this. There is a war in the East. Going to Ukraine, no one thought about it. (B_INF8_V)</i>	4
Going to church to pray for the Ukrainian nation and to find consolation for oneself	<i>(...) that we will pray for the people who suffered this misfortune. So, I left the church disgusted, and the first thing I thought was that I want to help such people, simply. (S_INF1_CM)</i>	2

Source: created by the author

The results also indicate that many community members felt a sense of growing anticipation that this Russian military aggression on Ukraine, a neighboring country, would impact Poland (see Table 4).

Whereas, for others, it was also a sense of panic and fear of the unknown: *On the way back to my place (...), I simply had a panic attack and couldn't concentrate on the fact that something like this was happening at all. And I got home. I somehow calmed down there, but I remember that it was very stressful, a strong adrenaline rush combined with panic and not knowing what would happen next, and what to expect. (B_INF13_CM)*

Other reactions were, for instance, on the day of the invasion, that of a need to attend a mass to find consolation and pray for the people in Ukraine (see Table 4).

Another informant shared that he got depressed and overwhelmed by this fact, but which he did manage to overcome by taking action as a response to this crisis: *That day, one was kind of..., well, dramatic. I remember that I was so nailed down, it moved me a lot, and such absolute helplessness.* (B_INF8)

Others were experiencing this crisis on a more personal level as, in those early days of the invasion, they were contacting their friends and acquaintances in Ukraine: *It was also that first day, it was the contact with people, with friends from Ukraine, or first, those from the East, then, those from Kyiv.* (B_INF8_V)

A community member in the Suwałki Gap shared that: *I experienced it very personally so that all this time – [which was] quite long – I came home late, and also immediately, information, information what it looks like, to at least tell these people how it is in general, because they had information from individual locations in Ukraine, from where they fled with their loved ones.* (S_INF16_M)

The results also demonstrate that, especially during the early days and weeks of the invasion, chaos and frenzy were the dominating reactions, which was often reflected in the logistical and informational chaos at the humanitarian aid front as a lot of people wanted to help people from Ukraine who, after having fled Ukraine, were arriving in Poland (see Table 4). After having learned about the invasion of Ukraine, many people in Poland wanted to get involved in helping, and, among them, were community members in Biecz and Suwałki.

Therefore, there was a massive and collective response to this emergency, yet an uncoordinated and unstructured one:

The first days were days of madness, (B_INF1_V) and everyone was willing to help and did not know how, and yet this law on the armed conflict on the territory of Ukraine did not enter into force, because that was the moment, and it only came into force in March later, before all this happened, and also until the end no one knew how to organize all this, even just on the example of the operation of the offices we can say that they themselves did not quite know how to function, (B_INF7_CM) and, for me, it was quite natural that I did not try to call, because I knew that there is a huge information chaos. (B_INF1_V)

Another community member shared a similar observation that:

When I was reading it on a regular basis, I was following it, they also wrote that there was a lot of it and that, well, it also made no sense that people wrote that they drove, stood for hours and they did not want to get on, for example, because they were afraid. (...) It had better be some kind of organized [activity], or, at least, if the person knew the language. (B_INF11_CM)

Other research participants were also considering:

Whether to go to the border, then, in this greatest chaos, and help, or not. (B_INF13_CM)

as there was really a lot of confusion in those days of March:

Nobody knew where to go, what to ask, how to get some help. It was such a bit of bouncing from point to point. (B_INF7_CM)

When it comes to similarity in the reactions and responses to the information about the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the most common was that of an emerging natural need to act in order to help the people who have experienced such a misfortune as, in the case of one of the research participants who commented:

For me, it's kind of like a completely normal thing. (B_INF1_V)

Other research participants also noted that *it is so normal that people just help each other and that's it. No matter what nationalities, no matter what situation. It's that simple. If I can, why not? It wasn't actually a decision. It was a reflex, something completely normal. (S_INF8_V and S_INF9_V)*

Many research participants were actively involved in helping arriving in Suwałki or Biecz refugees from Ukraine, or/and in assistance to those who remained in Ukraine, while keeping their daily routine such as going to work and leading their private lives:

while I know that those first days were very hectic in the sense that a person was trying to reconcile work, with what he did after work. (B_INF1_V)

and: *Everyone wanted to do something for the benefit of the disadvantaged. It was so natural. (B_INF7_CM)*

The research participants never did resign from their own activities, duties and responsibilities to solely deal with and focus on helping the refugees from Ukraine, but rather multitasked between work, family, and helping the Ukrainian refugees: *Well, and everyone tried to reckon with the opinion and capabilities of others, because everyone simultaneously went to work, had children and had to do something. (B_INF8_V)*

A community member from Biecz commented that:

I myself personally, as well as colleagues from the guard were in the hospital a few times with children, a girl broke her arm, so we also sacrificed our own, our private time. This is what we work for. It is known that we work until 15:00 and after that it was the so-called volunteer work, as they say. I myself personally was in the hospital until nine in the evening. All in free time. And the same way we picked it all up from the command. It was also the evening hours, because when the transports came from Kraków, they were also in winter, it was black. And so, to speak, for a voluntary firefighter, there is no such thing as free time. We're always somewhere (...) where they might call us and we'll need to help. (B_INF25)

The results reveal a variety of approaches among the research participants in both border communities towards the riskscape of the Suwałki Gap (see Table 5). Some did not consider the Suwałki Gap as a dangerous place, and even suggested that this region is as risky as any other in Poland (see Table 5). Meanwhile, others did find the Suwałki Gap a very dangerous place which triggers fear and uncertainty not only among its inhabitants, but also among others outside of this region:

The Suwałki Gap is immediately red on the map. My cousin lives in Germany, near the French border, I think her father died and my uncle, and she is going here for the funeral. Where are you going (...). There's a war there! You must be crazy. This is my whole family! There is no war there.

The findings also show that many research participants did not express any opinion or interest about the Suwałki Gap, the way they perceive the riskscape of the Suwałki Gap, or whether this region triggers any fear or uncertainty:

I have no opinion on this topic. (B_INF13_CM)

The results of the analysis regarding the first reactions and perceptions of risk help to gain better understanding of the response in the unprecedented context, the way people felt, and how they did try to cope with the uncertainty of this new situation. The consequences of the Russian invasion into Ukraine spilled over and cascaded to Poland, where the reactions to this unprecedented emergency were similar in both Polish border communities. The people were uncertain and fearful about the developments of this conflict, and yet they did overcome those feelings and took decisions and actions in order to get involved in helping those who fled Ukraine and were arriving in Poland.

What prevailed, among fear, panic and/or disbelief, as well as chaotic actions and frenzy, especially in the early weeks of the crisis, was the natural reaction to act to help refugees from Ukraine. People were capable to activate their agency which turned into a collective humanitarian aid front. The crisis did trigger the response which started from individual decisions to act and evolved into a massive collective intervention and a helping front.

It is rather difficult to comprehensively compare the case of Poland with other cases in Europe, but, if we want to compare the response from Poland with other European countries which also experienced the inflow of migrants/refugees in the recent years, for instance, countries like Italy, Greece, Germany or the Netherlands (Rast et al., 2020; Boersma et al., 2018, Panebianco, 2016; Glorius et al., 2019; Bousiou, 2021), there is one element all countries share, the natural reaction to act in order to help those who are in need of it, which manifests in spontaneous bottom-up, collective actions of non-formal actors – the civilian population (Boersma et al., 2019), often in a gesture of solidarity (Sandberg & Andersen, 2020). It is difficult to compare other elements of the response as the case of Poland is unprecedented (Gluszak & Trojanek, 2024). Also, what seems to be by default inherent in the case of response in Poland is the geographical and historical context, the awareness and deep understanding of the Polish people about what it means to be occupied by Russia. It seems that the context of the crisis situation itself plays a significant role in the way the response is organized. Poland and other countries affected by refugee/migration crises were set in a different context as the circumstances were different, and the risks related to those crises were also, inherently, different.

Since Poland borders Russia (Kaliningrad Oblast) and Russia's ally Belarus, and as one of the researched communities is located in the region of the Suwałki Gap, as well as according to the existing risk research, communities in the border regions are at the frontline of response (Kanteler & Bakouros, 2014), the concept of *riskscape* (Müller-Mahn et al., 2018) was employed to examine the way the risk related to the Suwałki Gap was perceived, narrated and navigated inside the Polish border region community in Suwałki and in the Polish border region community in Biecz.

Table 5. Code – Suwałki Gap risk narratives

Subcode	Quote	Number of informants
Dangerous spot on the map triggering fear and uncertainty	<i>We actually had a feeling, I remember it this way, because my grandmother was celebrating her 80th birthday. The first weekend after the outbreak of the war. And we were generally afraid to go to the North of Poland (...) because it was the period when planes were circling above our heads. And, overall, the situation was very uncertain. (B_INF7_CM)</i>	8
No opinion and/or no interest	<i>No, I think not. I think you know... Oh, it's like, you see, it's like it doesn't occur to us because we just don't go that far, like the fact that many people here don't think about the fact that the territory (...) (B_INF1_V)</i>	3
No sense of fear and/or uncertainty	<i>At this point, everyone has already moved on to their duties and, of course, life goes on, the pace is high, and there are other challenges. (S_INF16_M)</i>	2
As risky as any other place	<i>This location, let's call it what it is. Does it pose any greater danger than elsewhere? I don't think so. I think it's the same as any other. Every place has some risk, one way or another. If it's not the proximity of the border and the company of someone just across the border. (...) Every place poses some risk. (S_INF8_V and S_INF9_V)</i>	2

Source: created by the author

The findings reveal a variety of risk narratives related to the *riskscape* of the Suwałki Gap. The dominating perception was that the Suwałki Gap is indeed a dangerous spot on the map which triggers fear and uncertainty. This perception is in line with the major media narratives about the Suwałki Gap, specifically, the Western media (Beldyga, 2023). However, there were also some contrasting views about how risky and dangerous the Suwałki Gap is or could be. Those narratives manifested in, among others, expressing no sense of fear or uncertainty about the *riskscape* of the Suwałki Gap:

No, no, because if there is any interference with the Suwałki Gap, it will also be a large-scale war. It won't be a question of (...), Suwałki, that's all, it will be a nationwide massacre (...). The Russians or Russian troops do not act in a single-point manner, i.e., they will not push only towards the Suwałki Gap, (...) they neither have the resources nor are they efficient to operate so widely. So, for now, I'm not worried that anything will happen. (B_INF8_V)

The results demonstrate that there is full awareness of risk related to the *riskscape* of the Suwałki Gap, and yet, conversely, there is also the tendency that any other place could be a *riskscape*, or that the Suwałki Gap is as risky as any other place. It seems that there are also no opinions or interests expressed in the risk narratives

about the *riskscape* of the Suwałki Gap. The findings somehow reflect a general discourse outside the research about the Suwałki Gap risk narratives, in which, not only considerable awareness, but also lack of awareness or interest are visible (Beldyga, 2023).

Even though both the historical and geographical context were not concepts integrated in the conceptual framework of this research, out of the results of the analysis of the actors involved in the response, there emerges an affirmation that the historical background may significantly affect the response to an emergency. Especially in the case of the community in Biecz, many helpers were deeply involved in supporting not only the people arriving in Poland, but also those who remained in Ukraine. Their response was more effective because of the already established channels of communication in Ukraine via networks of friends, acquaintances, and family relatives. This type of networking was also a valuable source of specific information about, among other aspects, the needs on site in Poland as well as in Ukraine (see Table 6). In the case of the border region community in Suwałki, the historical and geographical context was also of importance because of the historical narrative about the turbulent Polish-Russian relations, which has been passed down through generations rather than throughout the sole existence of the already established social networks and connections in Ukraine or the proximity to the border with Ukraine. It is of interest to see how the roles of the historical and geographical contexts were split in the two communities located in two corners of Poland. Between geography and history, another unresearched valuable concept, to be further and closely examined, emerges out of the analysis, notably, *memoryscape*, which is the construction of memory in spatial contexts (Minta-Tworzowska, 2013).

3.2. Actors in the Social Network Involved in Response to Crisis

In the case of the code related to whoever was responding to the crisis invoked by the Russian invasion of Ukraine, namely, the actor involved in the response to the crisis, the results of the analysis show that the landscape of such actors is versatile (see Table 6). Within both communities, in Suwałki and Biecz, those who responded were private individuals, among them volunteers, who, for instance, and mostly in the case of the community in Biecz, had family connections in Ukraine, or had studied there, or were active for other reasons in Ukraine and thus had networks of Ukrainian friends and acquaintances (see Table 6). This group of informants very often did manage to establish specific aid channels mainly through those ‘contacts in the East’: *Damian by virtue of the fact that that’s where the contact is, probably also has a family connection to Transcarpathia, so I know that they also with the Russian bursa coordinated transports there through Michalovce.* (B_INF1_V)

The results indicate that private individuals, mostly from the community in Biecz, who were connected with Ukraine via their family or friends’ connections, were the first ones to respond:

They had direct information about the needs (...), the news from Łodyna, that is, from Kinga, our colleague, who also has Bieckian roots here, who was on the humanitarian aid front. (B_INF1_V)

Interestingly, because of this deep involvement in response, they have become the most active volunteers (see Table 6). Another group of private individuals helping the refugees were regular residents and community members in Suwałki and Biecz whose involvement was dependent on their social and material status, which meant that they helped according to their possibilities:

Well, this is a private store, yes, where they brought us here to the museum, we went to get it, they called us that they can't bring it to us, (...) but if we show up, we got probably, I don't know, circa 10 pieces of such seven-kilogram washing powders, that they can give us. (B_INF1_V)

It is of importance to mention that the results also reveal a significant role of private individuals with the refugee background, namely, former refugees who fled Ukraine as a result of the Russian aggression towards Ukraine in 2014 and the Crimean crisis:

Anna came to Poland 8 years ago, and the association exists for 2 years, she speaks Polish. (S_INF18_M)

The role of those actors was significant as they could provide accurate information for other helpers about the current needs of the people fleeing Ukraine and those still remaining there:

As soon as they opened the help desk and as soon as this office started to operate. And, as I say, it happened (...) because everyone was coming to them, because the girls were helping to get PESEL, send children to school, sign up to get some aid. (S_INF16_M)

In this landscape of response, an essential role was performed by the Voluntary Fire Services, the so-called OSP firefighters:

On the other hand, such general help, yet the firefighters who gathered and who, for example, in their fire stations organized collections even of clothes for these refugees, which were delivered to the fire station. (B_INF10_M)

It is noteworthy that this voluntary group's deep and direct involvement in helping the refugees from Ukraine who arrived both in Suwałki and in Biecz has been mentioned frequently in interviews with many other research participants who were either closely cooperating with OSP firefighters, or who have heard about their active participation in response:

but I also wouldn't be fair if I said that, that, you know, the OSP guys have done, they've done a lot really. (B_INF1_V)

Another voluntary group involved in providing aid were scouts whose support in organizing help was substantial not only within the communities, but also throughout Poland, like in the case of the scouts in Suwałki: *Well, and we also had such a corner, an area made by the scouts so that you could sleep over, so camp beds, those kinds of beds. And sometimes it was so that when they were waiting longer for some transport or something, they could at least rest for a while. (S_INF10_V)*

In the case of scouts in Biecz, they helped to transport aid to the border with Ukraine:

The scouts began to help organize the collection of aid. They took a busload of stuff to the border, and they organized it among themselves. (B_INF8_V)

Another voluntary group of helpers whose role in response to the crisis was vital was a group of helpers, who were later nicknamed by the refugees from Ukraine as *Angels from Suwałki Train Station* (see Table 6), which emerged out of the collective actions taken by, among others, scouts, employees of the railway company, as well as private individuals who, together, in a bottom-up manner, were also supported later by the Municipality and other institutions (see Table 6). They created a reception point at the train station in Suwałki. Suwałki Train Station, during the massive influx of refugees from Ukraine, served as one of the most important transit places and transport hubs for destinations such as Lithuania and other Baltic, EU and NATO countries. The group of *Angels from Suwałki Train Station* were on duty waiting for the refugees from Ukraine who were arriving in Suwałki to provide first humanitarian assistance and help, among other aspects, with information about the possible further travel connections, food provision, accommodation, travel bags and clothing, as well as emotional support:

Here, as if by necessity, these people passed through our hands first (...) and if this station had not been there, if nothing had happened there, then I can't really imagine what this one would have been like. What was happening to them? They came, got off the train, (...) and what? (S_INF8_V and S_INF9_V) and well, and the gentleman who was there on duty at the station, says I'll take them in. Two benches will be put up, (...) I have some blankets. There are children. (S_INF8_V and S_INF9_V)

The activity of the group was also recognized by the local community: (...) *Angels at the station, well, it's something fantastic, just people by themselves would do it automatically. (S_INF18_M)*

Table 6. Code – actors in the social network involved in response to crisis

Subcode	Quote	Number of informants
Family/ Friends/Acquaintances/	<i>(...) Or the Lemko families, which are, after all, as if they are not related to us, but we get along well, or my wife's family from near Wroclaw. (B_INF1_V)</i>	15
Private individuals/community members	<i>People would come and help us to sort it* out (B_INF8_V) *the donations (...) Here, residents and the surrounding villages, also. There were even toothbrushes, soaps, clothes for children. (...) These were also all provided by them. (B_INF10_M)</i>	13
State offices/ public institutions and facilities	<i>We just had such a situation that the voivode ordered in earlier letters to designate places where refugees from Ukraine would be located. (B_INF10_M) (...) The gentlemen from the city guard, really, the gentlemen from the city guard, were unbeatable and great. (S_INF8_V and S_INF9_V) (...) The boarding school also housed refugees, but they (...) were getting their resources from the district. But it was such cooperation also with the director, that when I called that I needed something, they had it, they also offered me this help. (B_INF_10_M)</i>	14
Employees	<i>We provided the ladies with food in the form of catering every day at the beginning, but, after a while, the ladies had their own food preferences, so they decided that they would cook for themselves, so we provided them with food products. My colleagues and I were there in shifts at the fire station at least three, four times a week, sometimes a couple of times a day. (...) (B_INF10_M) They had extra classes in Polish at the beginning. This was also organized by the teachers. (B_INF10_M)</i>	12
NGO organizations	<i>On the other hand, (...) we certainly cooperated with the Ruska Bursa in Gorlice. (...) Ruska Bursa is a center of the Lemko culture. (B_INF1_V)</i>	12

Medical staff	<i>(...) At the border, at least here at Krościenko, the biggest job was done by scouts, rescue workers, and volunteer firefighters.</i> (B_INF1_V)	7
<i>Ad hoc</i> voluntary groups	<i>I didn't look for groups on the Internet, because the groups were here on the spot, this network of friends, family and so on, kind of created the groups themselves. In the sense that here, in Biecz, for example, the group 'Biecz, I help Ukraine' was formed, and it was so that a colleague made his store available so that donations could be brought. Each of us who has a car, truck, made available his. (...)</i> (B_INF8_V) <i>Also, I will say the word again, spontaneous formation of groups. Because, for example, it turned out that the group that was formed 'Biecz, I help Ukraine', it turned out that a very large number of people I saw, as if very quickly the number of people who are watching it, that is, this information reaches them, right.? (...)</i> (B_INF1_V)	6
Permanent social units and voluntary groups	<i>(...) There was also general help from firefighters who gathered together and who, for example, collected clothes in their fire stations. (...)</i> (B_INF10_M) <i>(...) because the fire voluntary departments are associations, but as if the municipality interacts with the fire departments, and a lot is just dedicated to retrofitting the fire departments.</i> (B_INF10_M) <i>And when the wave of refugees had already moved in, in this group of instructors, scouts quite quickly began to organize some actions nationwide.</i> (S_INF10_V)	3
Humanitarian organizations	<i>There was definitely good cooperation with Caritas.</i> (S_INF8_V and S_INF9_V)	2
Former Ukrainian refugees	<i>I don't know by what miracle, but the thought found its way to me that I would just look for any of the Ukrainian women who live with us here. And (...) there was a lady who teaches dance (...) Mrs. Irina. And I think to myself aha, okay, she would be such a lady.</i> (S_INF1_CM)	2

Museum of Biecka Land	<i>I know that here, in educational institutions and facilities, that is, at schools, aid was collected. At the Cultural Centre, there was a collection of aid at the Museum. (B_INF10_M)</i>	1
Religious centers	<i>(...) When it turned out that we had washing powder left here in the museum, which was not needed at the border, even in larger centers it was not needed, we also very quickly made a decision here, let's say in the circle of employees what we were allowed to do, that, since the girls from the orphanage came and are in Gładyszów, in such an Orthodox center, we will not artificially create existence, send this powder randomly, because it is really needed here on the spot. (B_INF1_V)</i>	1
Adaptation centers	<i>(...) Certainly, through our friend here who has family ties to Biecz through Kinga with this adaptation center in Łodyna, near Ustrzyki. (B_INF1_V)</i>	1

Source: created by the author

Based on the results obtained, the classification of the actors in the social network involved in helping the refugees from Ukraine was developed. The breakdown of the actors illustrates the dynamic of actions taken in order to respond to the humanitarian and refugee crisis. That is why, within the early weeks of the invasion, which forced people to flee the attacked Ukraine, the first group of actors to respond were citizens/community members/residents/private individuals whose response was versatile (see Table 6). The reactions of this group of actors were not slowed down by any top-down orders, and they were able to act immediately and spontaneously. They knew they wished to help, but did not know how:

Really, at the beginning, this help was a little chaotic, well, because everyone wanted to help. (B_INF1_V)

This response was massive and collective, which, especially at the onset of the crisis, created informational chaos:

At first, there was a lot of chaos because (...) the information we got, we started some internal procedures, how to organize it. And this is how it seems to work out. (S_INF8_V and S_INF9_V)

The helpers were looking for more specific information about the needs of the refugees arriving in Poland, as well as those who remained in Ukraine by among others using personal networks within their social environment. Those helpers were establishing aid channels through *ad hoc* emerging voluntary groups (see Table 6).

In this landscape, there were also the NGO organizations, religious and adaptation centers (see Table 6). Within due time, helpers both in Biecz and Suwałki learned how to profile help, and started to specialize in providing aid, which means that they focused on specific areas of help, like, for instance, transporting aid to Ukraine. It was possible because of other helpers' involvement and the level of trust.

In the case of Biecz:

We decided that, from then on, we would not participate at all in such wholesale actions, that the goods that go from us are sent randomly, not knowing what their further fate would be, but we have already tried to ensure that they would actually go through contacts and trusted channels to the right people, to the right places, to which we have some confidence there. (B_INF8_V)

In the case of the helpers in Suwałki:

(...) there went such a group, so they could (...) scan what they really need, what we can give, so that there are no senseless things (...). (S_INF10_V)

Other actors in this classification are social units, such as voluntary firefighters, who were at the disposal of literally anyone who asked for help (see Table 6). Most often, they were responding to the needs of another group of actors, namely, state offices/ public institutions and facilities, such as the Municipality of Biecz:

Here, in the office, we have about 50 people working for us. Everyone has his or her own share, and we wouldn't have been able to organize it by ourselves in such a way; (...) sometimes, for example, we had to take someone to hospital, for example, in the evening, we had to bring someone from hospital; (...) sometimes it was impossible for someone to go from the office. Well, then I asked, for example, voluntary firefighters (...) who acted as the typical volunteers. (B_INF10_M)

Voluntary firefighters also accommodated refugees themselves at their fire department in Biecz:

(...) We had 20 beds prepared. (...) There was one room there. They had a kitchen, a sanitary junction with showers. Everything was prepared there. We received guests, we still bought pillows there, whatever was necessary. It was quite a specific group of refugees, because they were Ukrainians of the Roma origin. (B_INF10_M)

The response to the crisis by the Municipality group was a bit delayed in comparison to the above-mentioned groups mainly because of the top-down decision-making process to deal with an unprecedented situation of the massive arrival of refugees to Poland:

Of course, in every city and probably (...) as the conflict began, the decisions were top-down. The decision was imposed that they had to prepare accommodation (...) for the refugees but no one thought that they would need so much. (S_INF10_M)

The Municipal Offices in Biecz and Suwałki were waiting for the tasks assigned by, for instance, the Voivode:

[We] were subject to daily reporting to the Governor, (...) which is a huge amount of work. (S_INF19_M)

Despite the delay, the response was made by state offices/ public institutions and facilities, and it was also substantial:

If there were any delays somewhere, no one would predict it, because it was such a unique situation anyway. Absolutely the so-called human element. It varies, but, in general, it seems to me that it was all as it should be. (S_INF8_V and S_INF9_V)

Another group of people who responded to the crisis were employees of public institutions such as the *Museum of Biecka Land* with a strong representation of volunteers, out of whom, an *ad hoc* voluntary group emerged as well; these were

employees of the Municipal Offices in Suwałki and Biecz and their subordinate units (see Table 6). Again, it is worth noting that the results reveal that the role of the employees in helping the refugees from Ukraine was aligned with the contribution in an unofficial way, which means that, during the office hours, they acted according to their competencies and roles in the corresponding institutions, but also, they were helping beyond their competencies as ‘regular human beings’ (see Table 6). They also helped in their private time. Hence, the line between formal/official and informal/unofficial helping by the employees representing the official institutions of Biecz and Suwałki was constantly blurred:

It was a time when one devoted all of one’s time. Professionally, we had to be active. Everyone there performed their own, professional functions. Teachers are also known to be there. We, here, in the office, had to, and, after work, we rushed to these centers. (S_INF16_M)

The main factor between such mixed roles was the simple need of the employees, who are also ordinary human beings, to help other people in need in whatever way is within their reach, and the *primary goal was that this communication would be provided, not just with an open heart, time, because it is also after the working hours.* (S_INF16_M)

The analysis has also revealed the main actors in the need for local knowledge, in the context of the arrival and stay of the refugees from Ukraine, which means that those were the people who wanted to receive the most precise, accurate and up-to-date information about the crisis situation, for instance, the number of refugees and their needs (see Table 6). As it has already been illustrated in the case of the earliest reactions and perceptions of risk, there is a second element which unites countries which have been affected by refugees/migration in the recent years. The main group of actors directly involved in the response were informal actors, civilians, private individuals. This group of helpers is followed by the formal ones, such as states, governments and other public institutions. The results demonstrate that the civilian population was, once again, at the frontline of the response to the crisis which involved a massive inflow of migrants/refugees prior to formal actors’ intervention (Boersma et al., 2019). The formal actors’ response was somewhat limited by the procedures and the top-down approach (Boin & Rhinhard, 2008). Since the transboundary and complex nature of the crisis necessitates a multifaceted response, individual actors will not be able to respond to it independently. The research results about what kind of actors were mostly involved in the response support the claim that the focus should be put on developing the capacities for civilian crisis management, which is an alternative scenario of the response to a crisis, which assumes that the outcomes of an emergency are dealt with most efficiently at the local level, where the outcomes of the crisis are being felt most prominently, and are responded to most efficiently (Boin & Rhinhard, 2008; Fassin, 2022).

Table 7. Code – actor in need of local knowledge

Subcode	Quote	Number of informants
Private individuals (citizens, residents, community members)	<i>(...) and then it turned out that these people continue to ask how, to whom, where, what, and what it looks like; (...) also, here, in this area, people knew that I was going to the East, I was getting questions. (B_INF1_V)</i>	12
State offices/ public institutions and facilities	<i>We provided such information to the County Office on a daily basis. Also, the voivode received this data. (B_INF10_M)</i>	10
Local media	<i>Every day, on the other hand, there was a situation where they were also approached by the local media, but, to them, it was typically statistical data. They didn't give any personal data there, just statistical data, how many refugees we had. Also, such data was provided. (B_INF10_M)</i>	2

Source: created by the author

Among others, these were private individuals inquiring about refugees in the community so that they could know exactly what kind of support is needed, public institutions, such as the Voivode who wanted to receive data about the incoming refugees. Another group is the local media which was mostly interested in the statistics (see Table 7). Again, it was the civilian population as the main actor in need of the local knowledge, and they found it necessary to navigate their response efficiently and smoothly (see Table 7). The formal actors' need for knowledge was rather technical for the purposes of reporting and administrative work, as well as, among the aspects considered, to optimize the operations of the mass accommodation points (see Table 7). Since the nature of activity of informal actors is bottom-up (Kapucu, 2006) and the formal actors tend to operate top-down, it is understandable why there are discrepancies in the way the local knowledge was employed. Similarly to formal actors, the local media needed the statistics solely for media reports (see Table 7).

3.3. Community Resilience Dimensions

This subchapter provides analysis of the results about the core community resilience dimensions.

3.3.1. Agency

In order to gain a more profound understanding of how the community resilience dimension of agency could affect the response to the crisis, a special code – action in response to a crisis – was developed. The refugee and humanitarian crisis caused by the Russian invasion of Ukraine was a considerable triggering event for all kinds of groups of actors (see Table 6). The results reveal a variety of actions taken in response to this crisis (see Table 8). These actions covered a broad range from providing the Ukrainian refugees with the bare necessities, such as food, baby food, clothes and

hygiene products, arranging the collection of aid which was later distributed locally within the community in all places where the refugees were being accommodated; it was also transported to the border with Ukraine, or directly to Ukraine, where there was also a high demand for all kinds of aid (see Table 8). Some respondents were going to the border with Ukraine or further, into Ukraine, whereas others donated money or offered accommodation and shelter (see Table 8).

There were instances where somebody was not able to travel to the border with Ukraine, but gave their car so that somebody else could drive there to bring aid or bring refugees back to the community (see Table 8). Within due time, there were translations needed to help implement the administrative process so that the refugees could receive social benefits; also, medical care was offered for those refugees who were accommodated in the community (see Table 8). Then, errands were made, and everyone made sure that the refugees would have everything they needed and stayed in good health (see Table 8). Emotional support was also provided so that the refugees could feel safe, welcomed, and – almost – like at home (see Table 8). Moreover, cultural events, also in the Ukrainian language, were being organized (see Table 8).

On the institutional level, actions were being taken in the form of introducing a legal base to make the refugees from Ukraine eligible to receive all social benefits (see Table 8). Additionally, Municipality Offices supported their twin towns in Ukraine (see Table 8). Over time, some actors supported the refugees who decided to settle down by helping them find their own accommodation and finding a job so they could become independent (see Table 8).

Table 8. Code – action taken in response to crisis

Subcode	Quote	Number of informants
Accommodating refugees in Poland	<i>Another such activity of ours was when they called from the district office that 20 people of the Ukrainian origin were going to us, and here these people were going in a group. We had to locate them. The dormitory was full at the time, and so the Mayor decided to asset up a refugee shelter at the volunteer fire department in Biecz. (B INF10 M)</i>	14
Collection of aid for refugees from Ukraine	<i>Inside the museum, (...) the director reacted instantly; (...) we were putting out information that we were collecting things for refugees. (B INF1 V)</i>	13
Helping Ukrainian refugees to gain material/life independence in Poland	<i>(...) Later, when they decided that they would like to live here, I wrote an announcement myself that I was looking for an apartment. (S INF1 CM)</i>	12
Offering emotional support	<i>They were referring to him as grandpa; (...) there was help for them. Really wide-angle, (...) starting from this typical clerical job, to how we met them. (B INF10 M)</i>	12
Making sure that refugees had everything they needed	<i>I drove around, checked to see if food was being delivered to them, I also took turns checking with my colleagues to make sure they had everything. I drove them to the doctor, (...) I drove with them to the second-hand, so that the ladies could choose some clothes for themselves. (B INF10 M)</i>	11
Going/driving to the border with Ukraine/ Transporting goods for Ukrainian refugees	<i>(...) Maybe because I have a car, such a small van, very quickly, among my friends and also here, in the museum, we very quickly put together the transport with which I went at the very beginning of the war. As I say, three, four days after the start of the war, I went East already. (B INF1 V)</i>	9
Translations	<i>They couldn't walk up to the doctor, get something done. You had to go with them, you had to lead them, you had to try, translate. (B INF10 M)</i>	9
Medical care	<i>Anyway, later, when we went with them to the doctor, because there was such a need, because these children were non-stop sick, that's what our help consisted of, that we went both to hospital in Gorlice and here, to our center. (B INF10 M)</i>	9

Administrative activities/clerical work	<i>(...) We had, at the beginning, to register the people arriving from Ukraine, to simply record when they crossed the border. And here, these people who crossed the border, came to the office, registered, (...) which was later necessary for them to be able to receive the refugee status. (B_INF10_M)</i>	8
Transporting Ukrainian refugees to run errands (shop, office, hospital)	<i>Sometimes, for example, we needed to take someone to hospital, for example, in the evening hours, we needed to bring someone from hospital. (...) (B_INF10_M)</i>	8
Organizing cultural events in the Ukrainian language for the refugees	<i>(...) including such non-material help, the Bieckie Cultural Centre organized film screenings for kids and for adults in Ukrainian. Also, when it comes to the access to culture, they were organized in schools, so to speak, because kids went to school there as well. They had additional classes in Polish at the beginning. (B_INF10_M)</i>	6
Doing shopping and bringing those goods to the collection point	<i>There were no questions about where it would go, rather just what is needed – either there was complete spontaneity, which means that someone just shopped and brought it, or it was that someone called and wanted to know what was needed at the moment, whether it would be I don't know, just clothing, or, rather, that we would focus on children and mothers because that was the largest share of these refugees. (B_INF1_V)</i>	5
Providing Ukrainian refugees with bare necessities (food, hygiene products, household chemicals)	<i>Sometimes, we prepared food packages or something. (S_INF8_V and S_INF9_V)</i>	5
Developing and introducing legal basis to be able to help refugees	<i>(...) Even before this legal basis was introduced. How should we react so that all this would make sense? (B_INF10_M)</i>	4
Preparation and coordination of the transport/packing goods to be transported to Ukraine	<i>(...) and also here, at the museum, we put together the transport very quickly that I went with at the very beginning of the war. As I say, three or four days after the start of the war, I went East already. (B_INF1_V)</i>	4

Letting private space/ cars out of charge	<i>Damian, after the call to action on the Internet, [found] somewhere on Facebook that if you want to help you can bring things to me, his garden disappeared*. I mean it's cool, it's just that I also built myself a garage before the war, you know, near the house, in which, until now, a car has never stood, never. Well, it looks like this. (B_INF1V)</i> <i>*when people started to bring donations in large numbers</i>	3
Offering support for the twin city in Ukraine	<i>I only helped if there was a need to purchase some materials for these cities (...) because these cities approached us with specific needs for purchases or clothing, thermal or bedding, or shoes. (B_INF10_M)</i>	2
Distribution and redistribution of aid (locally and in Ukraine)	<i>Here, in the museum itself, I think 80% of the aid we collected was distributed locally, while those 20% went with me; (...) here, people understood very quickly that since there are people on the border and there is a crowd on the border, a crowd of people to be helped, very often, unfortunately, trampling on each other's feet, that it is necessary to help those who are here, well, it's important that, somehow, this energy and this help would not go in vain, but would rather [come] here. (B_INF1_V)</i>	1
Preparing the house for refugees on the first day of the invasion	<i>(...) I was already prepared, well, I bought food for them, (...) toothbrushes and the necessary hygiene products, because I already knew more or less who was going, so the kind of things that were needed for women first and foremost. (S_INF1_CM)</i>	1
When not able to help by themselves directly, they helped indirectly	<i>People, even if someone couldn't drive, themselves said: take my car. (B_INF1_V)</i>	1

Source: created by the author

Based on the results, a classification of actions has been developed. The findings show that the actions taken in both communities could be classified as: *Institutional*, taken on the Government and self-government level (see Table 9). This relates mostly to the development of a legal basis to make the refugees eligible to receive social benefits and medical care, as well as the sheltering of refugees in mass accommodation points and providing board. The Municipality also supported their twin towns in Ukraine by offering various types of aid. Following the subcodes, action

can be also classified as *Collective* with the massive number of people willing to help, especially at the onset of the crisis (see Table 9). Within this context of the provision of help, some people were acting *Individually*, while other individual contribution also remained *Independent*. It means that they did not look for any initiatives to be joined but, instead, organized aid on their own (see Table 8).

The results demonstrate that *Collective*, *Individual* and *Independent* actions have a common denominator – notably, that they were spontaneous (see Table 9).

Table 9. Code – classification of actions taken

Subcode	Quote	Number of informants
Individual/independent	<i>I kind of didn't have to get involved in it at all. (S_INF1_CM)</i>	10
Spontaneous/instant/swift/immediate	<i>So, when the war broke out on Thursday the twenty-fourth, I remember, already on Tuesday, we had our first family. (S_INF1_CM)</i>	10
Institutional – at the local self-government level (voivodeship, county, municipality)	<i>The Mayor participated in these conferences. (B_INF10_M)</i>	9
Collective	<i>When this migrant crisis happened here, when the migrants from Ukraine started coming to our village, well that's how it started, that first it was such an action that everybody helps, right? (B_INF10_M)</i>	8
Institutional – at the Government level	<i>The Polish State also decided to pay a one-time allowance of PLN 300, so here, too, the ladies and I had to, so to speak, go to the bank with those who had PLN 500+. The bank had to help them open an account for MOPS, i.e., social welfare, and fill in all the documentation there. (B_INF10_M)</i>	3

Source: created by the author

The results of the analysis also indicate a main motivation behind the actions of different actors. Specifically in the first days of the invasion, the decision to act was made out of the heart reflex, as well as because of empathy (see Table 10). Helping the refugees from Ukraine was the right thing to do (see Table 10). For some helpers, it was a matter of solidarity with other people whose homeland was under military aggression, whereas, for others, it was a fundamental issue of humanity and a moral and inner duty (see Table 10). The findings also suggest that the actors involved in helping the refugees were driven and motivated by their personal zero tolerance to injustice (see Table 10). The results of the analysis of the actions taken in response to the crisis, in both communities, i.e., Suwałki and Biecz, affirm that all the

actors involved, either informal actors, individually and collectively, or the formal ones, exercised their agency by taking their own independent decisions to act and respond instead of remaining passive participants in the response to the crisis. They were participating actors who wanted to get actively involved in response, according to the available resources, who became envoys of community resilience (Moralli & Allegrini, 2021). The motivations behind those actions could differ (see Table 10), but the agency was indeed triggered by the crisis (Hippe et al., 2024) and helped the actors make sense of uncertainty and cope with this new reality.

Table 10. Code – main motivation behind action

Subcode	Quote	Number of informants
Heart reflex	<i>From the heart (S_INF1_CM)</i>	9
Empathy	<i>You know, everyone seems to me to be human. It is necessary to help. The office is, you know, an institution, but an institution is made up of people. Well, and some are maybe more empathetic, others less empathetic, but everyone feels for another person, that someone needs to be helped. (B_INF10_M)</i>	8
Inner and moral duty	<i>I know of someone who simply helped there in their spare time with the sense of internal duty. (B_INF1_V)</i>	8
The right thing to do/ acting for the just cause	<i>(...) that someone needs to be helped, that bad things are happening there, that they [i.e., refugees] need to be taken in (B_INF10_M)</i>	8
No consent to injustice	<i>(...) because, well, injustices happen all over the world, this does not mean that I agree with it. (B_INF1_V)</i>	5
Solidarity	<i>(...) I know it's a terribly worn-out word, but such is human solidarity, and here, I think, Biecz passed the test very nicely. (B_INF1_V)</i>	5
Humanity	<i>Humanity, (...) I think, it obliges. (B_INF1_V)</i>	3

Source: created by the author

The results have revealed that the research participants had the empowering capacity to exercise their agency in various possible ways despite the fact that the first reactions upon learning about the Russian military aggression against Ukraine was manifested by, for instance, disbelief (see Table 4). Such a reaction emerged from the awareness of many research participants of Russia's imperialistic ambitions:

I also know what the Russians are capable of, and I know they will not stop and back down; (...) they have imperialistic tendencies and (...) want to overturn the previous form; (...) overall, they want to go back to this outline of what the Soviet Union once looked like. I just know they are capable of it. (B_INF7_CM)

Such awareness made them fully recognize the aggressor in the Russia-Ukraine conflict:

Well, yes, I think any person who, you know, it doesn't matter whether he brought a zloty or whether he brought (...) a kilo of sugar, this is a person who realizes who is the aggressor, in this war. (B_INF1_V)

Other reactions were, for instance, the strong need to go to church to seek consolation and pray there (see Table 4) or the thrill of anticipation that this event and crisis would affect Poland:

We always had something in the back of our minds that... it is not yet impossible that this would not affect us. (B_INF18_M)

Even before the refugees started to arrive in Poland in search for shelter, safety and security, some community members were aware that it might happen, and literally a day or two after the invasion, they undertook various activities to respond to the refugee and humanitarian crisis in the form of, for instance, organizing collection of humanitarian aid (see Table 8).

Helpers were transporting this humanitarian aid to be either distributed in Ukraine, at the Polish-Ukrainian border, or on site, in the Polish facilities which were already receiving and hosting refugees from Ukraine:

We organized here with the cooperation and, in fact, coordination of all these activities by my father-in-law. Shipments of food to the border, of hygiene products, blankets, sleeping bags, mattresses. Well, such basic things. Well, and toys for children as well. (B_INF7_CM)

Other community members of the Polish border regions communities, those who had no possibility to organize the collection and transport of humanitarian aid, contributed with material and financial donations:

People of goodwill also donated there, their products, their donations, (S_INF16_M) or, alternatively, they helped by doing target shopping to meet the highly specific needs of the refugees:

Listen, there was such a problem at one point. This is the turn of spring, still, such frosts, and still, this wind. People were arriving, badly cracked lips, and so lipsticks like glycerin are needed. I don't know if there was already a group on the Facebook page. We need lipsticks. Two hours have passed. A girl arrives. Such a box of these lipsticks. (S_INF8_V and S_INF9_V)

Others were prepared in advance (see Table 8). The results indicate that, despite the fact that not each participant had the same possibilities to help the refugees arriving from Ukraine in Poland, they did make a conscious and independent decision to take action in response to the crisis (see Table 8). Some community members were more solo-oriented in responding to this crisis situation, and they remained independent in helping the refugees from Ukraine:

But I was not in any organization; (S_INF26_CM), (...) as I say, I didn't want to be tied down by any kind of a clause. I tried to do everything to the extent of my material and mental capacity at the time. (...) (B_INF13_CM)

Others were more devoted to a collective effort, often as part of a group of helpers:

It may also sound silly, but it seems to me that if this group had not been formed, then,

maybe, it would have gone some other way. Especially, since, from the very beginning, there began to gather such a group of people who wanted to help. It was Mrs. X, then Y (...), then there were others, because they wrote somewhere on the forum. (S_INF8_V and S_INF9_V)

Community members did try to be as creative as possible in finding solutions to support the refugees or respond to the specific needs which existed because of this crisis:

I do not know if this is of any help, but, from one lady who is from Ukraine I was ordering dumplings non-stop, that is, I am her customer. Today, at sixteen o'clock, I have to pick up more dumplings that I don't need. (S_INF26_CM)

A community member from Biecz shared another account of her response to a specific need:

(...) She made a post that was filled with grief about the Ukrainians who died during the unrest, from the attacks, (...) the dead who are left there, and those who want to help bury them are not taken care of, (...) and I, (...) actually, got in the car, (...) just asked if they were able to somehow, as support just for the Ukrainians, simply support the donation of body bags; (...) thanks to that, X contacted funeral homes in Nowy Targ and the surrounding area, and it turned out that they were able to organize a very large amount of help in this very matter. (B_INF13_CM)

Others were acting in a more organized and structured manner, especially on the institutional level:

The time of the meeting, we are already there. One telephone call, and we come, and what has been done?

What we are going to do, also, it's just that this was the basic, good organization. (B_INF18_M)

What mattered most was the activation of an empowering capacity to respond to the crisis situation to the best of the abilities of each actor involved in the response (see Table 8). Firstly, the crisis did trigger individuals to activate and exercise their agency, which, consequently, did strongly affect and enhance the community resilience in response to this crisis, which translated into massive collective actions to help the refugees from Ukraine:

Then, under that post of hers, what she wrote – that something is being created at the station I wrote that I am willing to help, and, (...) if anything, I am willing to help; (...) on the other hand, I thought it would be cool if more of us found each other, and to connect to something bigger. (B_INF8_V and B_INF9_V)

The decision-making process – whether to help or not – was very quick, and, after such a decision, the next step followed, namely, taking action, which manifested in many forms and activities:

[Everything happened] very quickly, e.g., places were opened immediately for accommodation. Some decisions, such as sandwiches for the station, because they were also getting delivered immediately. Here, no one hesitated when they arrived and needed photos to be taken for a document. (S_INF18_M)

The results also reveal that, in the landscape of humanitarian aid, various activities and actions undertaken by different actors, the awareness of each other's

actions and initiatives was either full, limited, or there was none at all. The question about the awareness was posed on purpose to learn if it was involved in response to the crisis actors' agency, and thus in the decision-making process, triggered by the crisis, which was directed only towards the refugees, or also towards other helpers so as to strengthen the response by either joining forces and/or supporting each other in helping people from Ukraine (see Table 11).

Table 11. Code – awareness of other helpers in the community

Subcode	Quote	Number of informants
Full awareness	<i>Yes, we are still aware of it. (B_INF_M)</i>	4
No awareness	<i>I wasn't interested at all. (S_INF1_CM)</i>	3
Limited awareness	<i>I've heard something about this one, but I can't-tell you more. (S_INF_CM)</i>	2

Source: created by the author

The findings also indicate that the helpers who belonged to *ad hoc* created voluntary groups assumed their roles in the groups in many different ways (see Table 12). The question about the way the roles were distributed and assumed within the group was posed specifically for the Volunteer interview group in an attempt to study the scope of agency among those who joined the group of helpers and who were themselves already quite active on the humanitarian aid front.

Table 12. Code – role taken in response to crisis

Subcode	Quote	Number of informants
Role assumed in a natural way as the actor had already had a social role previously	<i>We, after all, we are still performing some social function, not only as a museum. (...) (B_INF1_V)</i>	1
The role came out of itself/ naturally	<i>It's more like this that everyone dealt with it, probably as it came out by itself. (B_INF1_V)</i>	1
No role assumed/assigned	<i>No, as if there was no role assigned. (B_INF1_V)</i>	1

Source: created by the author

3.3.2. Resources

The analysis of the code for resources has yielded several subcodes for resources which demonstrate that, similarly to the actors involved and the actions taken in response to the refugee and humanitarian crisis, there was a variety of resources provided (see Table 13). It is noteworthy that the type of resources provided was dependent on the timing of the crisis, the current situation of the refugees arriving in Poland and those remaining in Ukraine, as well as the material status of the actors providing those resources. The crisis situation dynamics reflected both the changing needs and the logistics of the resources provided. Therefore, the provision of resources

was subject to constant change (see Table 13). As time passed, the actors learned how to profile the aid, and established their own aid channels, through which, different resources, depending on the ‘then-current’ needs were provided. At the beginning of the invasion, in February 2022, the most common resources to be provided collectively and massively were warm clothes and bare necessities, such as food, baby food and diapers, hygiene products and toys for children (see Table 13). Over time, other resources were added up on top, including specialized medications, household equipment for the refugees settling down, or those still staying at the mass accommodation points. Those refugees who received the Personal Identification Number (PESEL) were eligible to receive social benefits from the State, including healthcare. Specific resources were also being provided for, among others, the twin cities in Ukraine, or Ukrainian soldiers, such as military and tactical equipment. What is noteworthy is that private money donations were continuing incessantly (see Table 13).

Table 13. Code – resources provided to refugees

Subcode	Quote	Number of informants
Clothing	<i>The first resources, probably like everywhere else, were mainly food and warm clothes plus blankets. (B_INF1_V)</i>	14
Hygiene products	<i>Hygienic products, bandages. (B_INF7_CM)</i>	10
Social benefits provided by the State	<i>I got money from them [i.e., the State of Poland], so it was important to me. We went to the store, and they took everything they needed, and treated me with great respect. (S_INF1_CM)</i>	10
Toys for children	<i>This was normal. (...) My son plays with Lego. The little boy was also playing with Lego; (...) anything that was needed. All of this I brought because I thought: how to provide a second home for this child? I have a child of my own, and I know what it's all about. He's the one who also has to be happy in what they were in. (S_INF1_CM)</i>	10
Private money donations	<i>(...) who gave me money and you know...Okay, it wasn't, it was sometimes money of amount circa 300 zlotys in hryvnias, but sometimes it was 3000 zlotys in hryvnias, he gave me access to his account, because I was given a card and a phone number in order to deposit this money so that it could be used here. (B_INF1_V)</i>	9
Household chemicals	<i>We packed what we had here, and we knew that things like laundry detergent, dishwashing liquid, soap, toothpaste were the things that would come in handy here. You don't need a central warehouse, you can really know locally where it might be useful, well, and we hit the jackpot as we took it to Eleos. (B_INF1_V)</i>	7

Medications	<i>I don't carry that much medicine, I mean painkillers, including getting morphine drugs from people here.</i> (B_INF1_V)	7
Diapers	<i>Hygienic products, bandages, dressings, diapers, blankets, sleeping bags and air mattresses.</i> (B_INF7_CM)	5
Military/tactical equipment	<i>There were even requests for purchases of such typically tactical, typically tactical equipment. It is known that, due to the Polish law, we could not buy them weapons, we could not buy them vests, but, for example, binoculars were bought, blankets were bought, mattresses were bought. For the survival of these people from these cities.</i> (B_INF10_M)	4
Household equipment	<i>But when, for example, they had already moved into their apartment, which they rented, well my first thought was that I must help them, because they moved into this apartment where there was furniture. I asked this lady who rented this apartment to leave them whatever she could, that is, a couple of glasses, a couple of plates, a couple of forks, whatever she could, to leave, whatever she didn't need, not to throw away, but to leave it.</i> (S_INF1_CM)	4
Food	<i>This was taken care of by a social cooperative which provided the ladies with food every day in the form of catering, but, after some time, the ladies had their own dietary preferences, and so they decided to cook for themselves, so we provided them with the foodstuff.</i> (B_INF10_M)	3
First aid kit items	<i>(...) that someone called and wanted to know what was needed for the moment, whether it would be I don't know, just bandages.</i> (B_INF1_V)	1

Source: created by the author

Based on the analyzed empirical data, a classification of resources has been created into the resources provided to refugees (Table 13) and the resources available within the community (see Table 15). The resources provided in response to the refugee and humanitarian crisis have been grouped as human resources (see Table 15), which is to say that, for instance, employees in various positions in the Municipality Office and its subordinate units, as well as other institutions, were involved in helping the refugees. For the people helping the refugees from Ukraine, resources were a major factor in this response (see Table 13). Another type of the resources provided were private resources which refer to all kinds of aid – either donated, collected, distributed, redistributed, or provided by private individuals (see Table 15). Another coded category was the resources provided by the State and its institutions, such as social benefits, mass accommodation points and reception centers for the refugees, free education for the Ukrainian children (see Table 13). It should be noted that, regardless of the above-mentioned categories, there is a separate category of financial resources which were being provided by private

individuals in the form of donations, money transfers (see Table 15), and by the State in the form of social benefits operated by its subordinate institutions on the local government level (see Table 13).

Table 14. Code – classification of resources provided

Subcode	Quote	Number of informants
Private resources from private individuals	<i>People brought things here, or brought them directly to my house, or to Bartek's store (B_INF1_V) We need, we need to raise money to buy a dryer, because there were no other options, only this in the form of donations. Quickly, this was collected in a single day and given to the director of OSiR. (S_INF16_M)</i>	11
State/institutional resources	<i>Here, we had money allocated for these 40 zlotys per person. (B_INF10_M)</i>	10
Bare necessities (first-need products)	<i>How can we help them in a human way, either financially, or with things? I called friends to collect some things, clothes, toys, tampons, sanitary pads, and that sort of thing. So, I took it there to the girls who came to the castle. (B_INF13_CM)</i>	8
Financial resources	<i>Later, there were issues related to money, because women who had children were entitled to a 500+ [zlotys] allowance. (B_INF10_M)</i>	3
Human resources	<i>This means the help of employees of both the Municipal Office in Biecz and the facilities and institutions supporting the Office, (...) and here were human resources. (B_INF10_M)</i>	2

Source: created by the author

Out of the subcodes, an additional classification of the way those resources were accessed was created

The sources of the resources were sponsors, donations, private individuals, as well as the State.

Table 15. Code – access to resources

Subcode	Quote	Number of informants
Private/own resources	<i>After announcing on the website that the museum was involved in helping and announcing a collection [of donations], (...) people started showing up; (...) someone brought something, someone called and asked what was needed. There were no questions about where it would go, rather just what was needed, or else it was completely spontaneous, i.e., someone just did some shopping and brought it, or someone called and wanted to know what was needed at a given moment.</i> (B_INF1_V)	9
State/institutional aid	<i>The Polish State also decided to pay a one-time allowance of 300 zlotys.</i> (B_INF10_M)	8
Donations made by employees	<i>We also conducted such collections among our employees. Everyone brought things as they had them. I told my friend, for example, I need a pair of shoes, size 26, for a girl, she says, I have a daughter, but she is 27. I say, they will be a size bigger, but they will be [fine].</i> (B_INF10_M)	6
Sponsors	<i>Partner cities need our help. They wrote me a letter. So, what should we do? Well, Mrs. X, we'll find sponsors.</i> (...) (B_INF10_M)	3

Source: created by the author

Since agency followed by the decision to take actions activates the necessity for mobilizing all types of resources, in order to be able to respond to a crisis, community members in both Polish border region communities were providing their own private resources:

The resources that were created were all people's donations, ranging from food, clothes, strollers to shoes, it could all be expanded anyway. It was all donations, donations. (S_INF8_V and S_INF9_V)

Helpers were trying to get access to the resources needed:

Here we have the local owner of the (...) store. From him we ordered canned goods, hygiene items. Well, with the help of local residents. Basically. The products were delivered on pallets [and] (...) in larger quantities. (B_INF7_CM)

Other community members were involved in collecting resources to be further redistributed and distributed: *They brought things all Sunday, so, on Sunday, we went to the border on our own again.* (B_INF8_V)

This pattern as well as the dynamics of the mobilization and provision of resources were comparable in both communities. Private individuals (community members) were donating material and financial resources to be later distributed or redistributed either by the same or by other actors involved in the response: *We organized various aid collections in the company. Even before the girls from*

Ukraine came to live with us and during [their stay] because it happened cyclically. (B_INF7_CM)

The collected resources were then distributed in Ukraine, at the Polish-Ukrainian border, or internally, in Poland, at the places where the refugees from Ukraine were being accommodated. Over time, the helpers did learn how to profile and target the resources so that they would not be allocated randomly:

And, after a month, we focused on helping the refugees who are here. There was a very large community here in Biecz, I don't know if it was 200 or 300 people, most of them lived in a boarding school, and there were huge shortages in this boarding school as well. (B_INF8_V)

The most visible systematization of resources, which emerged as a result of the analysis, was of a private origin:

Well, for example, these friends from Ireland, they had, I don't know, a few or a dozen or so thousand euros. (B_INF8_V)

There were also State/institutional resources:

We also provided information all the time about where to go and about the types of benefits. We explained that you should first go to our town hall to get your PESEL number, and then, the next step would be taken. It was the Municipal Family Assistance Center, where one-off assistance of PLN 300 could be obtained. There are also family benefits. Later, after some time, the so-called forties did not come immediately, i.e., the ability to secure a place, a rented apartment, and be maintained by the owners. (S_INF16_M)

In many cases, private resources offered by informal actors were transferred to the formal actors so that they could allocate these resources according to the needs: *The aid collection was started by the Mayor of the city of Suwałki. There was an appeal to the listeners to carry everything to the arena so that it would be tidy.* (S_INF18_M)

A surprising finding was that the helpers from both communities found information to be a resource itself, which turned out to be critical in navigating the humanitarian aid landscape, firstly by helping to avoid or limit chaotic provision and distribution of resources, and secondly, by facilitating a more effective mapping of the specific needs of either people from Ukraine in Poland and Ukraine, as well as the needs of the helpers themselves:

Practically, traffic management, and practically, practically managing who goes where and everything. Then we laughed that when the police people arrived, because they kept some statistics, they wrote down how many arrived, who went where, and generally asked where who was going, where, how many people, and they asked him where and who was sent. (S_INF8_V and S_INF9_V)

The results also suggest that, at the most intense moment, in response to the arrival of refugees from Ukraine, approximately in the first two or three weeks after the invasion, the source of mobilized resources or how they were accessed was not that relevant (see Table 15). Of the utmost importance was the efficient, fast and effective provision of aid for those in need, especially when it concerned women, elderly and children who were the most representative group of the refugees arriving

in Poland:

As, already at a certain stage, it is difficult to distinguish whether this contact is more private or more, perhaps, official. Well, because on the basis of assistance. It's already hard later to differentiate whether it was private help, or in the framework of work, or... Well, it seems to me that it was people's hearts that drove it, not duty. But, well, contacts in the sense of what, where is needed, here as the office knew best what the needs were. (B_INF7_CM)

Table 16. Code – classification of resources within community

Subcode	Quote	Number of informants
Private resources from private individuals	<i>(...) but suddenly it turned out that someone brought, for example, zero milk, went to the pharmacy and bought four, since he knew it would be useful. (B_INF1_V)</i>	11
Bare necessities (first-need products)	<i>(...) what was needed for first aid. Yes, I was already ready, so I bought food for them in the fridge, I bought toothbrushes and the necessary hygiene cosmetics, because I already knew more or less who was going, so the things that were necessary for women's lives, especially. (S_INF1_CM)</i>	8
Human resources	<i>This means the help of employees of both the Municipal Office in Biecz and the facilities and institutions supporting the office that we mentioned earlier, including the Museum. (B_INF10_M)</i>	2

Source: created by the author

Apart from agency, which was triggered by the crisis and empowered the actors to actively participate in their response, the resources affected the effectiveness of this response significantly (Moralli & Allegrini, 2021). The nature of mobilization, getting an access to, and the distribution of resources was dynamic and unstructured as the actors were placed in an unprecedented context. This means that, in a real-time mode, they were using the available resources to meet the needs they were already familiar with, through, for instance, social networks, or provided the resources in a chaotic, random manner as, especially in the early weeks of the invasion, the mobilization of humanitarian aid was truly massive. The results confirm that both communities were capable of mobilizing almost all the resources they needed for the response. These resources were either already available, or were activated through social networks which were the most important channels of communication about the needs and respective resources needed as well as the resource itself to generate further resources. The results solidify the theoretical assumption that the resources in both communities were accrued as accumulation of the real and the potential resources (Hart et al., 1993) which were accessed, mobilized, activated, distributed, and redistributed according to the needs. The resources were and remained an important social capital generated by the communities (Ansell et al., 2010) mainly through social networks, specifically of those individuals directly involved in the response (Obrist et al., 2010).

3.3.3. Self-reliance

The results demonstrate that the more resources were available and were at the disposal of the helpers, the more self-reliant they could be (see Table 17). Some of the research participants did to a large degree manage to remain self-reliant in helping the refugees without any external resources,

And so, without the outside support, we helped, because there was no money for them, because, in Suwałki, this money was allocated, but this money was probably not there. I don't know. (...) (S_INF1_CM)

Yet, they underlined that it is not possible to be fully self-reliant, namely, that it would be definitely hard without the outside help:

And if there was a crisis in our country, I don't know how I would know. I don't know, I don't know. Are you able to cope in the face of a crisis? To me, it seems that no one is able to cope. In the face of a war, or what? That's what it seems to me that, in such situations, everyone needs some support, right? (B_INF11_CM)

An interesting finding worth to be further explored is that community self-reliance could be dependent not only on individual community members' available resources and access to them, but also on the self-confidence in exercising agency of individual community members as:

The community, first of all, lacks self-confidence, agency, and, as it has worked out very nicely in terms of aid, this community here lacks self-confidence in terms of agency when it comes to things that directly affect them. (B_INF1_V)

However, the potential of the community's self-reliance has been recognized:

The potential is [here], and every time these people here have used their potential and their wits rather than thinking. (B_INF1_V)

The community members' capacity to remain self-reliant has also been coded, and two subcodes have been created. The results demonstrate that the capacity of the community members to remain self-reliant in their response can be either limited, or it may depend on their level of financial standing (see Table 17).

Table 17. Code – community members’ capacity to remain self-reliant without asking for additional support

Subcode	Quote	Number of informants
Dependent on the level of financial standing	<i>It would be the case that, depending on the size of the wallet, each of us would buy some part of the aid, and that would be the end of it. Unfortunately, very often, the help ends with the size of the wallet, even though the people, whether they be employees or residents, felt like in that first spurt they gave more than they could, but it would have ended very quickly. (B_INF1_V)</i>	10
Limited	<i>(...) When it comes to the migration crisis and the crisis related to the outbreak of the war, well, like I said, maybe we could, but I can't guarantee it. It would definitely be very difficult. Also, this help here, this help of the volunteers, this material and non-material help was truly priceless. (B_INF10_M)</i>	5

Source: created by the author

Whereas, the community’s capacity to remain self-reliant has been coded into several subcodes, yet, some research participants found it difficult to answer that question (see Table 18). Other research participants saw a still-untapped potential of the community to become self-reliant (see Table 18).

Table 18. Code – community’s capacity to remain self-reliant

Subcode	Quote	Number of informants
Not able to fully remain self-reliant	<i>I think not. I think we need something because, there are different people in my opinion, and they have different needs. They are rich, they are poor. (...) (S_INF1_CM)</i>	8
Untapped potential to become self-reliant	<i>The potential is there, and every time these people here used their potential and their wits and didn't think, this is the issue of small-town mentality, what people will say then I think it would be even better (...)</i> (B_INF1_V)	7
Dependent on the level of community self-confidence in exercising agency	<i>No. This community, first of all, lacks self-confidence and agency, and, although it worked very well in the matter of aid, this community here does not have the self-confidence in terms of agency when it comes to, for example, [something] that directly concerns them, i.e., elections, making decisions in the town, making decisions in the commune, this is what is illogical to me, because, spontaneously, these people reacted very nicely, so to speak, but when it comes to, for example, the issue of expressing their opinion in a referendum or elections, for example, some of them will come (...) some will not go because they will assume that they do not have this agency. This is such a lack of certainty.</i> (B_INF1_V)	4
Difficult to say	<i>I can't answer this question (B_INF10_M)</i>	4

Source: created by the author

Among the research participants, there were also opinions that the community may be unable to remain fully self-reliant (see Table 18). The results also demonstrate an underlying tendency in finding the community’s capacity to remain self-reliant to be potentially possible but subject to effort on the part of all community members, especially those with greater financial possibilities (see Table 18). A highly interesting finding is that self-reliance is dependent on the level of agency exercised by the community. It implies that agency is not only a dimension which enhances community resilience, but it may also increase the self-reliance capacity. Following the results of the community resilience dimension in terms of resources, the same interpretation could be made about the role of resources – in the sense that the more resources are available at the community and the individual level, the more self-reliant the members of the community and the community as an entity may become. In the case of both communities, they did present some strengths and capacities in self-reliance (Helfgott, 2018), and yet, despite the untapped potential, the dominating observation is that it was not possible for both communities to be fully self-reliant in the response.

3.3.4. Collaboration capacity

The results of the analysis demonstrate that the actors involved in this crisis, such as volunteers, community members, as well as the municipality, indeed, joined their forces, in the all-hands-on-deck manner, in order to respond to the needs of the refugees from Ukraine and those who remained in Ukraine:

I rather didn't expect so many people to get involved in our first action. (...) Some people came by minibus with goods from the wholesaler, and, for example, some parts were on pallets. We absolutely did not keep any statistics, about that, we did not care. But we did not expect so many people. (B_INF8_V)

Collective mobilization was seen in both border region communities, i.e., in both Suwałki and Biecz:

I didn't ask anyone, but as I mentioned earlier, there was no room to stack it all in that room. My husband would come and load it into the car, a colleague from work also helped. We drove there to that villa Eden, slippers, towels, toys, cleaning products. They called me, because they knew I worked in the office and said Listen, you have contacts there, you tell me what to bring, what is needed. (...) Even when we needed money to buy a dryer, because it got too stuffy where they were accommodated, and they would hang it to dry on these nets, on these fences. (S_INF16_M)

The results reveal that the experience of collaborating with different actors can be perceived as extremely active, proactive and smooth:

A group of people of different professions, different ages, different characters, different views came together. After all, it is basically to say that this should not have the right to happen. People who came together, for, let's call it, half a year, sometimes, they worked hard for the benefit of other people. Of their own free and unforced will. (S_INF8_V and S_INF9_V)

The actors were willing to collaborate with each other to help the people from Ukraine:

It wasn't that someone told us not to help or not to come. It was all of us teaming up here, and whether it was a given housing base, bands or something, or a sound system, no one looked that it was a Saturday, that it was a Sunday, you could just feel that solidarity. (B_INF18_M)

Despite certain limitations depending on the type of the actor involved in this particular response, people did their best to provide help or assistance:

Here, no one hesitated when they arrived and needed photos to make a document for PESEL. Immediately, the photographic establishment here on Chłodna Street reported. (...) so that they would not pay for the photos. It was the city that paid the photo outlet. (S_INF18_M)

The main limitations in cooperation were in the case of the Municipality, among other procedures:

I don't know, because here it's like this.... I think that such grassroots ventures work much faster, sometimes much more efficiently than the activities of organizations, where it's obvious that it has to go through the whole machine of administration before something is announced, launched, and put into effect. (B_INF8_V)

Lack of central coordination in the case of volunteers and community members was observed:

At the beginning, there were a lot of people and a lot of volunteers. And sometimes it was like that, there were more than enough candidates than needed. But it's also nice that others want and come to help. (S_INF8_V and S_INF9_V)

Yet, Government authorities also put in their best efforts by, among other points, adopting and following the procedures as efficiently as possible to provide the necessary help for those in need as soon as they could:

We tried to get some funds from sponsors, for example, so that they could buy something for themselves, because, from those 40 zlotys that we received, not everything could be purchased, and, in a warehouse, for example, in Gorlice, where there were clothes, there were no shoes for these ladies, so we had to buy them shoes. We, also here, from the Municipality, gave a little bit of funds for this. (B_INF10_M)

For instance, in the case of the response made by the Municipality or by other State institutions, the perspective of those involved in helping was that, first of all, they are human beings, and, only secondly, officials:

Daily reports. Is that all? And the other way around? (...) A typically human side, (...) we help. (B_INF10_M)

This general sense that there is the need to help another human being in need the experience in cooperation was good and positive as the actors, to their best abilities, helped each other by supporting each other:

(...) There was such close cooperation. It's hard for me to even separate what we did and what the district did, because everyone actually helped each other. There was no such thing as a boarding house getting some help for itself, let's say for these refugees, and they didn't share it. They shared; they even gave us diapers for these kids. They got it. They knew they were needed, so they gave them to us here. (B_INF10_M)

The results reveal that there were many positive experiences in cooperation between various actors (see Table 19), *those who felt the need and were able to devote their private time were with us shoulder to shoulder. There were many such people. So, we weren't looking for volunteers. We were not looking for people of good will. Yes, there were organized meetings to which we invited organizations. Maybe it happened twice. We divided the roles because we knew what was being done. Organizations also supported us. (...) (S_INF16_M)*

The crisis triggered among the members of both communities the sense of *communitas* (Drury et al., 2009), which empowered the actors to be helpful and useful. Hence, whenever necessary, the actors were also helping each other to make the humanitarian aid front even stronger. *Communitas* enhanced the actors' collaboration capacity. The people involved transformed into an a 'helping community' or a 'community of helpers' who, maybe, did not know each other, but trusted each other as they shared the same goal to help the people in need. *Communitas* may be behind very active and good cooperation even if central coordination was lacking. The people were willing to get involved, and this was the main driving force behind the response.

Table 19. Code – experiences in cooperating with various actors

Subcode	Quote	Number of informants
Supporting each other by helping each other	<i>Well, actually, I guess that's it. Although, when it comes to the boarding school, here, because the boarding school also housed refugees, but they had it as if they were getting their resources from the county. But it was also the cooperation with the director, when I called and said I needed something, they had it, they also provided me with this help. (B INF10 M)</i>	10
Perfect coordination and work despite a lack of central coordination	<i>Suddenly, it was just like this: the phones were ringing off the hook, but there was very little central coordination. It turned out that we worked perfectly, but, unfortunately, sometimes central coordination can do more damage than it could fix. (B INF1 V)</i>	4
Good and smooth cooperation	<i>However, it turned out that it all worked out very nicely. People, even if someone couldn't drive themselves, said: take my car. Well, as I said, from the very beginning, I am not even able to recreate it day by day, but whether it was my action or the action here, let's say in this community, it was very spontaneous and actually express from the very beginning. (B INF1 V)</i>	4
Very active cooperation	<i>Yes, as I have already mentioned, this cooperation was no longer so official that we would send a letter to each other. Only it was, I don't know if it would be a good word, a lively cooperation. As I say, our ties are definitely getting closer, whether with units such as the Museum, the Bieckie Cultural Centre, or the volunteer fire department. (B INF10 M)</i>	1

Source: created by the author

The results demonstrate that the cooperation between different actors involved in the response became ever closer and more solidified because of the ties getting strengthened over time (see Table 20).

Table 20. Code – evaluation of cooperation prior to and after crisis

Subcode	Quote	Number of informants
More trust built	<i>It seemed like... You know, let's call it trust, i.e., people who, for example, are not going with me, but know that if they deliver something to me, it will arrive, right? (B_INF1_V)</i>	7
Ties strengthened	<i>Not like a patient and a doctor, but on the basis that we are here and are trying to help both us and you. And it was so nice because these doctors weren't so formal. (B_INF10)</i>	3

Source: created by the author

Because of the unprecedented context, very often, the actors involved in the response who were cooperating with each other, did not know each prior to the emergency. Yet, they did manage to optimally allocate the available resources and abilities in their response to the crisis (Flint & Luloff, 2007). One of the reasons for this smooth and effective cooperation was the trust which, as an outcome of such a cooperation, was strengthened. Trust, alongside the geographical, historical and *memoryscape* concepts, which were not included in the conceptual framework, emerges as a potential community resilience dimension which affected the response to the crisis in a positive way. Because of trust, the people who were, in many cases, strangers to each other, managed to collaborate. Trust was also strengthened among those actors who had known each other prior, but who did not cooperate very often. The response to the crisis in an unprecedented context made people overcome the trust issues in order to provide the optimal help and support. Trusting each other transformed collaboration into a more effective and positive experience.

3.3.5. Social networks

The results reveal that a very important link between the actors involved in the response and the mobilization of resources was the social networks, namely, the actors' private and/or professional contacts. Due to the social networks of friends, acquaintances, family members and relatives as well as other contacts, information about the needs was traveling quicker, and the aid logistics were smoother, more efficient and effective (see Table 21). For the code classification of cooperation, several subcodes have been coded. The cooperation between the actors involved in the response can be categorized as cross-sectoral, where private individuals were very closely cooperating with employees from the Municipality Offices and other institutions, as well as the other way round (see Table 21). As a result of this type of cooperation, a strong bonding of formal and informal ties developed (see Table 21). The results also show that cooperation between the actors helping the Ukrainian refugees was very tight (see Table 21). Another form of cooperation was based on the sharing and exchange of information, which is a critical element in the response to the refugee and humanitarian crisis. Among private individuals, the cooperation was less structured and hierarchical; it was rather freestyle and based on a chain of help in

comparison with the helpers from State Offices/ public institutions and facilities (see Table 21). The results demonstrate a positive outcome of such an active, rather unstructured and uncoordinated cooperation with the actors involved in helping, the community resilience dimension of social networks did play a major role in responding to this crisis in many facets of such a response:

It's amazing, because virtually everyone here knows each other, so we know that there is an empty house there, I can call there, maybe they will accept it. Or maybe this lady is looking for someone? (B_INF18_M)

The results reveal that the experiences of using private and professional social networks were versatile in their scale and scope, and yet they shared a common denominator, the intention to activate and mobilize all possible social networks to respond to the crisis (see Table 21). Frequently, the division between professional and social networks was disappearing in order to smoothen the process of organizing help for the refugees:

At a certain stage, it is difficult to distinguish whether this contact is more private or perhaps more official. Well, because it's based on help. Later, it is difficult to organize whether it was private help, or as part of work, or... (B_INF7_CM)

The main resource or commodity shared and exchanged in social networks was the information about the specific needs or aid offered:

Only here, even on this local, let's say, market, there was an exchange of information in quotation marks: Okay, we have this, this and this, someone there has this and this, and suddenly we made, for example, five packages out of it and sent it there, right? Information. Information ruled out the chaos, and it really was... Anyway, I will insist that this is the most important thing, the most important thing that existed here. This information. Anyway, my experience with driving East is the same. Information. Because you can overshoot. (B_INF1_V)

The actors' social networks were also important because it was also a platform to access, share and/or distribute information which, as in the case of community resilience, regarding resources, was a major resource for social networks: *Well, here it was... The network of personal contacts was dominant, I think. In other words, most information is exchanged through a network of personal and professional contacts. (...) However, I think that most of them were based on such private contacts and exchange of information between private groups. I'm talking about groups because, often, it was, I don't know, a family or a group of friends.* (B_INF8_V)

Out of social networks, new spontaneous groups or chains of helpers emerged to join in forces and help together:

See how this spontaneous system worked. A man from the Netherlands sends me money. I call a man in Jasło who sells used washing machines, and the moment he finds out that I need to buy for 2500 PLN washing machines but not two new ones, but used ones, that there will be more of them, but still where they will function for a year, two, three, well, first of all, the guy, a young boy too, brings down the price, and secondly, when I come to collect them, I have washing machines which, considering second-hand washing machines, they really look like new ones, they still function. (B_INF1_V)

The results reveal that the strong social capital generated by private and professional social networks, which, over time, become even more cross-sectoral, and ties were depended upon, they did substantially contribute to a more resilient response:

So, I don't know how the contacts are going, but I think that these phones and the contacts that have already been established there, if something like this were to happen again, I think that we would be able to organize ourselves faster, because we already have people who trusted us, people who know that this is not some group that cannot be trusted and entrusted with various things. He could even leave the equipment with us (...) or other things with us for safekeeping or something, and we took care of them, and it was no problem. I also think that such cooperation has already been established, and we know that sometimes, at least in our group, these institutions can be trusted, and they know what is going on. (S_INF10_M)

The findings indicate that social networks are one of the biggest assets for community resilience:

I also think so, because the people around you are very important, because a person alone, in my opinion, can do much more with people around him who are also open [to providing help]. (B_INF11_CM)

Table 21. Code – classification of cooperation

Subcode	Quote	Number of informants
Cross-sectoral with bonding formal/official and informal ties	<i>It will definitely strengthen our contacts, not on an official level, but more on a friendly level, like this is what I need, you arrange it for me. So, it was a way of strengthening our bonds, not only those related to work. But, with such functioning in society, with interpersonal contacts. (B INF10 M)</i>	9
Chain of help	<i>Well, and someone who was in Biecz and really wanted to help, there was such a chain, that I got information, this information went through the museum staff here, it went in all directions, and suddenly we didn't get random cans of "Bebiko 3" milk, but suddenly it turned out that someone brought, for example, this zero milk, went to the pharmacy and bought four, since it was known that it would be useful. (B INF1 V)</i>	6
Very close	<i>(...). It was really close cooperation. It's hard for me to even separate what we did and what the county did, because everyone actually helped each other. (B INF10 M)</i>	5
Based on sharing and exchange of information	<i>The most important form of cooperation was information. From my point of view, it was very important. Information about what is needed, where it is needed, and depending on the sort of redirection, if, I don't know, you need, say, shoes, right? Suddenly, it was like this information, it was nice that, when asked what we needed, we received extremely specific information. It wasn't the answer: everything. We knew that everything was needed in this first phase. (B INV1 V)</i>	4
Freestyle	<i>It's freestyle, but in my opinion, this freestyle, I don't know if it would work the second time, because, I think, we're a little bit wiser, so it would look a little different now, but the spontaneity of the people and us also very quickly turned into just that they know (...) Someone who called the museum didn't call to ask after just three days where to bring it, because they knew where, they just called to ask what was needed. (B INF1 V)</i>	4

Source: created by the author

The results also reveal that the experience of using networking sites was very positive as this tool very frequently proved to be crucial to reach out and access social networks and remain in constant touch while sustaining communication:

It would really be problematic to come and arrange it and enter it on paper or some other way. And when you went through these instant messengers, it was really quick,

and you could immediately see who, where, when, where there was a gap, who to look for. It went very fast. Then, it helped with communication. (S_INF10_M)

The same as in case of agency and resources, social networks affected the response in a positive way. They allowed the actors involved in the response to access diverse resources (Chayko, 2015), for instance, material or non-material ones, which were mobilized and distributed according to demand. In times of this specific crisis, social networks proved to be an invaluable platform/capital to help the actors meet even the most unexpected needs required in a crisis situation (House et al., 1988).

3.3.6. Local knowledge and leadership

The results of the empirical data analysis demonstrate that, in the context of the Polish border region communities' response to the humanitarian and refugee crisis, the local knowledge generated by the community members was specific information which helped avoid chaos in the local humanitarian aid landscape, as well as enabled a quicker response to meet the needs of the refugees (see also Table 22):

Very quickly, it turned out that we didn't have to, and we informed about it through our contacts so as not to go to the border without any specific purpose. It was launched very quickly, our friend from Ustrzyki, who has family here in Biecz, and was very involved in the adaptation Center in Łodyna, and it was she who informed us:

We need quilts, we need blankets, we need this. (B_INF1_V)

Table 22. Code – local knowledge and leadership

Subcode	Quote	Number of informants
Information helping to avoid chaos	<i>(...) If you came to the Museum and asked if you had any contacts in the East, you would be immediately redirected either to me or to X, or, yes, we would provide advice and help. Including this, we are, I think, able to answer questions about what is needed now, where this help will reach, and so on and so forth. (B_INF1_V)</i>	13
Specific insider experiential knowledge	<i>I think it's a result of, I don't know, knowledge, experience or the fact that I don't go where I have no idea. If I had to go to Michalovce or Uzhhorod, I would go, I know this crossing, I have entered or left Ukraine through this place many times. (B_INF1_V)</i>	10

Source: created by the author

Local knowledge was sought by actors such as the local media, Municipality, as well as private individuals who wanted to receive most accurate correct and useful information about the needs of the refugees from those who were the most active on the humanitarian aid front and who had themselves the most updated information about the needs of the refugees in Poland, and those still remaining in Ukraine:

We were creating a database. These job offers are from the residents from the database, offering a job, offering a place to live. All the information from the residents by phone, and online via e-mail. Later, we created a special website where (...) thanks to the Internet, the residents could enter information. (S_INF19_M)

Also, previous personal experiences and know-how in responding to any similar crisis were quite important in assuming some form of an effective role in the new response to the crisis:

The first very strong situation was the Ukrainian Maidan. 2009, right? Yes, 2009, I think I remember correctly. Where... But it was help... It was help back then, to a large extent, at least my family relied on donations. I mean, we sent money, right? As if we knew that, from this distance, it didn't even occur to me to organize transport and take it there. We rather relied on contacts in Ukraine and on the fact that we knew that the money was paid there, for example, to the accounts of friends or to the accounts of institutions that we knew quite well, would not go away, would not disappear, right? Then it was 2014, and here the commitment was greater, because people also appeared here, injured people appeared, there was already help for the Crimean Tatars, help for people from Donetsk, from Luhansk, and also for the boys, for the boys who were already fighting then. (B_INF1_V)

The results demonstrate that not all research participants were able to compare or find similarities with the previous crises they had undergone with the one caused by the Russian invasion of Ukraine (see also Table 23):

Completely two separate areas. It wasn't the same. (S_INF16_M)

Table 23. Code – previous experience in response to crisis

Subcode	Quote	Number of informants
No comparable previous experience	<i>No, I have never experienced such a crisis. (S_INF1_CM)</i>	9
COVID-19 pandemic	COVID was before this crisis (B_INF10_M)	8
Comparable previous experience	<i>The first very strong situation was the Ukrainian Maidan. 2009, right? Yes, 2009, I think I remember correctly. Where... But it was help... It was help back then, to a large extent, at least my family relied on donations. I mean, we sent money, right? As if we knew that from this distance, it didn't even occur to me to organize transport and take it [i.e., donations] there. (B_INF8 V)</i>	5
Flood	<i>We had a flood. Well, then that's it. I didn't work at the office yet, because I worked a little later, but, from what we later had in the papers and documentation, that's all. (B_INF10 M)</i>	3
Drought/water shortage	<i>There were situations related to, for example, the drought and lack of water for the residents. Then, the office also reacted quickly. But it was only between the office, the guards, and the people in need. (B_INF10 M)</i>	1

Source: created by the author

The findings show that the decisions of the actors involved in response were taken by them in different ways (see Table 24).

Table 24. Code – decision making process

Subcode	Quote	Number of informants
Top-down at the institutional level	<i>Well, at the beginning, the Mayor told us ‘yes’, this is to help people, GDPR [i.e., matters of legal data protection], we will explain ourselves later. That’s what it looked like too. The Mayor certainly had his superiors, so to speak. On the voivode’s order, the voivode often sent orders what needed to be implemented. (B INF10 M)</i>	12
Bottom-up at the community level	<i>I mean, honestly, speaking backwards, it’s like I didn’t cooperate with the Municipality, as I did, and I didn’t have any contact, but I also didn’t feel like I had such a need, because the residents showed better speed of decision and speed of action than institutions. (B INF1 V)</i>	9
Quick	<i>In fact, people very quickly, you know... Firstly, they understood, secondly, they helped. You know, everyone helped as much as they could. And kudos to them for that. (B INF1 V)</i>	7
Unanimous	<i>Decisions were made very unanimously, at least here where I work. (B INF1 V)</i>	4
Internal	<i>(...) We also made a decision very quickly here, let’s say, among the employees, what we were allowed to do. (B INF1 V)</i>	2

Source: created by the author

The findings imply that, in the interview group of the volunteers, there was no clear single formal or informal actor who would take the strong leadership in this group. In this unprecedented situation, leadership was somewhat diffuse (see Table 25):

To put it this way. Everyone found their own place there. You know, it was an informal group, so there was no manager, there was no boss, there was no one who ordered you to do this, to do that, and everyone was there to do what they felt good (...)
S_INF8_V and S_INF9_V)

Table 25. Code – leadership in the group

Subcode	Quote	Number of informants
A group of individual leaders (everyone is their own leader)	<i>I mean, in other words, without a leader, while very quickly, very quickly, specializations just came in, right? That is, Damian, who goes to Transcarpathia, me, who goes here, let's say, to the Lviv Oblast area, well it's like that, you know, very quickly, we were able to decide what is what, wherever needed, and it didn't come from having a leader or being, wanting to be a leader. (B_INF1_V)</i>	6
Lack of central one-person leadership	<i>I will emphasize again, there was no central coordination, whereas, very nicely, this machine played itself. I think this is a result of, I don't know, knowledge, experience, or the fact that I don't push myself where I have no idea. (B_INF1_V)</i>	5
Nucleus of those who established the group	<i>I also understand those people who founded this group, who created it, who cleared the rubble in the place there, who did it. That's the core that pulled it all together from the beginning, and later some groups of people formed there, who have more of those leadership qualities there, so to speak, and took over that management of it. (S_INF10_V)</i>	3

Source: created by the author

The results reveal that there was no sole leading organization in both communities in charge of the response, or which would coordinate the activities on the local (self-government) level (see Table 26).

Table 26. Code – leading organization

Subcode	Quote	Number of informants
Partial coordination of the response	<i>In an hour I had a phone call. Listen, everything is organized. You have everything organized. So, it's really from every side that this aid ran here for the refugees, and we as an office it's so largely from the office too, but we kind of coordinated it between these different institutions. (B_INF10_M)</i>	6
Lack of central State coordination, and lack of leading organization	<i>(...) The lack of coordination of the Municipality, services and so on, took its toll on the fact that we did it all right. (B_INF1_V)</i>	2

Source: created by the author

The findings also indicate that, at the State (Government) level, there was also no organization which would be considered to be the leading one in the response (see Table 26).

The results confirm that the local experiential knowledge generated within both communities, and also due to the active social networks, was highly useful in tackling many issues and solving problems as well as helpful in making the actors within the communities aware of their own strengths and vulnerabilities. Yet, the scale and the nature of the crisis they tried to cope with was new, and, as it has already been suggested several times above, unprecedented. Some actors did have the experience of responding to earlier crises in Ukraine but the one caused by the Russian invasion in 2022 was a new experience on many levels. Neither the informal actors and the communities they belonged to, nor the formal actors were prepared to face this crisis. Therefore, there was a lack of centralized coordination, or partial coordination, or a leading organization in charge of crisis management which, from the very first day, would be able to coordinate the response. In view of those circumstances, specifically at the very beginning of this turmoil, the response was organized mainly by the civilian population in a bottom-up manner. As a consequence, leadership was diffused. In *ad hoc* created groups of volunteers, the helpers were their own leaders. It was not about leading a group, but rather about leading activities in order to be more effective and efficient. With time, helpers transformed into experts (Konsti-Laakso & Rantala, 2018) in their field, depending on the profile of their activity at the humanitarian aid front. Despite many limitations stemming from the lack of unified coordination or diffuse leadership, the communities did exercise their own local leadership by somehow intuitively knowing that they need and want to share a common ground in order to cope with the outcomes of the massive inflow of people from Ukraine to Poland. This leadership empowered the communities to constantly look for solutions to the problems and challenges created by the crisis (Helfgott, 2018).

3.3.7. Human values

The results indicate that, in both Polish border communities, their values were indeed activated, and, among them, solidarity:

But I think that this solidarity, our solidarity with other nations, also showed that they are not alone, because, maybe, they could not survive this long on their own; (B_INF18_M) but such human solidarity, and here, I think, that Biecz passed the test very well. (B_INF1_V)

The findings also imply that empathy was also activated in response to the crisis (see Table 27).

The research participants did respond to this unprecedented situation according to their values and beliefs:

That's how it should be. It's just the way it should be. We have to help people, we helped ourselves when we could, when we could help someone, if we could. And, in our lives, there were also situations in our private lives when we helped people, sometimes complete strangers, in different situations, in different ways, because we think that's how it should be. We were raised that way and that was the need (...) if you see a person in need, then help them, give them a hand, someone falls down then pick them up. If I can help, why not do it? This is so normal. This is also a certain result of life experience, I think so, because there were situations in our lives that we

ourselves needed help and people helped us. And we think this is normal (S_INF8_V and S_INF9_V)

For others, it even meant leaving their comfort zone and resigning from their own benefits for the sake of those in need (see Table 27):

They use it as an office once a month, so I thought it was crazy, as there was a mother with children here. (...) So I decided this was more important. (S_INF26_CM)

The findings indicate that other research participants were also strongly motivated to help the refugees in order to overcome the feeling of hopelessness, as well as lack of agency and remorse:

(...) As we were talking about it yesterday, that it's just a bit of selfishness. Well, I felt completely different after that first day. I felt better myself, but secondly, of course, simple empathy. As I imagined that there were mothers with small children sitting on this border in the dark, without food, because it was February, sitting. (B_INF8_V)

Because I think I was in such a stage of bewilderment (...) and at such a point in my life that I felt bad not helping. (B_INF13_CM)

Helping was a natural way to solidarize with people whose homeland had been militarily attacked; it was not actually a decision:

It was a reflex, something completely normal. (...) I think I even wrote somewhere that it's human. (S_INF8_V and S_INF9_V)

Table 27. Code – value which triggered action/response

Subcode	Quote	Number of informants
Altruism	<i>But I can help. I don't have to be selfish that I have to have it done right now. I can wait a year or two and help someone, because, maybe, someone is more in need. It's like, if I have something, why shouldn't I share it? I can share. (S_INF1_CM)</i>	11
Compassion	<i>Because of compassion. I always try to place myself in someone else's situation. I can't imagine that such a tragedy would happen to us and that someone, some human being, wouldn't help us. (B_INF7_CM).</i>	7
Empathy	<i>(...) You know, everyone seems to me to be human. It is necessary to help. The office is, you know, an institution, but an institution is made up of people. Well, and some are maybe more empathetic, others less empathetic, but everyone feels for another person, that someone needs to be helped, that bad things are happening there, that they need to be taken in. (B_INF10_M)</i>	6
Egoism	<i>It means, as we were talking about yesterday, that it's just a bit of egoism. Well, I felt completely different after that first day. I felt better myself, but secondly, of course, simple empathy. (B_INF8_V)</i>	5
Humanity	<i>Humanity? I think it is an obligation. I never think about it, for me, the color of my skin, nationality and such are things to be proud of, while they are not an indicator of whether I will help someone or not. Besides, I don't treat it as help. In the sense that I treat it as a duty, because, well, injustices happen all over the world, but this does not mean that I agree with it. (B_INF1_V)</i>	4
Solidarity	<i>(...) but such human solidarity, and here, I think, Biecz passed the test very nicely. (B_INF1_V)</i>	3
Benevolence	<i>I don't need it. I don't need it, to be clear, because, for me, it's not needed for anything. But, maybe, other people need it to say thank you somehow, to stand out somehow. I don't know, I didn't need it. I didn't need it for anything. (S_INF1_CM)</i>	2

Source: created by the author

The results imply that, in the context of the role of the individual risk perception in this response to the crisis, a value of humanity has been also recognized by many research participants as a value at stake which needs to be protected:

It's scary to think about what will happen in the world in the future for people who have children, I don't even want to think about it. This can happen. Because this is not going to be good. Crisis after crisis, and I hope that it won't go this way, that we

will lose our humanity at some point, and this is what all this may lead to, and that we will simply maintain our mental fortitude and morality, that we can count on each other at any time and support each other in some way. (S_INF10_V)

The results confirm that human values did activate pro-social and helping behaviors towards other people (Cole & Habashi, 2020). Values were essential in guiding the actors in their decision-making process. It is of interest to find that, somehow, the motivation to act and the values which triggered action could be either used interchangeably, or are the same. In other cases of responses to refugee/humanitarian crises triggered in other European countries, solidarity is usually the most common value, the “flagship value or an ‘umbrella’ value which is the representation or the epitome of the main motivations and intentions of people helping other people” (Serntedakis, 2016; Fotaki, 2021).

3.4. Crisis Management – Civil Preparedness, Reconstruction and Recovery

The results reveal that the refugee and humanitarian crisis, which also affected Poland and the Polish border region communities in Biecz and Suwałki, was an experience which provided a source of various lessons to be learned. Those could be valuable in enhancing community resilience in response to the crisis, which could specifically affect the preparedness stage, an active phase in the crisis management cycle (see Table 28).

Table 28. Code – lessons learned

Subcode	Quote	Number of informants
It is necessary to help each other	<i>A lesson, a lesson for the future, that we need to help, we need to help, that helping Not always. It only involves pluses, because helping varies. Sometimes we may get upset at different situations, but it is necessary to help, and we must help, because it is most important. (B INF10 M)</i>	8
It is impossible to prepare for a crisis	<i>On the other hand, we will never be prepared for aggression and for a conflict. (B INF1 V)</i>	7
To improve coordination and communication channels	<i>But I missing such someone who I could talk to, because if there is something I go to a fireman, and then to someone else. Or maybe it would be enough to have such a single person in the city, who would then coordinate directly already by herself and distribute it (S INF10 V)</i>	6
Not able to learn lessons	<i>On the other hand, well, sort of, oh my. I think we are the kind of society that thinks “man learns from mistakes”. If man learned from his mistakes, then we would be a land of milk and honey, right? As you can see, well, we are not. And we won’t happen. (B INF1 V)</i>	3
It is possible to function with a limited number of items	<i>(...) These are my only such conclusions from this, already very much my personal one, is that I don’t need as much stuff as I have. I really think so. I have too much of everything. Because when I looked at them when they came to see me, they really only needed a few things. (...) (S INF1 M)</i>	2
Russia-Ukraine war and crisis as an opportunity to learn a lesson	<i>(...) I think we can just learn a lot through what has happened. (B_INF1_V)</i>	1

Source: created by the author

The analysis has also identified future challenges to be worked on in order to enhance community resilience in response to a crisis, especially during the proactive stage of preparedness prior to a crisis situation (see Table 29).

Table 29. Code – future challenges

Subcode	Quote	Number of informants
Russia-Ukraine war as a long-distance race	<i>The biggest challenges from my point of view (...) is despite this very spontaneous spurt, well for which I have great respect (...) no one wanted to listen, or maybe listened (...) I'm not that optimistic (...) I, from the very beginning, said that this would be a long-distance run, however. It won't be over after three months. There was 'hurrah' optimism, there was that here-and-now, whereas, listen, long-term actions. This is, the first point is that, it won't end. (B_INF1_V)</i>	13
Building awareness of the neighbors/ Getting to know the neighbor/process of integration	<i>On the other hand, in the future, I think, to build such awareness here as well. Awareness that (...) our neighbor doesn't threaten us, right? I think that's how I would put it. (B_INF1_V)</i>	5
Opportunity/potential to build anew	<i>(...) We have a huge trade market, we just wanted to trade, yes, after the war. I'm already looking at (...) what's going to happen after the war, we'll never be ready for any aggression, but, after the war, we can take advantage of what happened, actually, and build (...) new relations, build new economic relations (...). (B_INF1_V)</i>	5
Escalation of the Ukraine-Russia conflict leading to another wave of refugees from Ukraine and Belarus	<i>But, as the saying goes, you want peace, get ready for a war. That is, we have to be prepared. For different situations, and, I think, we are certainly not one hundred percent [ready], because I will not hide the fact that one is never one hundred percent prepared. Now, it was supposed to happen that this migrant crisis would resume, and another such wave of, let's say, refugees, would move in, or from Ukraine, or let's say, even from Belarus, because it's different, these can look like different situations. (B_INF10_M)</i>	2
Migration crisis at the border with Belarus	<i>We also have a crisis on the Belarusian border, and I don't even mean refugees of the Belarusian origin, but let's say Somalis and other refugees. I'm not in a position to say what it would look like if it was escalated. If it would look like it does now, we know what to expect. But if it would be an intensified situation, it could be different. (B_INF10_M)</i>	1
To rebuild and reconstruct Ukraine	<i>(...) we can say (...) Ukraine will have to be rebuilt. (B_INF10_M)</i>	1

Source: created by the author

The results demonstrate that the process of learning lessons and identifying future challenges either on an individual, collective, or national, or even global level,

with the involvement of outside actors, like Russia or Ukraine (see Table 29), reflects the Sendai Framework agenda which, among other points, vocalized the need for a broader and a more people-centered approach to disaster risk, an improved understanding of the disaster risk in the area of exposure, vulnerability and preparedness as well the need to recognize actors and their roles by engaging with the relevant stakeholders in the design and implementation of the policies, plans and standards to build a stronger resilience (The Sendai Framework, 2015). In the light of above mentioned several points of the Sendai Framework agenda, the experiences, the lessons learned, and the future challenges identified by the actors directly involved in response, especially the civilian population in the communities affected by a crisis, are a valuable source of experiential knowledge on which the governments could build the knowledge pool for the purpose of pre-disaster risk assessment, for the prevention and mitigation, as well as for the development and implementation of preparedness and an effective response to crises and disasters, which is referred to as ‘build back better’ (The Sendai Framework, 2015). This experiential knowledge could be further leveraged by government officials at all levels, the civil society, communities and volunteers, as well as the private sector, through sharing experiences, lessons learned, good practices, as well as training and education on the disaster risk reduction and crisis mitigation (The Sendai Framework, 2015).

In the context of *risksapes*, such experiential knowledge could be employed by the governments to develop, periodically update and disseminate, as appropriate, location-based disaster risk information, including risk maps, to the decision makers, the general public, and to communities at risk of an exposure to a disaster (The Sendai Framework, 2015).

3.5. Comparative Analysis of two Polish Border Communities

The results reveal that some dimensions, such as agency, resources, social networks and collaboration capacity, were activated in a similar way in both communities:

Of course, it's not just us who did it, but, after a few days, there was quite a large group of people, mostly friends, just people who kind of joined in. (B_INF8_V)

The agency exercised in both communities was immediate, and very often, individual and independent:

There was no other option. Simply. This is due to the fact that this is a human being, and people, and we simply need to help each other, especially in such traumatic situations. (B_INF18_CM)

Both communities followed similar ways and strategies to either mobilize the already existing resources, or to access the ones not yet available to them:

It really went through different channels. Sometimes it happens that cooperation with such a store has been established. (...) Toys. And they do every now and then.

Such a company is simply a matter of fact that they wanted it to exist somewhere on Facebook, somewhere, and they brought really big things to these kids, in fact, most of them brought it privately from their homes. There were also larger institutions that provided some things like wholesalers, stores, someone knew someone somewhere. (S_INF10_V)

The cooperation capacity and social networks did play a critical role in accessing those resources, either by donations, collection of aid, approaching sponsors, etc. Both communities made very extensive use of their own private and professional social networks:

It seems like a lot. Although I didn't use it personally and it was just a phone call. But I also followed Suwałki for the Ukraine Facebook profile to see all the collections of aid, aid stations, and so on. I think that, unfortunately, we have to pay tribute to the social media here, because I think that people also use it as a medium, they use this thing. (S_INF26_CM)

Alike, the bottom-up initiatives of volunteers and community members were, within due time, supported by institutional ones which followed within approximately one-two weeks since the beginning of the invasion. Yet, they were on a different scale in Biecz and Suwałki, as Biecz hosted much fewer refugees arriving and residing than in Suwałki, which, for many refugees, was a communication hub allowing to transit to destination countries, such as the Baltic states. Biecz welcomed groups of refugees within some time, and Suwałki received hundreds of passengers on a single train during the day (in the most intense time of the invasion, till almost June 2022). It is very vivid that the very first reactions and responses triggered by the information about the Russian invasion of Ukraine were also very similar in Biecz and Suwałki. Both communities expressed fear, panic, and prominently increased uncertainty about the next step of Putin in Ukraine, and how this could impact Poland as a neighboring country:

We even had a feeling, I remember it that way, because my grandmother was turning 80. The first weekend after the war broke out. And we were generally afraid to go to the North of Poland from here. Well, we were afraid, because it was that period where planes were circling over our heads. And well, and, in general, such a situation was very uncertain. (B_INF7_CM)

They also articulated:

That, from the mouths of U.S. officials, it was quite loud. It resonated. I will honestly say that it aroused tremendous fear at the time. Hence, perhaps from there, many citizens felt (...) or perhaps they feared that they could do the same to us. Is it going to be very noisy at this end of Poland? (S_INF16_M)

Interestingly, similar values activated the agency, mainly humanity and empathy, which led some of the research participants to leave their comfort zone in order to help others in need:

We returned home, and it didn't give us any peace. How can you, not nicely speaking, leave people in a hole? And return to your warm home and feel comfortable. (S_INF8_V and S_INF9_V)

The local leadership style or management was quite alike, namely, there was no leading organization in both communities which would be fully in charge of this crisis situation management. It was more of a diffuse leadership of individual leaders:

I mean I tried not to take (decisions) on my own (...); there was no leader in this initiative, I mean someone had to shout sometimes that okay, it's over, we're going

with this bus. Well, but it was rather not in the nature of any leadership, but rather it was all collective.

No one on their own, nothing on their own, I tried not to do anything on my own, because it's like I could do it myself. Because this was not the leader's initiative. Sometimes someone had to shout that, okay, it's over, we're going on this bus. Well, it probably didn't have any character. Leadership, but rather it was all collective.
(B_INF8_V)

When the response was supported by institutional actors, the Municipalities in Biecz and Suwaki only partially coordinated this response:

Well, there was some coordination in the [Municipality] Office. But we immediately called meetings with NGOs to see who wants to help. There were always Ukrainians at these meetings or someone from the union to assess what they needed; such meetings were only aimed at helping Ukrainians. (S_INF18_M)

In the case of Biecz, it was again on a smaller scale, whereas, in Suwałki, it was bigger in size. In both communities, there were mass accommodation points which were organized by the local government actors, but only in Suwałki a reception point was created; it operated at Suwałki Train Station, and this reception point at the very beginning of the invasion was built solely bottom-up. Civil preparedness seems to be a weak point of both communities and the corresponding local governments, but this is the consequence of a 'not-increased' civil preparedness and awareness as well as the need to improve this dimension at the State level.

Table 30. Code – comparison of community resilience dimensions

	Biecz	Suwałki
First reactions and perceptions of risk	Mainly panic, fear and a feeling of hopelessness, especially at the very beginning of the invasion followed by the decision to act; Poland could be the next target; Biecz is rather safe yet because of the close proximity to Rzeszów, a military hub for helping Ukraine, whereas, in Ukraine, in fact, anything can happen anytime.	Mainly panic and fear, especially related to the invasion, followed by the decision to act; Poland could be the next target; awareness of the community in relation to the fact that Suwałki, because of the Suwalki Gap is in a geographically vulnerable region exposed to threats, risks and hazards.
Community resilience		
Agency	Definitely and almost immediately triggered by the developments that followed after Russia invaded Ukraine.	Definitely and almost immediately triggered by the developments that followed after Russia invaded Ukraine.
Resources	Resources collected, mobilized, mainly distributed in Ukraine and partially redistributed in Biecz.	Resources collected, mobilized, mainly redistributed in Suwałki and partially distributed in Ukraine.

Collaboration capacity	Smooth, good, effective despite minor conflicts or tensions; focus not on conflicts but on helping others.	Smooth, good, effective despite minor conflicts or tensions; focus not on conflicts but on helping others.
Social networks	Extensive use of both private and professional networks which, within time, blend and become one social network; critical in effective response; the outcome: more trust built.	Extensive use of both private and professional networks which, within time, blend and become one social network; critical in effective response; the outcome: more trust built.
Local knowledge and leadership	Used mainly within the community by actors such as local individuals; lack of one central leadership; diffused leadership.	Used within the community by actors such as the Municipality, local media, and local individuals; lack of one central leadership; partial coordination of the activities by the Municipality.
Human values	A very similar set of values to that of Suwałki, which triggered action in response to a crisis; leading value – humanity.	A very similar set of values to that of Biecz, which triggered action in response to a crisis; leading value – empathy.
Civil preparedness	Limited awareness of civil preparedness on the individual level and community level; weak civil preparedness on the institutional level.	Limited awareness of civil preparedness on the individual level and community level; weak civil preparedness on the institutional level.

Source: created by the author

Both communities were ready to respond to the crisis which affected them but did not directly happen to them, like in the case of helping others – i.e., refugees from Ukraine, but they are not necessarily ready to help themselves when a crisis happens literally to them. This entails that both communities are fully capable of responding to an ‘indirect’ crisis by skillfully, very effectively and very efficiently activating different dimensions and capacities on both individual and community levels, but they have not reflected about how they would react and what they would do if they had to respond to such an emergency.

3.6. Discussion

The results of the qualitative analysis organized around the research concept of individual risk perception and its role in a response to a crisis, suggest that, in times of a crisis which heightens uncertainty, ontological security may be an empowering coping mechanism to deal with fear and uncertainty as both risk perception and uncertainty call for action and response, they trigger agency on the individual and community levels, which was manifested in both communities when making decisions and taking action (Mitzen, 2006).

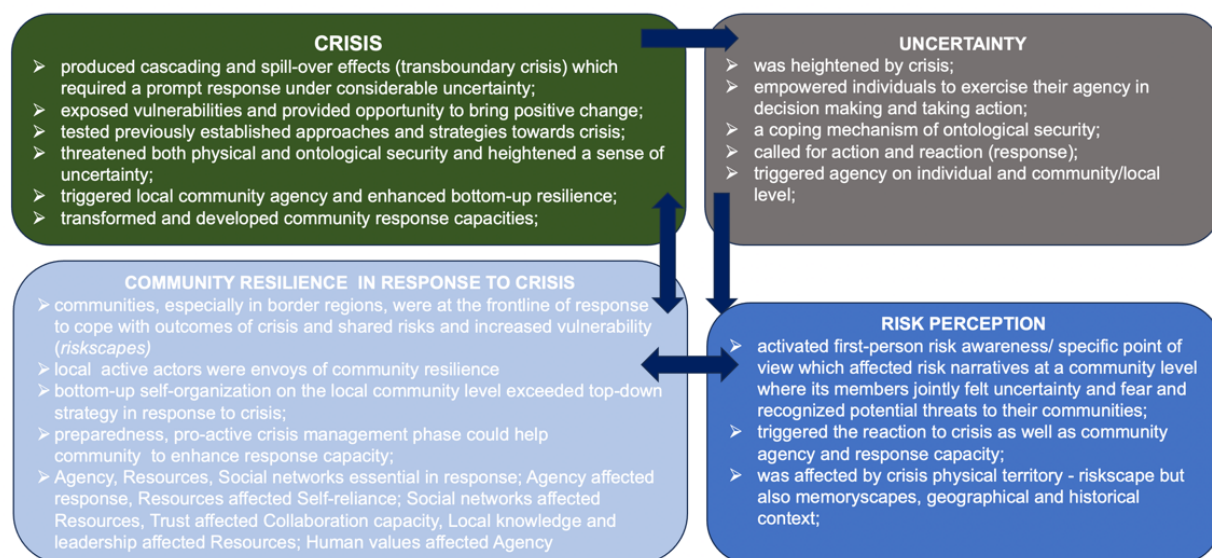


Fig. 7. Summary of main findings developed by the author

The information about the Russian aggression against Ukraine did indeed provoke an emotional upheaval (Homolar & Scholz, 2019) which manifested itself in a heightened sense of fear and uncertainty (Mitzen, 2006). This event did disrupt the ontological security of individuals, and yet, at the same time, empowered them to act in their response to the crisis. In many instances, being involved in helping refugees from Ukraine helped the respondents restore and ensure their sense of ontological security (Gustafsson & Krickel-Choi, 2020), and, as a result, manage to cope with fear and uncertainty. Moreover, the geographical context, specifically, that of the respondents from Suwałki (Suwałki Gap), did affect the perception of risk (Tierney et al., 2001), which translated into a heightened fear, and, in many instances, panic that the physical territory of Suwałki may be affected by this disruption and remain under threat due to the close proximity of Poland's neighbors of the Russian exclave of Kaliningrad Oblast and Belarus.

Those individual perceptions indeed triggered the collective community agency and response capacity within the community in Suwałki (the Suwałki Gap) (Flint & Luloff, 2005; Greider & Garkovich, 1994; Gustafson, 2001; Manzo, 2005). Furthermore, the findings demonstrate a strong collective mobilization in response to a crisis as the research participants in both communities recognized some common values being at stake because of this threat (Almeida, 2019; Scott, 2023), namely, peace and humanity being at stake not only in Ukraine, but also in other European countries, and, among them, Poland, as a result of further developments in the Russia-Ukraine crisis.

In the context of the role of individual risk perception in the response to the refugee and humanitarian crisis caused by the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the results of the qualitative data analysis demonstrate that the Russian military aggression against Ukraine in 2022, which forced an unprecedented massive migration of people from Ukraine who fled their attacked homeland to seek safety and security in Poland and other parts of the world, was a precursor of an interrelated chain of crises, mainly humanitarian and refugee crises, as well as a crisis leading to an increased sense of

uncertainty, a heightened anxiety and anticipation of potential threats. All of this made the contingencies more feasible. The historical context of the Polish-Russian shared history, and specifically, the Soviet invasion of Poland in 1939 followed by the Soviet occupation of Poland until 1945, amplified this individual perception of uncertainty and risk among the members of the Polish border region communities, caused by the Russian invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022. This affected and amplified the response to the humanitarian and refugee crisis which followed Russia's military attack on Ukraine. Despite the fact that the Polish-Ukrainian shared history was not a concept in this specific research, the results reveal that, in the view of some respondents, the decision of the refugees from Ukraine to choose Poland as their shelter was not random and accidental, but, to the contrary, it was rather conscious. The results demonstrate that the uncertainty, fear and anticipation about the next step of Russia did also significantly affect members of the Polish border region community located in the Suwałki Gap, a strip of land between Poland's neighbor Belarus, and Kalinigrad Oblast, a city and an exclave of the Russian Federation.

National and Western media narratives were promoting a vision of the Suwałki Gap as the most dangerous place on earth, they heightened and amplified this sense of uncertainty and risk not only among the local population, but also among Polish people and foreign tourists and investors who gradually stopped visiting this region because of those media narratives. Following the conceptual framework, the Suwałki Gap may be identified as a *riskscape*, where community members were being exposed to sudden and unanticipated emergencies and attempted to navigate the new disrupted reality. From the theoretical perspective, individual risk perception affects significantly community resilience, the response and adaptive capacity during a crisis, and the results of this research show that the Russian military aggression against Ukraine, a neighboring country, threatened the ontological security of the members of both Polish border region communities by triggering various reactions and emotions among the research participants. In order to cope with fear, anxiety, and the sense of uncertainty caused by such an unprecedented disruptive event, each person dealt with those threats by developing a different, or, at times, largely the same coping strategy to deal with and overcome those emotions and fears. It confirms the theoretical approach that such a coping capacity empowered the community members to exercise their agency, that is, to decide to take action in response despite the feeling of fear and uncertainty about the impact of the Russian invasion of Ukraine on Poland in general and on their own lives in particular.

The main findings of this research reflect the need to focus on the local aspect of the organization of a response to the crisis to be included as valuable experiential knowledge into the development and implementation of crisis management during all stages – not only at the time of a crisis, but also in the recovery and preparedness phases (The Sendai Framework, 2015).

When studying the role of nonformal actors, in particular, in the local communities, who are directly involved in the response to the crisis which was becoming more transboundary in nature, it is worth reconsidering the definition of the 'first responder'. According to the *Oxford Dictionary*, the first responder's

job entails being the first on the scene of an emergency, such as a firefighter or a police officer (Oxford Dictionary, 2025). The findings demonstrate that, very often, the first responders were not qualified workers, but, rather, regular citizens. It is important for the future research on the community resilience or disaster research to continue studying the role of actors who, by definition, are not first responders, and who, yet, do the job of the first responders nevertheless.

Another observation, which is critical for crisis management, and which was not taken into consideration, is that there is a strong gap and the need to redefine or create a new definition of the ‘first responder’. Already during the review of the relevant research, it was observed that the discussion about the definition and role of first responders was not extensive enough, and that it requires a broader discussion, as well as, possibly, separate research to gain more clarity about the roles and characteristics of a ‘first responder’. As a rule, the first responder is considered to be a trained person whose job is to respond to an emergency. Yet, in the case of the response in both Polish border communities, especially in Suwałki, the first responders were people who were not professionally trained to respond to an emergency. Naturally, professional first responders were also involved in the response, but the first to respond were nonprofessional informal actors. Another venue for potential future discussion and research in this area is the nature of the involvement of voluntary units, such as scouts and firefighters. In the case of the community in Biecz, the first responders were also voluntary firefighters, but they responded to the emergency on voluntary grounds. An in-depth qualitative study of the involvement of first responders can be crucial for incorporating this experiential knowledge in programs and strategies aimed at building and strengthening resilience of social systems and units, specifically, communities, which mostly are at the frontline of coping with a crisis. The question could also be reframed as: whether a community affected by a crisis could act by itself as a first-responder. In addressing such questions, the focus should be also put on communities in the border regions which are more vulnerable to the outcomes of a crisis. In this context, the concept of *riskscape* could be further employed as it proves to be a highly effective framework to study the role of individual risk perception in response to a crisis, and also the way in which risk is envisioned, and risk narratives are created in practice in everyday life.

The results confirm that the response to a crisis organized by nonformal actors was less limited and more flexible, and it was more prompt as it was organized in a bottom-up nonhierarchical manner whereas the formal actors were being restricted by the top-down hierarchy and structure within their organizations. This may explain the delay in the response of the formal actors which was organized approximately ca. one or two weeks after the initial moment of the invasion. For the purpose of making crisis management more effective, it is recommended to combine both structures – hierarchical and nonhierarchical – in order to work together on strategies to prepare for, survive a crisis, and recover from it. Special focus should be on the participation of the local communities directly affected by the crisis whose experiences, along with their local and experiential knowledge, would be a valuable source of feedback for the formal actors.

Along with *memoryscape*, historical and geographical contexts (also *riskscapes*) emerge as both contexts and community resilience dimensions which may significantly affect the way risks are perceived and response is organized. As it has already been elaborated, Poland is a special case due to the geographical proximity to the border with Russia (Kaliningrad Oblast) and Russia's ally Belarus. In the historical and *memoryscape* context, Poles could identify easier with the militarily attacked Ukraine than other countries in Europe which did not share their history with Russia. Hence, those contexts should also be taken into consideration when examining what makes a community more resilient in its response to a crisis.

A concluding reflection is that, out of the 52 research participants, when asked, already one year after the invasion, if there was anyone prior to the researcher who would have approached them to share their experiences, the answer was negative. It is of importance to mention that, among the research participants, there were town authorities, officials, Municipality employees and counsellors, and the answer was always negative. One year after the invasion, naturally, in the case of the two researched border region communities, there was no initiative from the side of formal, institutional actors on the Government or self-government level, to attempt to document the experiences of the response and the lessons learned so that to incorporate those accounts into a crisis management or resilience building strategy. This observation is in line with the finding that the awareness of civil preparedness is weak or limited. Both points correspond with the call of global actors, such as the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, which is a multifaceted cooperation embracing various relevant stakeholders.

One more theme which emerged as a potential dimension affecting community resilience in response to crises and uncertainty is trust. Trust was the main link between various social networks and actors, and particularly between complete strangers who only got to know each other, very often only online, and who never had the chance to meet in person, because of their involvement in helping the people from Ukraine. Trust solidified the already existing social networks and connections, and made the cooperation smoother; it thus helped to make response more effective and quicker in general. This finding is in contrast to an approach in crisis management that trust needs to be built, and that it takes time, especially in top-down hierarchies.

Another observation is that such research should be conducted by a team of researchers instead of a single one, as this phenomenon requires more attention; hence, more time in the field is required, as well as more communities or other social units need to be studied. For further research, it is recommended to design holistic research which would incorporate the full scope/range of actors involved in response, especially the formal and informal reception points at the Polish-Ukrainian border as well as the mass accommodation points and shelters throughout Poland. Such studies should be more systematic, as well as long-term, and they should cover as big a number of instances of the affected areas as possible, which would allow to make an even more detailed and broader comparison between/among the responses within the communities.

Future studies on risk perception and community resilience should also focus on the passive actors who were non-responsive during the crisis situation. Such a perspective is a valuable lens through which the process of building community resilience could be better understood. If community resilience is to be investigated holistically, both the feedback from ‘active actors’ and the feedback from non-responsive and passive actors should be explored in future studies in order to learn what limits, and also what strengthens community resilience.

Ideally, such research should be comparative in nature, which means that, apart from Poland, research could also be conducted in other European countries with the largest intake of refugees from Ukraine. Comparative studies conducted by a group of researchers in Poland and throughout Europe in that respect would be an effective way to investigate the role of community resilience and risk perception in response to a crisis experienced by the most affected communities, and specifically the border region ones. This observation and recommendation is in line with the agenda and priorities set by the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction in order to, among other aspects, strengthen resilience by extending cooperation between various stakeholders.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Against the background of an unprecedented humanitarian and refugee crisis triggered by the massive displacement of people from Ukraine caused by the Russian military aggression against Ukraine in 2022, this research aimed at analyzing the role of community resilience dimensions and individual risk perception in Polish border region communities' response to a crisis and uncertainty caused by this unexpected event. From this perspective, two main research questions were posed: "How does risk perception and community resilience interact in Polish border region communities' response to crisis and uncertainty?", and "How are community resilience dimensions activated in Polish border region communities' response to crisis?"

1. A comprehensive review of the existing research in the field of crisis, risk perception and uncertainty research has revealed concepts of crisis society, risk society, polycrisis, transboundary crisis, risk perception, ontological security as well as civil preparedness (the pro-active stage of crisis management) which were identified as vital in developing a theoretical synthesis and conceptual framework for this research. The results of the research seem to support the theoretical and conceptual framework developed for the purpose of this research. The humanitarian and refugee crisis was a non-routine occurrence as well as a short-term disruptive event which produced long-term consequences in both Polish border region communities.

In a negative aspect, the crisis did expose vulnerabilities and tested the previously established approaches towards emergency, such as, for instance, weak civil preparedness. Yet, on the positive note, it also brought an opportunity to transform and develop the response capacities in both communities. The findings also support the theoretical approach, according to which, the crisis led to a heightened sense of uncertainty and threatened not only the physical security but also the very ontological security of the social actors who were trying to overcome fear and uncertainty by empowering individuals to exercise their agency, namely, to make decisions and take action. The results demonstrate that the Russian military aggression against Ukraine was a transboundary crisis in nature, which produced cascading effects affecting Poland. This event posed a real risk and threat which triggered individual and community agency, which, along with resources and social networks, was one of the most significant community resilience dimensions affecting the decision to act, namely, to get directly involved in the response to the humanitarian and refugee crisis.

2. An in-depth literature review of the community resilience studies has revealed the core community resilience dimensions of agency, resources, self-reliance, collaboration capacity, social networks, local knowledge and leadership, as well as human values which were identified as the key dimensions in community resilience to crisis and uncertainty. The individual risk perception and situational awareness of the crisis within both communities, no matter whether the reaction was fear, anxiety, panic, or readiness to act, did in fact contribute to activating agency in the first place. This response could be compared to a domino effect or a chain reaction. Upon having learned about the Russian aggression against Ukraine, the responses were instant and

spontaneous, and they did, in a natural way, activate agency. Subsequently, agency necessitated the mobilization of resources, either own/internal, or external. The need for resources, in turn, activated the social networks as a source of the social capital and resources. Depending on the context, the configuration/order could change, and the response was still about the agency, but the social networks were the first, and the resources came second. The results support the theoretical perspective that they were enabling factors which enhanced the community resilience. Some of those were of more critical importance, such as agency, resources, social networks, and the collaboration capacity. Yet, local knowledge and leadership, as well as human values, were also prominently important in responding to this unexpected event as, in the case of human values, they motivated social actors to act, whereas, in the case of local knowledge and leadership, they helped to avoid organizational chaos and make the action-taking and decision-making process smoother.

3. The findings seem to be consistent with and to support the theoretical framework developed for the purpose of this research along with conceptual framework incorporating the research concepts of community, community resilience, crisis, risk perception, and uncertainty, as well as *riskscapes*. The results support the theoretical framework that the local community is a unit at the frontline of coping with the outcomes of a crisis. In the crisis situation, the local activity in both communities brought new and creative ways of collective action and resilience. Social actors become envoys of community resilience. Bottom-up self-organization on the local and community levels tends to outperform top-down plans to manage a crisis. Specifically, actors on the community level, and also in the border regions, were the ones to respond directly to the specific difficulties and challenges they were facing in their communities and neighborhoods. The findings also confirm that communities in cross-border areas shared risks, an increased vulnerability, and coordination challenges (*riskscapes*). The results show that the crisis management phase of preparedness, which helps build community resilience, and which helps a community cope with a crisis during the response phase and recover in the recovery phase, is a topic which still needs to be closely looked at and worked on in both communities. The crisis brought the opportunity to enhance preparedness, but it needs to be further researched if, since the invasion in 2022, any developments could be seen in this area.

4. The developed and grounded methodology for the purpose of analyzing the role of community resilience, risk perception and uncertainty in the Polish border region communities' response to the crisis proved to be suitable for the purpose of this specific qualitative research and empirical data collection. The case study strategy was essential in obtaining the research participants' accounts from the real-life context, while the crisis was still ongoing. The sampling of the research participants in both communities was optimal and very helpful in studying the response of the local social actors from a micro-level perspective.

5. The results demonstrate that the reaction, which could be described as a chain-and-domino effect, was very intensive, especially during the early weeks of the invasion causing the crisis. Within time, the response became more structured as the helpers were learning and gaining experience. The results reveal a pattern of

a response to crisis and uncertainty which, in times of a crisis, becomes activated by agency, while agency is activated by the way the risks are perceived. Yet, this pattern may vary from context to context. In the case of the response of the Polish border region communities, the historical events (and hence the historical context) which were not the object of this research did in fact dominate the response as Poles do have awareness of what it means to be attacked by the Russian army. A paradox was observed that community resilience is both universal in the pattern of response, and also strongly contextualized, specifically in the historical and geographical aspect. The historical (*memoryscape*) and geographical (*riskscapes*) contexts emerge as significant community resilience dimensions which affect the agency and motivation to take action in response to a crisis. Yet, the results also reveal that they may either empower and strengthen the process of building community resilience, or else hinder this process. This depends on the way through which individual actors perceive the crisis and risk setting. In this regard, apart from the already employed concept of *riskscape* which is recommended to be studied further, and which is a new and emerging framework which seems to be vital in the study of the role of community resilience and risk perception in response to crisis and uncertainty, there is the concept of *memoryscape*, the construction of memory in spatial contexts.

Even though both Polish border region communities differ in many aspects, such as, for instance, Suwałki being a transit town and an international communication hub in the Northeastern part of Poland with major transport routes that pass through the town, i.e., from Berlin via Warsaw to Saint Petersburg and from Warsaw to Helsinki, enabling the sole land connection between three Baltic states, which are also NATO member countries and the remaining NATO countries, while Biecz is a small town with less traffic, and yet, these settlements shared the same risks and vulnerabilities – Suwałki because of the close proximity to the borders with Russia and Belarus as well as the massive influx of refugees from Ukraine transiting or staying in Suwałki, and Biecz because of its close proximity to the border with Ukraine. Despite those vulnerabilities and differences, they shared a similar pattern of response and became affected by the same crisis. Because of those differences within the pattern of response, help in Suwałki was mainly oriented inwards, inside the community, to the refugees transiting or staying in Suwałki, while, in Biecz, help was oriented mainly outwards, outside the community, to the people from Ukraine at the Polish-Ukrainian border, or in Ukraine itself. Both communities did manage to adapt to the disruption.

Even though the adaptive capacity was not operationalized, measured and researched for the purposes of this study, it emerges as a theme to be further examined and analyzed in the context of community resilience to a crisis. The question remains to be answered if the same pattern of response was observed in other affected communities in Poland which have not been examined yet. If the community is the unit which, in case of a crisis is affected the most, and its members, non-formal actors, undertaking the roles, such as those of a first-responder, before the institutional actors take action, then, having gained the first-hand experience of examination of the chosen core dimensions of a community, it is highly recommended to continue studies of what makes a community resilient. This practical knowledge and experience gained

in the process of a response is the most vital, rich and valuable source of credible data, from which, conclusions could be drawn about what it means for the community to be resilient, and how the risk perceptions are translated in real-life daily actions taken in response. To investigate the global constructs, such as resilience/ community resilience, or individual risk perception, research should be conducted on the local level as the nexus is the actors who constitute the community and its actions.

6. The systematic exploration of the affected areas on the community level, the nexus of response in risk and crisis settings, with an increased focus on the geographical and historical context, should be a new framework of research in the field of community resilience to a crisis. Most importantly, it should be taken into account that, since community resilience is a process and an ability that is within the community prior, during, and in the aftermath of a crisis, studies should also cover the analysis of proactive stages of crisis management – reconstruction, recovery, and civil preparedness. The knowledge gained from both formal and informal actors directly involved in response needs to be closely looked at by the actors in charge of crisis management.

A practical recommendation before any policy could be developed is that there is more commitment and work from both sides of the informal and formal actors, with the focus on institutional actors. There is a strong and urgent need for initiating a dialogue with the civilian population on what can be jointly done to build a stronger resilience. This dialogue should be initiated by the authorities on the Government and self-government level as taking into consideration the recommendations of the civilian population which has already experienced a crisis directly should be a top priority. Such a dialogue could help develop organic cooperation based on trust. Another practical recommendation which could possibly be a fundament for new policy-making is to combine the top-down and bottom-up hierarchies in the areas of crisis management and civil preparedness. Such a holistic approach could possibly help to strengthen the mechanism of response by, for instance, mapping the stakeholders and actors who could be directly involved in the response.

If the community is the unit which, in case of a crisis, is affected the most, and if its members, who are non-formal actors, such as the first-responder, are involved before institutional actors take action, then, having gained the first-hand experience of examination of the chosen core dimensions of community, it is highly recommended to continue studies of what makes a community resilient. This practical knowledge and experience gained in the process of the response is the most vital, richest and the most valuable source of credible data, from which, conclusions could be drawn about what it actually means for a community to be resilient, and how the risk perceptions are translated in real-life daily actions taken in response. To investigate the global constructs such as resilience/ community resilience, or individual risk perception, research should be conducted on the local level as the nexus is the actors constituting the community and its actions.

For future studies of community resilience and the related concepts, it is recommended to integrate all aspects of response, especially the negative one(s), with the research participants who were not involved in any direct and/or indirect response.

Such research could strengthen the already existing one, especially in the recent discourse about the need to apply a holistic approach to study resilience.

To the best of the knowledge of the author of this thesis, similar research has not been conducted in Poland yet, whereas the findings of this thesis already provide new knowledge which is experiential, as well as practical, and which originates from people placed directly in the context of a crisis and the response to an emergency. It was expected that the findings would reveal highly contextualized and local knowledge, which is yet denoted by a considerable potential to be also universal and, possibly, suited for the practical use both in Poland and outside of Poland. Although this research was set in a specific and dynamic context, it may provide a universal lens through which further research on the role of community resilience and risk perception may be conducted. Such studies should be more systematic, long-term, and should cover as high a number of instances of the affected areas as possible, which would allow to make an even more detailed and extensive comparison between the responses within communities.

5. SANTRAUKA

Tyrimo aktualumas

Socialinė tikrovė sudėtingėja ir tampa vis kompleksiškesnė. Šio kompleksiskumo priežastis – rizikos ir grėsmės, kurios pamažu susisieja vis glaudžiau, nes krizės sąveikauja, sukelia viena kitą arba vyksta vienu metu (Beck, 1992; Grabowska, 2023; Moralli & Allegrini, 2021; Polanyi, 1944; Walby, 2022). Tai gali išprovokuoti pavojų sąveiką, kuri savo ruožtu gali būti naujo polikrizės reiškinių pagrindas.

Šiuolaikinis pasaulis yra tokios būklės, kai vienu metu vyksta daugybė krizių – aplinkos, finansų, COVID-19 ar karas, dažnai provokuojantis migraciją ir pabėgėlių krizę, pvz., masinį pabėgėlių atvykimą iš Sirijos 2015 m. (Gaspar et al., 2023; Homer-Dixon et al., 2021) ar milijonų ukrainiečių atvykimą į Europą 2022 m., Rusijai užpuolus jų tėvynę (Komenda Główna Straży Granicznej, 2024). Krizės tampa ne lokalios, o tarpvalstybinės, jos savo ruožtu sukelia kaskadinę rizikos, nenumatytų atvejų ir neapibrėžtumų plitimą (Haas, 1958; Henig & Knight, 2023; Walby, 2022). Tokiu atveju nuo krizės nukenčia ir esantys krizės aplinkoje, ir nutolusieji nuo krizės šaltinio. Pagal plitimo ir kaskadinę krizės scenarijų sunku nustatyti, kas turėtų būti atsakingas už reagavimą į krizę, ir sumažinti krizinės situacijos poveikį. Krizė tapo įgyta ir nuolatine būsena socialinėje sistemoje.

Plataus masto Rusijos karinė invazija į Ukrainą 2022 m., sukėlusį karinį konfliktą, humanitarinę ir pabėgėlių krizę, taip pat pasaulio saugumo architektūros pasikeitimą, geopolitinį Rytų ir Vakarų susiskaldymą bei pabloginusi ES ir NATO santykius su Rusija ir Kinija, yra polikrizės pavyzdys.

Beprecedentę sisteminių krizių, vykstančių viena po kitos ir turinčių tendenciją sutapti, situaciją reikėtų vertinti ne kaip atskirų įvykių rinkinį, o kaip tarpusavyje susijusias rizikas ir nenumatytus atvejus (Makarychev & Diez, 2023). Kadangi žmonės vienu metu susiduria su daugeliu rizikų ir jas valdo, jų neįmanoma nagrinėti izoliuotai. *Rizikos landšafto* (angl. *riskscape*) sąvoka (Muller-Mahn, 2018) padeda orientuotis šioje sudėtingoje aplinkoje, kurioje yra sutampančių, tarpusavyje susijusių, viena kitą stiprinančių daugialypių rizikos veiksnių, tokių kaip gamtiniai pavojai, technologinės grėsmės, pandemijų protrūkiai, finansų krizės, jau nekalbant apie pastarojo meto įvykius, kuriuos sukėlė Rusijos invazija į Ukrainą.

Sudėtingas tarpvalstybinis krizės pobūdis reikalauja daugialypės reagavimo sistemos, nes atskiri subjektai negalės reaguoti savarankiškai. Taigi alternatyvus atsako į krizę scenarijus daro prielaidą, kad tokios ekstremalios situacijos pasekmės veiksmingiausiai sprendžiamos vietos lygmeniu, kur daugiausia dėmesio turėtų būti skiriama civilinio krizių valdymo gebėjimams ugdyti (Boin & Rhinhard, 2008). Perėjimas iš rizikos visuomenės į krizių visuomenę suteikia galimybę apmąstyti krizės pobūdį ir būdus, kaip visuomenė galėtų ją valdyti, stiprinti pilietinės visuomenės kolektyvinius veiksmus ir bendruomenių atsparumą krizėms. Sociologinėje mokykloje nėra bendro sutarimo, kaip apibrėžti krizės reiškinį (Jiří, 2014; Moralli & Allegrini, 2021). Ji suteikia galimybę, pirma, sustiprinti subjektus (angl. *agency*) ir atsparumą iš apačios į viršų, antra, nurodyti pažeidžiamas sritis, kuriose vėl galėtų

veikti vietos bendruomenės. Akivaizdu, kad kilus krizei bendruomenės vietos veiksmai yra labai vertingi, nes gali pasiūlyti naujų kolektyvinio veikimo ir atsparumo būdų, o aktyvūs socialiniai veikėjai tampa bendruomenės atsparumo branduoliais (Moralli & Allegrini, 2021). Krizės gali paveikti įvairius subjektus ir socialinius vienetus, tokius kaip asmenys, šeimos, grupės, bendruomenės, kaimai, miestai, institucijos, organizacijos, regionai, valstybės ir tautos (Pawar, 2023). Tyrimai parodė, kad pirmieji subjektai, kurie labiausiai nukenčia individų ir grupių lygmeniu, yra vietos bendruomenės (Bergman-Rosamond et al., 2022; Hindow et al., 2018).

Literatūroje buvo išskirtos pagrindinės dimensijos ir rodikliai, sudarantys bendruomenės atsparumo sistemą, kuriuos galima išmatuoti (Cutter et al., 2010; Lam et al., 2015; Peacock, 2010; Powell et al., 2018), nes labai svarbu dirbti su gebėjimu užkirsti kelią ir reaguoti į ateities krizes (Eriksson, 2023). Atsparumas – tai tvirtumas, gebėjimas prisitaikyti, ištvirti, mokytis ir transformuotis reaguojant į krizes ir grėsmes (Norris et al., 2008; Paton & Johnston, 2001). Rizikos suvokimas taip pat buvo pripažintas kaip bendruomenės veikimo ir reagavimo pajėgumų kilus krizei veiksnys (Boersma et al., 2018; Drabek & McEntire, 2003; Flint & Luloff, 2005; Rast et al., 2020; Smets et al., 2017; Yang et al., 2021). Tačiau mažiau tyrinėtas yra praktinis šių rizikos naratyvų konstravimo aspektas (Gellwitzki & Houde, 2023). Reaguojant į susirūpinimą dėl krizių poveikio bendruomenėms, buvo atlikti išsamūs atsparumo tyrimai, siekiant išanalizuoti bendruomenių ir asmenų reagavimo bei atsigavimo gebėjimus, o tai gali būti naudinga krizių valdymui ir institucinių veikėjų atsakui į krizių planavimą (Alessi et al., 2020; Bruneau et al., 2003; Norris et al., 2008; Roberts & Townsend, 2016; Sherrieb et al., 2010; Twigg & Mosel, 2017). Norint veiksmingai įveikti šiuos iššūkius, būtina išanalizuoti, nustatyti ir sekti, kokie aspektai daro bendruomenę atsparią krizėms. Remiantis Hyogo veiksmų programoje ir Sendajaus nelaimių rizikos mažinimo gairėse išdėstytais prioritetais, esamus mechanizmus reikia stiprinti, kad būtų galima teikti veiksmingą paramą ir geriau valdyti krizes. Todėl labai svarbu stiprinti atsparumą suteikiant galių vietos valdžios institucijoms ir bendruomenėms, įtraukiant ir pripažįstant atitinkamas suinteresuotąsias šalis ir jų vaidmenis, pavyzdžiui, civilius gyventojus, įskaitant savanorius, bendruomenes, nacionalines ir vietos valdžios institucijas, pilietinės visuomenės organizacijas, akademinę bendruomenę, glaudžiai bendradarbiaujant ir įgyvendinant nacionalines strategijas bei planus vietos lygmeniu. Taip pat svarbu pabrėžti platesnį, į žmones orientuotą įvairiais pavojais, daugelio sektorių bendradarbiavimu grįstą prevencinį požiūrį į nelaimių riziką (Kanteler & Bakouros, 2024; The Sendai Framework, 2015).

Naujumas

Nors bendruomenės atsparumas buvo plačiai ištirtas, mažiau nagrinėtas klausimas – kodėl bendruomenių reagavimo gebėjimai ir bendruomenės atsparumas skiriasi (Steiner, 2016). Nepaisant to, kad įvairios suinteresuotosios šalys pripažino bendruomenės atsparumo matavimą esant yra svarbiu prioritetu (Lam et al., 2016), nėra visuotinai priimtose metodologijos, kaip empiriškai įvertinti atsparumą (Bristow & Healy, 2014). Išmokyti krizės pamokas – vienas labiausiai neįgyvendintų reagavimo į krizę aspektų (Stern, 1997), o individuali krizės patirtis, suvokimas ir atpažinimas vis dar menkai tyrinėti. Aptariant krizės suvokimą ir atsaką į ją, reikėtų atsižvelgti ir į individualias perspektyvas (Fassin, 2022). Tyrimai rodo, kad bendruomenių subjektai, ypač esantys netoli valstybių sienų, tiesiogiai reaguoja į konkrečius sunkumus ir iššūkius, su kuriais susiduria ir savo bendruomenėse bei apylinkėse (Yeo, 2020). Kadangi bendruomenės atsparumas yra sudėtingas ir daugialypis reiškinys, praktikoje konkrečiame kontekste, nustatytame laiko ir erdvės, turėtų būti taikomi įvairūs jo rodikliai (Carpenter et al., 2001). Atsparumo neapriboja ekstremalių įvykių procesas ar jo baigtis, jis pasireiškia vykstant kasdienėms kovoms ir užklumpant sunkumams, būdingiems individų gyvenimui ir bendruomenėms (Otgtem-Young, 2018; Helfgott, 2018). Svarbu taikyti holistinį požiūrį į bendruomenės atsparumo matavimą vertinant problemos visumą (Folke et al., 2006). Naujasis požiūris turi būti tarpdalykinis (Midgley, 2000; Brand & Jax, 2007) ir pritaikytas prie vietos bendruomenės konteksto, nes bendruomenių savybė ugdyti reagavimo gebėjimus ir atsparumo potencialą gali skirtis ir būti paveikta vietos dinamikos ir aplinkybių (Reed et al., 2022).

Sudėtinga sukurti išsamią dimensijų rodyklę, siekiant nustatyti jų poveikį bendruomenės atsparumui (Clarke & Mayer, 2017; Jordan & Javernick-Will, 2013; Keck ir Sakdapolrak, 2013; Khunwishit et al., 2013; Walker et al., 2004). Reikia tęsti ir plėtoti bendruomenės atsparumo dimensijų analizės tyrimus (Añasco et al., 2021; Berkes et al., 2016; Johansen et al., 2016). Šio tyrimo naujumas tas, kad buvo sukurtas ir pritaikytas integruotas (holistinis) požiūris tiriant sudėtingus realaus gyvenimo reiškinius konkrečiu laiku ir konkrečiame kontekste, įtraukiant sociologines pagrindinių tyrimo sąvokų, svarbių šiam konkrečiam tyrimui, koncepcijas, t. y. tiriama geografiškai pažeidžiamų Lenkijos pasienio bendruomenių (Suvalkų ir Biečo) reakcija į neseniai įvykusią humanitarinę ir pabėgėlių krizę, kurią sukėlė Rusijos invazija į Ukrainą 2022 m. ir kuri tiesiogiai paveikė abi bendruomenes.

Tyrimo klausimai

Pagrindiniai disertacijoje keliami tyrimo klausimai – kaip rizikos suvokimas ir bendruomenės atsparumas sąveikauja, Lenkijos pasienio bendruomenėms reaguojant į krizes ir neapibrėžtumą, kaip bendruomenės atsparumo dimensijos aktyvuojasi Lenkijos pasienio bendruomenėms reaguojant į krizes.

Tikslas

Pagrindinis šio tyrimo tikslas – išanalizuoti bendruomenės atsparumo ir individualaus rizikos suvokimo vaidmenį, Lenkijos pasienio bendruomenėms reaguojant į krizę ir neapibrėžtumą, kuri sukėlė 2022 m. vasario 24 d. Rusijos invazija į Ukrainą.

Uždaviniai

Disertacinio tyrimo tikslas bus pasiektas įgyvendinant šiuos tyrimo uždavinius:

- Atlikti išsamią esamų krizių, rizikos suvokimo ir neapibrėžtumo srities tyrimų apžvalgą, siekiant nustatyti aktualiausias teorijas, metodus ir spragas.
- Atlikti išsamią bendruomenių atsparumo tyrimų literatūros apžvalgą, siekiant nustatyti pagrindines bendruomenių atsparumo dimensijas.
- Sukurti konceptualią priemonę, integruojančią sociologinį krizės, rizikos suvokimo ir bendruomenės atsparumo supratimą.
- Sukurti ir pagrįsti metodiką, skirtą bendruomenių atsparumui analizuoti, Lenkijos pasienio bendruomenėms reaguojant į krizės ir neapibrėžtumą.
- Atlikti kokybinę surinktų empirinių duomenų analizę, siekiant nustatyti kylančius klausimus ir (arba) temas apie bendruomenės atsparumo dimensijų ir individualaus rizikos suvokimo vaidmenį. Lenkijos pasienio bendruomenėms reaguojant į krizes ir neapibrėžtumą.
- Identifikuoti temas, tendencijas ir modelius, susijusius su Lenkijos pasienio bendruomenių atsparumu krizėms ir neapibrėžtumui, siekiant pateikti rekomendacijas institucijoms, atsakingoms už krizių valdymą ir civilinę parengtį.

5.1. TEORINIAI RIZIKOS SUVOKIMO IR BENDRUOMENĖS ATSPARUMO PAGRINDAI VYKSTANT KRIZĖMS IR VYRAUJANT NETIKRUMUI

Krizės yra sudėtingos ir susijusios tarpusavyje. Jos kyla įvairiose visuomenės gyvenimo srityse, kur susikerta ir susilieja su kitomis krizėmis. Kartu jos veikia kaip kitų krizių pirmtakės arba jų padariniai, todėl susidaro susijusi krizių grandinė ir atsiranda netikrumo jausmas.

Kita krizės funkcija – ji gali būti kritinis taškas, suteikiantis galimybę socialinei sistemai transformuotis (Polanyi, 1944; Walby, 2022). Kadangi pasauliniu mastu krizė tapo mūsų realybe, rizikos visuomenė (Beck, 1992) virto krizių visuomene (Moralli & Allegrini, 2021). Tai reiškia, kad šiuolaikinėje visuomenėje laipsniškai netikrumo jausmas didėja kaip vienas pagrindinių rizikos visuomenės bruožų. Transformacija iš rizikos visuomenės į krizių visuomenę suteikia galimybę mąstyti apie krizės pobūdį ir būdus, kaip visuomenė, ypač pilietinė, galėtų ją valdyti kolektyviniais veiksmais. Konceptualizuojant krizę visuomenės lygmeniu, išskiriamos tokios socialinės sistemos dalys kaip politika, ekonomika ar kultūra, visapusiškai veikiančios visą socialinę sistemą. Žvelgiant iš sociologinės

perspektyvos, nebuvo pasiekta bendro sutarimo, kaip priartėti prie krizės reiškinių (Moralli & Allegrini, 2021; Šubrt, 2014).

Rizika ir netikrumas yra susiję kalbant apie ateities įsivaizdavimo ir dabarties organizavimo būdus, siekiant užkirsti kelią ateities krizėms. Gali būti tiesioginių praeities sąsajų tarp to, kas įvyko kitur arba seniai, ir manoma, kad gali pasikartoti ateityje dar didesniu mastu. Gali būti netiesioginių praeities sąsajų, pavyzdžiui, numatant, kad įvykis gali būti dar blogesnis už jau įvykusius. Kitas ryšys tarp rizikos ir neapibrėžtumo yra dėmesys, kurį sukelia laukiamas įvykis, neatidėliotini raginimai imtis veiksmų ir reaguoti. Nustačius riziką, ją reikia įvertinti, suskirstyti į kategorijas ir valdyti. Dėl netikrumo reikia analizuoti dabartį, kad pasiroštume nepageidaujamai ateičiai. Ir rizika, ir neapibrėžtumas yra aktyvūs veiksniai, nukreipiantys dėmesį į neatidėliotinus pavojus ir neaiškumus, ir abu jie gali sukelti bei įgyvendinti pokyčius (Muller-Mahn, 2012). Rizikos visuomenės bruožų išryškėjimas krizių visuomenėje sukuria tarpvalstybiškumą, kuris veikia seniai nusistovėjusius ir standartinius krizių valdymo klausimus. Dėl šios transformacijos reikia išnagrinėti ir išanalizuoti, kokių procedūrų reikia šiems bendriems iššūkiams įveikti. Paprastai į krizes, nelaimės ir kitas ekstremalias situacijas reikia reaguoti greitai, dažniausiai tvyrant kolektyvinei įtampai ir dideliame neapibrėžtumui (Rosenthal et al., 1989).

Bendruomenė yra ne tik geografinė, socialinė ir sociologinė erdvė, ji yra ir emocinių ryšių, ryšių ir santykių, normų, prasmų ir vertybių mikroerdvė, kurioje auga asmenybės. Yra du bruožai, apibrėžiantys bendruomenę: vienas – emocinių santykių tinklas, susikertantis ir stiprinantis vienas kitą, antras – vertybių, normų ir prasmų sistema, taip pat bendra istorija ir kultūrinis tapatumas. Bendruomenės, būdamos lojalumo ir įsipareigojimo tinklais, siūlo tiesioginį ir natūralesnį ryšį, mažiau nutolusį ir nepaviršutinišką. Naujas bendruomeniškumo jausmas atsiranda erdvėse, kurias reikia tirti, interpretuoti ir klasifikuoti (Rose, 1999). Sąvoka *communitas* reiškia socialinį ryšį, susiformavusį kartu kuriant saugumo jausmą grupėje. Tokie ryšiai sukuriama *ad hoc* spontaniškai, tai reiškia improvizacinius socialinius ryšius ir spontaniškai, kolektyviškai reaguojant į ekstremalią situaciją. Atskleista, kad nelaimė skatina bendruomenės veiksmus, taip pat tokias vertybes kaip abipusis rūpestis, palaikymas, nesavanaudiškumas, gerumas ir altruizmas (Prince, 1920). Be to, ekstremalios situacijos ir krizės skatina bendruomenės narių ir bendruomenių prosocialų požiūrį. *Communitas* įvardijamas įvairiomis sąvokomis ir pasireiškia įvairiomis formomis.

Žmonės susiduria su keliomis rizikomis vienu metu, o ne su pavieniais veiksniais, tad socialinės praktikos požiūriu rizikos negalima suvokti izoliuotai nei patyrimu, nei konceptualiai (Müller-Mahn et al., 2018). *Rizikos kraštovaizdžio* koncepcija pristatoma siekiant ištirti, kaip rizika vizualizuojama ir kaip kasdienis gyvenimas perkeliamas į teritorinį pasakojimą. Geografinė teritorija formuojama ir pertvarkoma iš perspektyvos, orientuotos į veikėjus. *Rizikos peizažai* yra ne tik pavojinga vieta, kur reikia manevruoti, bet ir socialiai sukonstruota koncepcija (Lupton, 1999), nes jos atsiranda iš socialinio rizikos padidėjimo (Kasperson et al., 2010), galinčio kilti dėl visuomenės ar socialinių grupių kolektyvinio rizikos suvokimo, diskusijų ir kolektyvinių veiksmų (Müller-Mahn et al., 2018).

Spartėjantys pasauliniai pokyčiai ir tendencijos visose socialinio gyvenimo srityse, dėl kurių bendruomenės atsiduria naujose realijose ir kontekstuose, kelia didelį susirūpinimą dėl šiuolaikinių bendruomenių atsparumo ir gebėjimo reaguoti bei atsigauti (Nacionalinė mokslų akademija, 2010).

Reaguojant į susirūpinimą dėl galimų krizių ir nelaimių poveikio bendruomenėms, buvo atlikti išsamūs atsparumo tyrimai, kuriais siekiama išanalizuoti bendruomenių ir asmenų reagavimo bei atsigavimo gebėjimus. Atrodo, kad grėsmės išliks ir kels tolesnių iššūkių. Norint veiksmingai įveikti šiuos iššūkius, būtina išanalizuoti, nustatyti ir sekti, kokie matmenys ir pajėgumai daro bendruomenę atsparią krizėms ir nelaimėms (Alessi et al., 2020). Pirminis atsparumo apibrėžimas apėmė šią sąvoką kaip sistemų patvarumą ir gebėjimą absorbuoti pokyčius bei trikdžius ir vis dar išlaikyti tuos pačius socialinius santykius ar būsenos charakteristikas (Holling, 1973). Naujesnė sąvoka atsparumą apibūdina kaip „sistemos gebėjimą sugerti trikdžius ir prisitaikyti, patiriant pokyčius ir prisiderinant prie jų, kad iš esmės išlaikytų tą pačią funkciją, struktūrą ir tapatybę“ (Walker et al., 2004).

5.2. METODOLOGIJA

Šiame daktaro disertacijos tyrime naudojama socialinio konstruktyvizmo paradigma – mokymosi teorija, kuri teigia, kad žinios geriausiai įgyjamos refleksijos procese (Mascolo & Fischer, 2005). Šiame tyrime remiamasi indukciniu samprotavimo ir kokybiniu požiūriu. Šiam konkrečiam tyrimui buvo pritaikytas atvejo analizės tyrimo planas ir tyrimo krypties, glaudaus tarporganizacinio kolektyvinio veiksmo bei kontekstinių sąlygų ryšio strategija (Yeo & Huang, 2019; Yin, 2003). Šis daktaro disertacijos tyrimas pagrįstas atvejo analize. Metodas leidžia holistiškai ištirti Lenkijos pasienio bendruomenių atsaką į krizę, sukeltą Rusijos invazijos į Ukrainą.

Daktaro disertacijos tyrimas buvo atliktas autorės gimtojoje šalyje Lenkijoje, kuri po Rusijos karinės invazijos į Ukrainą priėmė daugiausia pabėgėlių iš Ukrainos. Lenkijos pasienio apsaugos tarnybos statistikos duomenimis, 2022 m. sausio–gruodžio mėn. Lenkijos sieną, ypač sienos su Ukraina ruože, kirto 9 522 444 piliečiai, turintys Ukrainos pilietybę, o 2022 m. pirmąjį ketvirtį, intensyviausiu laikotarpiu nuo invazijos pradžios, Ukrainos piliečių, kirtusių sieną, buvo 3 180 897 ir 3 046 762 – sienos su Ukraina ruože (Komenda Główna Straży Granicznej, 2024).

Buvo labai svarbu, kad tyrime dalyvautų tie subjektai, kurie tiesiogiai reagavo į krizę. Siekiant kuo išsamiau išanalizuoti abiejų Lenkijos pasienio bendruomenių reagavimo pobūdį, buvo nuspręsta apklausti įvairius vietos subjektus, tiesiogiai dalyvavusius situacijoje, tačiau iš skirtingų socialinių aplinkų, t. y. bendruomenių narius, savanorius ir savivaldybių atstovus. Šiame tyrime buvo taikomi du atrankos metodai – tikslinė netikimybė atrankos strategija ir sniego gniūžtės atranka. Tikslinė atranka leido atrinkti tyrimo dalyvius, turėjusius faktinės ir naudingos informacijos apie reagavimą į krizę ir veiksnius, galinčius turėti įtakos bendruomenės atsparumui (Prysmakova & Pysmenna, 2024). Tyrimo dalyviai buvo atrenkami remiantis informantų patirtimi tiriamą tema (Murphy et al., 2022). Interviu darytas su tais asmenimis, su kuriais susisiekė tyrėjas arba kuriuos rekomendavo kiti informantai

(Yeo, 2020). Tokie kriterijai, kaip amžius, lytis, šeiminė padėtis, nebuvo naudojami ir neturėjo įtakos tyrimui. Vienintelis kriterijus, taikomas abiejose bendruomenėse, buvo asmeninė pagalba ukrainiečių pabėgėliams, atvykstantiems į Lenkiją.

Empiriniams duomenims surinkti buvo atlikti kokybiniai interviu su atrinktais tyrimo dalyviais, suskirstytais į tris interviu grupes: savanoriai, bendruomenės nariai ir savivaldybės atstovai.

Iš viso tyrime dalyvavo 52 informantai:

- savanoriai – iš Biečo 5, Suvalkų 6, iš viso 11;
- bendruomenės nariai – iš Biečo 7, Suvalkų 7, iš viso 14;
- savivaldybė (darbuotojai ir pavaldūs padaliniai) – iš Biečo 14, Suvalkų 13, iš viso 27.

Tyrėjos parengtas interviu grįstas temomis, susijusiomis su bendruomenės atsparumo tyrimo samprata, t. y. pagrindinėmis jos dimensijomis – veiksmais, ištekliais, pasitikėjimu savimi, bendradarbiavimo gebėjimu, socialiniais tinklais, vietos žiniomis ir lyderyste bei žmogiškosiomis vertybėmis. Taip pat buvo įtraukti klausimai apie informantų pirmąsias reakcijas į invaziją, individualų rizikos suvokimą, civilinį pasirengimą. Kiekvienai interviu grupei buvo užduodami tie patys klausimai, tačiau kai kurie klausimai buvo suformuluoti taip, kad atitiktų grupės specifiką.

Surinkti empiriniai duomenys buvo koduojami, analizuojami ir interpretuojami indukcinio būdu, siekiant identifikuoti besiformuojančias temas ir sąsajas. Surinkti empiriniai duomenys nagrinėti atliekant kokybinę turinio analizę. Kadangi kokybiniai duomenys yra nestruktūrizuoti, suteikia daugiau gylio ir yra sudėtingiau analizuojami, autorė iš anksto sukūrė kodų struktūrą, kad galėtų identifikuoti, susisteminti ir interpretuoti subkodus / temas, kuriais remdamasi ir atlikdama kokybinę analizę, ji galėtų gauti įžvalgų ir geriau suprasti tiriamą reiškinį.

Apribojimai

Šio tyrimo apribojimas yra tas, kad, nepaisant tyrimo koncepcijų ir pasirinktų temų potencialo, jo apimtis nėra labai plati, nes apėmė tik dvi Lenkijos pasienio bendruomenes, o tyrimą atliko tik vienas tyrėjas. Taigi rezultatų ir išvadų apie bendruomenės atsparumą, neapibrėžtumą ir atsaką į krizę pobūdis gali būti ir labai universalus, ir labai specifinis, tačiau taikytinas dviem analizuotoms bendruomenėms iš dviejų Lenkijos regionų. Šiame tyrime pateikiama atsako analizė mikroperspektyvoje, kuri turi didelį ir neišnaudotą potencialą. Autorės žiniomis, šioje srityje buvo atlikta labai nedaug tyrimų, tačiau šis tyrimas nėra platus. Į tolesnius kokybinius bendruomenės atsparumo, rizikos suvokimo ir neapibrėžtumo vietiniame kontekste tyrimus ir į analizę būtina įtraukti tyrėjų komandą, taip pat atlikti papildomą empirinį masinio apgyvendinimo ir (arba) priėmimo vietų visoje Lenkijoje tyrimą. Taip pat buvo suorganizuotas pirmasis atsakas, į kurį buvo įtraukta labai daug suinteresuotųjų šalių ir veikėjų. Dėl etinių priežasčių tyrėja nusprendė neįtraukti į Lenkiją atvykusių pabėgėlių iš Ukrainos, nes tai buvo pernelyg jautri tema, kad būtų galima aptarti *de facto* besitęsiančią krizę.

5.3. REZULTATAI

Svarbu pažymėti, kad nors nuo 2015 m. buvo panašių humanitarinių / migracijos / pabėgėlių krizių, į kurias reagavo Europa bei kaimyninių ir (arba) priimančiųjų šalių bendruomenės (Spindler, 2025), žmonių, bėgančių iš Ukrainos, antplūdis po Rusijos karinės atakos buvo didžiulis. Plataus masto Rusijos invazija į Ukrainą sukėlė greičiausią ir didžiausią perkėlimo krizę Europoje nuo Antrojo pasaulinio karo (Podgórska et al., 2023; Spindler, 2025).

Nuo invazijos pradžios 2022 m. vasario mėn. Lenkija buvo priimančioji šalis, kurioje daugiausia žmonių iš Ukrainos priimama, o per Lenkijos sieną daugiausia žmonių iškeliauja (Deloitte, 2024). Kiti aspektai, didinantys šį precedento neturintį kontekstą, yra tai, kad Rusijos ir Ukrainos karas vyksta Europoje ir kad Lenkija ribojasi su Ukraina, Rusijos sąjungininke Baltarusija ir pačia Rusija Kaliningrado srityje. Be to, dėl savo geografinės padėties Suvalkų koridoriaus Lenkijos pasienio bendruomenė tapo pažeidžiamesnė. Kita lenkų pasienio bendruomenė Bieče galbūt buvo mažiau pažeidžiama, tačiau vis dar buvo paveikta tų naujų aplinkybių, nes ji buvo arti Žešuvo miesto ir karinio mazgo netoli Lenkijos ir Ukrainos sienos.

Pirmosiomis invazijos savaitėmis abiejų bendruomenių informatoriai galėjo girdėti ir matyti karinius orlaivius, patruliuojančius oro erdvėje prie sienų su Ukraina, Baltarusija ir Rusija (Kaliningrado sritis). Atsižvelgiant į tai, tyrimas buvo atliktas precedento neturinčiame laiko ir erdvės kontekste dviejose pažeidžiamose bendruomenėse, praėjus maždaug metams po invazijos.

Pirmųjų reakcijų ir rizikos suvokimo analizės rezultatai padeda geriau suprasti reakciją precedento neturinčiame kontekste, kaip žmonės jautėsi ir kaip bandė susidoroti su šios naujos situacijos netikrumu. Rusijos invazijos į Ukrainą pasekmės persikėlė į Lenkiją – abiejose Lenkijos pasienio bendruomenėse reakcija į šią ekstremalią situaciją buvo panaši. Žmonės buvo netikri ir išsigandę dėl šio konflikto eigos, tačiau nugalėjo tuos jausmus ir ėmėsi sprendimų bei veiksmų, siekdami padėti pabėgusiems iš Ukrainos ir atvykusiems į Lenkiją.

Tarp baimės, panikos ir (arba) netikėjimo, chaotiškų veiksmų ir įsiučio, ypač pirmosiomis krizės savaitėmis, vyravo natūrali reakcija padėti pabėgėliams iš Ukrainos. Žmonės sugebėjo suaktyvinti savo veiksmus, kurie virto kolektyvine humanitarine pagalba. Krizė paskatino atsaką, kuris prasidėjo nuo individualių sprendimų veikti ir peraugo į masinį kolektyvinį įsikišimą ir pagalbos frontą. Gana sunku visapusiškai palyginti Lenkijos atvejį su kitais atvejais Europoje. Palyginus Lenkijos atsaką su kitomis Europos šalimis, kurios pastaraisiais metais taip pat patyrė migrantų / pabėgėlių antplūdį, pavyzdžiui, Italija, Graikija, Vokietija ar Nyderlandai (Boersma et al., 2018; Panebianco, 2016; Rast et al., 2020), matyti, kad yra vienas dalykas, būdingas visoms šalims, – tai natūrali reakcija padėti tiems, kuriems to reikia, pasireiškianti spontaniškais veiksmais iš apačios į viršų, kolektyviniais neformalių veikėjų – civilių gyventojų – veiksmais (Boersma et al., 2019) ir dažnai solidarumo išaugimu (Sandberg & Andersen, 2010).

Sunku palyginti kitus atsako elementus, nes Lenkijos atvejis yra precedento neturintis (Gluszak & Trojanek, 2024). Be to, tai, kas yra neatsiejama atsako Lenkijoje atveju, yra geografinis ir istorinis kontekstas, žmonių sąmoningumas ir gilus

supratimas apie tai, ką reiškia būti Rusijos okupuotam. Atrodo, kad pats krizinės situacijos kontekstas atlieka svarbų vaidmenį organizuojant atsaką. Lenkija ir kitos šalys, nukentėjusios nuo pabėgėlių ir (arba) migracijos krizių, buvo įtrauktos į kitą kontekstą, nes buvo skirtingos aplinkybės ir su tomis krizėmis susijusi rizika.

Išvados atskleidžia įvairius rizikos naratyvus, susijusius su Suvalkų koridoriaus rizika. Dominavo suvokimas, kad Suvalkų koridorius iš tiesų yra pavojinga vieta žemėlapyje, sukelianti baimę ir netikrumą. Šis suvokimas atitinka pagrindinius žiniasklaidos naratyvus, ypač Vakarų žiniasklaidoje apie Suvalkų koridorių (Beldyga, 2023). Tačiau buvo ir priešingų požiūrių apie tai, koks rizikingas ir pavojingas yra arba gali būti Suvalkų koridorius. Tie pasakojimai, be kita ko, neišreiškė jokios baimės ar netikrumo jausmo dėl Suvalkų koridoriaus rizikos.

Nors tiek istorinis, tiek geografinis kontekstas nebuvo įtrauktas į konceptualią šio tyrimo schemą, iš reagavimo dalyvių analizės rezultatų išplaukia patvirtinimas, kad istorinis fonas gali reikšmingai paveikti atsaką į ekstremalią situaciją. Ypač daugelis Biečo bendruomenės pagalbinių buvo labai įsitraukę į paramą ne tik atvykstantiems į Lenkiją, bet ir likusiems Ukrainoje. Jų atsakas buvo veiksmingesnis dėl Ukrainoje jau sukurtų bendravimo kanalų per draugų, pažįstamų ir šeimos giminaičių tinklus. Šio tipo tinklų kūrimas taip pat buvo vertingas konkrečios informacijos šaltinis apie poreikius vietoje Lenkijoje ir Ukrainoje.

Suvalkų bendruomenės atveju istorinis ir geografinis kontekstas taip pat buvo svarbus, nes istoriniai pasakojimai apie audringus Lenkijos ir Rusijos santykius yra perduodami iš kartos į kartą. Įdomu pažymėti, kaip istorinio ir geografinio konteksto vaidmenys pasidalijo dviejose bendruomenėse, esančiose dviejuose Lenkijos kampeliuose. Tarp geografijos ir istorijos dar viena vertinga sąvoka, kurią reikia nuodugniai išnagrinėti, kyla iš analizės, atminties peizažo, atminties konstravimo erdviniuose kontekstuose (Minta-Tworzowska, 2013).

Rezultatai rodo, kad civiliai gyventojai labiausiai reagavo į krizę, susijusią su didžiuliu migrantų / pabėgėlių antplūdžiu iki formalių subjektų įsikišimo (Boersma et al., 2019). Oficialiųjų veikėjų reakcija buvo šiek tiek apribota procedūrų ir principo „iš viršaus į apačią“ (Boin & Rhinhard, 2008). Kadangi tarpvalstybinis ir sudėtingas krizės pobūdis reikalauja daugialypio atsako, pavieniai veikėjai negalės į ją reaguoti savarankiškai. Tyrimų rezultatai apie tai, kokie subjektai dažniausiai dalyvavo reaguojant, patvirtina teiginį, kad daugiausia dėmesio reikėtų skirti civilinio krizių valdymo gebėjimų ugdymui, darant prielaidą, jog krizės atsakas yra veiksmingiausias vietos lygmeniu (Boin & Rhinhard, 2008; Fassin, 2022).

Veiksmų, kurių buvo imtasi reaguojant į krizę abiejose Suvalkų ir Biečų bendruomenėse, analizės rezultatai patvirtina, kad visi veikėjai, tiek formalūs, tiek individualūs, savarankiškai priėmė sprendimus veikti ir reaguoti, o ne likti pasyviais krizės dalyviais. Jie buvo įtraukūs veikėjai, norintys aktyviai įsitraukti į atsaką pagal turimus išteklius, tapę bendruomenės atsparumo atstovais (Moralli & Allegrini, 2021).

Turimi ištekliai labai paveikė šios reakcijos efektyvumą (Moralli & Allegrini, 2021). Mobilizacijos, prieigos prie išteklių ir išteklių paskirstymo pobūdis buvo dinamiškas ir nestructūrizuotas, nes veikėjai pakliuvo į precedento neturintį

kontekstą. Tai reiškia, kad realiuoju laiku jie naudojo turimus išteklius jau žinomiems poreikiams tenkinti, pavyzdžiui, per socialinius tinklus, arba teikė išteklius chaotiškai, atsitiktinai, nes humanitarinės pagalbos mobilizavimo mastas buvo labai didelis, ypač pirmosiomis invazijos savaitėmis.

Rezultatai patvirtina, kad abi bendruomenės sugebėjo sutelkti beveik visus išteklius, kurių joms reikėjo reaguoti. Šie ištekliai arba jau buvo prieinami, arba buvo aktyvuoti per socialinius tinklus, kurie tapo svarbiausi komunikacijos apie poreikius ir reikalingus išteklius kanalai. Rezultatai patvirtina teorinę prielaidą, kad abiejų bendruomenių ištekliai buvo realių ir potencialių išteklių derinys (Hart et al., 1993), pasiekiamas, mobilizuojamas, aktyvuojamas, paskirstomas ir perskirstomas pagal poreikius. Ištekliai buvo ir išliko svarbiu socialiniu kapitalu, kuri generuoja bendruomenės (Ansell et al., 2010) daugiausia per socialinius tinklus, ypač tiesiogiai dalyvaujančių socialinių subjektų tinklus (Obrist et al., 2010).

Kuo daugiau išteklių bus prieinama bendruomenės ir individo lygmeniu, tuo savarankiškesnės gali tapti bendruomenės ir jų nariai. Abi bendruomenės parodė tam tikrą pasitikėjimą savimi ir gebėjimus (Helfgott, 2018), tačiau, nepaisant neišnaudoto potencialo, pastebėta, kad abi bendruomenės negalėjo būti iki galo savarankiškos.

Krizė tarp abiejų bendruomenių narių sustiprino bendruomeniškumo jausmą (Drury et al., 2009), kuris veikėjus padarė paslaugius ir naudingus. Todėl prireikus veikėjai padėdavo vieni kitiems, kad humanitarinės pagalbos frontas būtų dar stipresnis. Bendruomeniškumas sustiprino subjektų bendradarbiavimo gebėjimus. Dėl precedento neturinčio konteksto bendruomenių nariai iki ekstremalios situacijos labai dažnai nėra pažinoję vieni kitų. Tačiau jiems pavyko optimaliai paskirstyti turimus išteklius ir gebėjimus reaguojant į krizę (Flint & Luloff, 2007). Viena iš tokio sklandaus ir veiksmingo bendradarbiavimo priežasčių – pasitikėjimas, dėl tokio bendradarbiavimo tik sustiprėjęs.

Pasitikėjimas kartu su geografinėmis, istorinėmis ir atminties peizažo (angl. *memoryscape*) sampratomis, netrauktomis į teorinį pagrindimą, išskyla kaip galimas bendruomenės atsparumo matmuo, teigiamai paveikęs atsaką į krizę. Pasitikėjimas taip pat sustiprėjo tarp subjektų, kurie vienas kitą pažinojo anksčiau, bet ne itin dažnai bendradarbiavo. Reagavimas į krizę precedento neturinčiame kontekste privertė žmones įveikti nepasitikėjimo problemas, kad galėtų suteikti optimalią pagalbą ir paramą. Pasitikėjimas vienas kitu pavertė bendradarbiavimą veiksmingesne ir pozityvesne patirtimi.

Kaip ir agentūros bei išteklių atveju, socialiniai tinklai teigiamai paveikė reakciją. Jie leido gauti įvairių išteklių (Chayko, 2015), pavyzdžiui, materialinių ar nematerialių, kurie buvo mobilizuoti ir paskirstyti pagal poreikį. Šios konkrečios krizės laikais socialiniai tinklai pasirodė esanti neįkainojama platforma / kapitalas, padedantis veikėjams patenkinti net ir netikėčiausius poreikius, kurių reikia krizinėje situacijoje (House et al., 1988).

Nepaisant daugybės apribojimų, kylančių dėl bendro koordinavimo stokos arba išsklaidytos lyderystės, bendruomenės ėmėsi vietos lyderystės, intuityviai suprasdamos, kad joms reikia turėti bendrą pagrindą norint susidoroti su didžiulio žmonių antplūdžio iš Ukrainos į Lenkiją pasekmėmis. Ši lyderystė įgalino

bendruomenes nuolat ieškoti sprendimų dėl krizės sukeltų problemų ir iššūkių (Helfgott, 2018). Rezultatai patvirtina, kad žmogiškosios vertybės suaktyvino prosocialų ir atsakingą elgesį kitų žmonių atžvilgiu (Cole & Habashi, 2020).

Vertybės buvo labai svarbios vadovaujant veikėjams sprendimų priėmimo procese. Kai reaguojama į pabėgėlių / humanitarines krizes kitose Europos šalyse, solidarumas paprastai yra labiausiai paplitusi vertybė, pavyzdinė vertybė arba „skėtinė“ vertybė, kuri yra žmonių, padedančių kitiems, pagrindinių motyvų ir ketinimų reprezentacija arba įkūnijimas (Serntedakis, 2016).

„Sendai Framework“ darbotvarkėje pabrėžiama, kad reikia platesnio ir labiau į žmones orientuoto požiūrio į nelaimių riziką, geresnio supratimo apie nelaimių riziką poveikio, pažeidžiamumo ir pasirengimo srityje. Tai pat reikia pripažinti įvairių reagavimo procese tiesiogiai dalyvaujančių bendruomenių subjektų, ypač civilių gyventojų, nukentėjusių dėl krizės, vaidmenį bendradarbiaujant ir įgyvendinant veiksmingo reagavimo į krizes planus bei priemones (The Sendai Framework, 2015).

Šias patirtines žinias galėtų toliau naudoti visų lygių vyriausybės pareigūnai, pilietinė visuomenė, bendruomenės ir savanoriai, taip pat privatus sektorius, dalindamiesi patirtimi, išmoktomis pamokomis, gerąja praktika, taip pat mokymais ir švietimu apie nelaimių rizikos mažinimą ir krizių švelninimą (The Sendai Framework, 2015).

5.4. IŠVADOS

1. Visapusiška esamų krizių, rizikos suvokimo ir neapibrėžtumo tyrimų apžvalga atskleidė krizių visuomenės, rizikos visuomenės, polikrizės, tarpvalstybinės krizės, rizikos suvokimo, ontologinio saugumo, taip pat pilietinio pasirengimo (aktyvaus krizių valdymo etapo) sampratą, kurios buvo įvardytos kaip gyvybiškai svarbios kuriant šio tyrimo teorinę konceptualią sintezę.

2. Išsamios literatūros apžvalga apie bendruomenės atsparumo tyrimus atskleidė pagrindines bendruomenės atsparumo dimensijas – veiksnumą, išteklius, pasitikėjimą savimi, gebėjimus bendradarbiauti, socialinius tinklus, vietos žinias ir lyderystę, taip pat žmogiškąsias vertybes, kurios buvo įvardytos kaip pagrindiniai bendruomenės atsparumo krizėms ir netikrumui aspektai.

3. Išvados atitinka ir patvirtina šio tyrimo tikslu sukurtą teorinę sistemą ir konceptualią sintezę, apimančią bendruomenės, bendruomenės atsparumo, krizės, rizikos suvokimo ir neapibrėžtumo, taip pat *rizikos kraštovaizdžio* sąvokas.

4. Sukurta ir pagrįsta metodika, skirta bendruomenės atsparumo, rizikos suvokimo ir neapibrėžtumo vaidmeniui analizuoti Lenkijos pasienio bendruomenių atsako į krizę kontekste, pasirodė tinkama šio specifinio kokybinio tyrimo ir empirinių duomenų rinkimo tikslui.

5. Rezultatai rodo, kad Rusijos karinė agresija prieš Ukrainą yra tarpvalstybinio pobūdžio krizė, sukėlusį poveikį Lenkijai. Šis įvykis kėlė realią riziką ir grėsmę, sukėlusią individo ir bendruomenės veiksnumą, kuri kartu su ištekliais ir socialiniais tinklais buvo viena svarbiausių bendruomenės atsparumo dimensijų, turėjusių įtakos sprendimui veikti, tiesiogiai įsitraukti į humanitarinės ir pabėgėlių krizės sukeltą atsaką. Individualus rizikos ir situacijos suvokimas apie krizę abiejose bendruomenėse, nesvarbu, ar reakcija buvo baimė, nerimas, panika, ar pasirengimas

veikti, pirmiausia paskatino žmonių aktyvumą. Šį atsaką galima palyginti su domino efektu arba grandinine reakcija. Sužinojus apie Rusijos agresiją Ukrainoje, momentiniai ir spontaniški atsakymai natūraliai suaktyvino veiksnumą. Vėliau reikėjo sutelkti nuosavus / vidinius arba išorinius išteklius. Išteklių poreikis savo ruožtu suaktyvino socialinius tinklus kaip socialinio kapitalo ir išteklių šaltinį. Priklausomai nuo konteksto, konfigūracija / tvarka gali keistis ir atsakymas vis tiek buvo susijęs su veiksnumu, tačiau socialiniai tinklai buvo pirmoje vietoje, o ištekliai – antroje. Ši grandininė ir domino efekto reakcija buvo labai intensyvi, ypač pirmosiomis krizę sukėlusios invazijos savaitėmis. Ilgainiui atsakymas tapo struktūriškesnis, nes pagalbininkai mokėsi ir įgijo patirties. Rezultatai atskleidžia reagavimo į krizes ir neapibrėžtumo modelį, kuris krizės metu suaktyvina veiksnumą, o veiksnumas – rizikos suvokimą. Tačiau šis modelis gali skirtis priklausomai nuo konteksto.

Lenkijos pasienio bendruomenių atsako atveju istoriniai įvykiai, taigi ir istorinis kontekstas, kuris nebuvo tyrimo objektas, dominavo, nes lenkai žino, ką reiškia būti užpultiems Rusijos kariuomenės. Istoriniai (atminties vaizdai) ir geografiniai (rizikos vaizdai) kontekstai iškyla kaip reikšmingi bendruomenės atsparumo aspektai, turintys įtakos veiksnumui ir motyvacijai imtis veiksmų reaguojant į krizę.

Tačiau rezultatai taip pat atskleidžia, kad jie gali suteikti galių ir sustiprinti bendruomenės atsparumo kūrimo procesą arba trukdyti jam. Tai priklauso nuo to, kaip atskiri veikėjai suvokia krizę ir riziką. Šiuo atžvilgiu, be jau rekomenduojamos vartoti *rizikos kraštovaizdžio* sąvokos, nauja atsirandanti priemonė ir sistema, kuri yra gyvybiškai svarbi tiriant bendruomenės atsparumo ir rizikos suvokimo vaidmenį reaguojant į krizes ir neapibrėžtumą, yra *atminties kraštovaizdžio* sąvoka, t. y. atminties konstravimas erdviniuose kontekstuose.

Abi lenkų bendruomenės skiriasi daugeliu aspektų. Suvalkai yra tranzitinis miestas ir tarptautinio susisiekiimo mazgas šiaurės rytinėje Lenkijos dalyje su pagrindiniais transporto maršrutais, einančiais per miestą, t. y. iš Berlyno per Varšuvą į Baltijos šalis, į Helsinkį, sudarant vienintelį sausumos ryšį tarp Europos ir likusių ES ir NATO šalių. Biečas nėra tranzito zonoje, bet yra arti sienos su Ukraina. Nepaisant šių skirtumų, jiems būdingas panašus reagavimo į krizę modelis. Pagalba Suvalkuose daugiausia buvo nukreipta į bendruomenę, skirta į Suvalkus vykstantiems ar čia gyvenantiems pabėgėliams, o Bieče pagalba daugiausia buvo nukreipta į išorę, už bendruomenės ribų, skirta Ukrainos žmonėms prie Lenkijos ir Ukrainos sienos arba pačioje Ukrainoje. Abi bendruomenės sugebėjo prisitaikyti prie trikdžių. Nors adaptaciniai gebėjimai nebuvo naudojami, matuojami ir tiriami, tyrimo temą reikia toliau nagrinėti ir analizuoti bendruomenės atsparumo krizei kontekste.

Lieka atsakyti į klausimą – ar toks pat atsako modelis buvo ir kitose paveiktose Lenkijos bendruomenėse, kurios vis dar nėra ištirtos. Jei, kilus krizei, labiausiai nukenčia bendruomenė ir jos nariai, neformalūs subjektai, pavyzdžiui, pirmasis atsakingas asmuo, prieš imantis veiksmų instituciniams veikėjams, tuomet, įgijus tiesioginės patirties nagrinėjant pasirinktus esminius bendruomenės aspektus, rekomenduojama tęsti tyrimus, kas daro bendruomenę atsparią. Šios praktinės žinios ir patirtis, įgyta reagavimo procese, yra gyvybiškai svarbus ir vertingas patikimų duomenų šaltinis, iš kurio galima daryti išvadas apie tai, ką reiškia bendruomenei būti

atspariai, kaip rizikos suvokimas paverčiamas kasdieniais veiksmais, kurių imamasi reaguojant. Norint iširti globalias sąvokas, tokias kaip atsparumas / bendruomenės atsparumas ar individualus rizikos suvokimas, tyrimai turėtų būti atliekami vietiniu lygmeniu.

6. Sistemingas paveiktų vietovių tyrinėjimas bendruomenės lygmeniu, reagavimo į riziką ir krizes sąsaja, daugiau dėmesio skiriant geografiniam ir istoriniam kontekstui, turėtų būti nauja bendruomenių atsparumo krizėms mokslinių tyrimų tema. Bendruomenės atsparumas yra gebėjimas, būdingas jai prieš krizę, jos metu ir po jos, tyrimai taip pat turėtų apimti proaktyvių krizių valdymo etapų – atkūrimo, atsigavimo ir civilinio pasirengimo – analizę. Už krizių valdymą atsakingi subjektai turi atidžiai išnagrinėti žinias, gautas iš formalių ir neoficialių subjektų, tiesiogiai dalyvaujančių reaguojant.

Reikia skubiai pradėti dialogą su civiliais gyventojais dėl to, ką galima kartu padaryti siekiant padidinti atsparumą. Šį dialogą turėtų inicijuoti valdžios ir savivaldos lygmens institucijos, atsižvelgdamos į civilių gyventojų, patiriančių krizę, rekomendacijas. Toks dialogas galėtų padėti plėtoti natūralų pasitikėjimu pagrįstą bendradarbiavimą. Kita praktinė rekomendacija, kuri galėtų būti naujos politikos formavimo pagrindas, – krizių valdymo ir civilinio pasirengimo srityse derinti hierarchijas iš viršaus į apačią ir iš apačios į viršų. Toks holistinis požiūris padėtų sustiprinti atsako mechanizmą, pavyzdžiui, nustatant suinteresuotąsias šalis ir subjektus, kurie galėtų būti tiesiogiai įtraukti į atsaką.

Jei kilus krizei labiausiai nukenčia bendruomenė, jos nariai, neformalūs veikėjai, pavyzdžiui, pirmasis atsakingas asmuo, prieš imantis veiksmų instituciniams veikėjams, tuomet, įgijus tiesioginės patirties nagrinėjant pasirinktus esminius bendruomenės aspektus, rekomenduojama tęsti tyrimus, kas daro bendruomenę atsparią.

Šios praktinės žinios ir patirtis, įgyta reagavimo procese, yra gyvybiškai svarbus ir vertingas patikimų duomenų šaltinis, iš kurio galima daryti išvadas apie tai, ką reiškia bendruomenei būti atspariai ir kaip rizikos suvokimas paverčiamas kasdieniais veiksmais.

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7. CURRICULUM VITAE

Natalia Ewa Beldyga
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Education:

Doctoral studies

- 2020 – 2024 Doctoral studies at the Faculty of Social Sciences, Arts and Humanities at Kaunas University of Technology with Vytautas Magnus University and the Lithuanian Centre for Social Sciences, Lithuania
- 2022 – 2022 Erasmus + doctoral visit to participate in the doctoral course “Sociology of Risk and Uncertainty”, Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Risk and Crisis Research Centre/ Mid Sweden University, Sweden

Master’s studies

- 2011 – 2013 Master of Arts, Krzysztof Kieślowski Film School, University of Silesia, Poland
- 2000 – 2006 Master’s degree in English philology, Faculty of Modern languages, Institute of English Studies, University of Warsaw, Poland

Postgraduate studies

- 2018 – 2019 Innovative economy, Faculty of Economic Sciences, University of Warsaw, Poland
- 2008 – 2009 Cultural diplomacy, Adam Mickiewicz Institute, Collegium Civitas, Poland

Professional experience:

Positions

- 2025 – present Junior Project Researcher, EU Decarbonisation in Times of Crises: Exploring Social Innovations and Enhancing an Equitable Twin Transition Project (DeCries), Academic Centre of Social Sciences Arts and Humanities, Faculty of Social Sciences, Arts and Humanities at Kaunas University of Technology

- 2024 – present Junior Assistant Professor, Academic Centre of Social Sciences, Arts and Humanities, Faculty of Social Sciences, Arts and Humanities at Kaunas University of Technology
- 2017 –present Journalist and producer (freelance) Factstory/ Agence France-Presse

Other relevant professional experience and positions

- 2025 – present Board member, Polish Sociological Association
- 2024 – present Board member, Warsaw Chapter of Polish Sociological Association
- 2021 – present Board member and secretary, *Teraz Wschód* Foundation

Areas of research interest:

Community resilience, civil preparedness, humanitarian crisis, crisis management, risk perception, security;

8. LIST OF SCIENTIFIC PUBLICATIONS AND CONFERENCES

Scientific publications

1. Bėdyga, N. (2024). Community Resilience Dimensions of Agency and Human Values in Polish Border Communities Response to Refugee Crisis Caused by Russian Invasion of Ukraine in 2022. *Faces of War*, 2, 109–120. <https://doi.org/10.18778/3071-7779.2024.2.07>
2. Bėdyga, N. (2024). Analiza reakcji polskich społeczności przygranicznych na kryzys humanitarny i uchodźczy spowodowany inwazją Rosji na Ukrainę – studium przypadku. *Mazowsze studia regionalne: Part I: Analyses and studies*, 49, 23–35. <https://doi.org/10.21858/msr.49.02>
3. Bėdyga, N. (2023). The role of community resilience dimensions of agency and resources in community resilience to crises and uncertainty in Polish border communities. *European Integration Studies*, 17, 71–82. <https://doi.org/10.5755/j01.eis.1.17.33991>
4. Bėdyga, N. (2022). A review of literature on community responses to environmental crises. *Filosofija. Sociologija = Philosophy, Sociology*, 33(4), 397–406. <https://doi.org/10.6001/fil-soc.v33i4.4845>
5. Bėdyga, N. (2024). Human Values in Times of Crisis and Uncertainty: A Case Study of Polish Border Communities in Response to the Russian Invasion of Ukraine. In O. Koshulko (Ed.), *Humanity and Ukraine: Invasion of Ukraine Resistance through Language, Culture, and the Taking Up of Arms* (pp. 99–117). New York: Bloomsbury Publishing. ISBN 978-1-66696-052-5, p. 99-117
6. Bėdyga, N. (2023). Analiza dyskursu medialnego o ryzyku i niepewności przesmyka suwalskiego w ogólnopolskich i zagranicznych mediach. In G. Cątek (Ed), *Młoda socjologia o społeczeństwie* (pp. 90–107). Kraków: Impuls. ISBN 9788382942859. p. 90-107

Scientific conferences

International

1. 27-31.08.2024 – “*The Impact Of Individual Risk Perception On Community Resilience: A Case Study Of Polish Border Communities’ Response To Humanitarian And Refugee Crisis Caused By Russian Invasion Of Ukraine*” at 16th European Sociological Association Conference – *Trust, Tension and Transformation*, organizer: European Sociological Association, Porto, Portugal
2. 26-27.10.2023 – “*The Role of Community Resilience in Polish Border Communities’ Response to Refugee Crisis and Uncertainty caused by Russian invasion of Ukraine*” at ESA RN22 and ISA TG04 Midterm Conference 2023 – *Uncertain times, unsettled lives? Complex risks and uncertainties in times of crises*, organizer: University of Southern Denmark Esbjerg, Esbjerg, Denmark
3. 25.08.2023 – “*Response to Refugee Crisis in Polish Border Communities caused by Russian invasion of Ukraine*” at International Online Conference – *the Trauma of War: Experiences of Refugees and IDPs*, organizer: Oksana Koshulko SARU fellow at the Department of Social Sciences and Business, Roskilde University and Scholars at Risk Denmark Section, Roskilde, Denmark
4. 01-02.06.2023 – “*Response to Refugee Crisis in Polish Border Communities Caused by Russia Invasion of Ukraine*” at 8th International Research Conference – *Faces of War – War & Society*, organizer: Institute of History, University of Łódź, Łódź, Poland
5. 13.04.2023 – “*Community Resilience to Crises and Uncertainty in Polish Border Communities*” at International, Interdisciplinary, Scientific Conference on European Processes – *Public and Corporate Governance in Progress: Economic, Political, Social and Technological challenges*, organizer: Public Governance research group, Faculty of Social Sciences, Arts and Humanities at Kaunas University of Technology, Kaunas, Lithuania
6. 27-29.09.2022 – “*‘Riskscape’ of Suwałki Gap: community of first responders in Ukraine refugee crisis and uncertainty*” at 8th Annual Meeting of Society for Risk Analysis Europe – *Nordic Chapter Conference*, organizer: The Society for Risk Analysis Europe-Nordic Chapter, The SRA-E Nordic Chapter Organizing Committee, University of Bergen, Bergen, Norway

7. 31.08-03.09.2021 – *“The Role of Human Values in the Communities Responses to Environmental Crisis”* during Research Network Session RN08 – *Disaster, Conflict and Social Crisis* at 15th ESA Conference, European Sociological Association, Barcelona, Spain

National

1. 08.12.2023 – *„Rola odporności społeczności w reakcji polskich społeczności przygranicznych na kryzys uchodźcy i niepewność spowodowaną rosyjską inwazją na Ukrainę“* at National Scientific Conference – *2nd Young Sociologists Forum*, organizer: Warsaw Chapter of Polish Sociological Association, Warsaw, Poland
2. 21.04.2023 – *“Community response to refugee crisis in Polish border communities caused by Russian Invasion of Ukraine”* at 9th annual national conference of young sociologists and anthropologists – *Actual Research in Sociology and Anthropology: problems and contexts*, organizer: Vytautas Magnus University, Lithuanian Sociological Association, Kaunas, Lithuania
3. 25-26.11.2022 – *“The local community of the Suwałki Gap in the face of the humanitarian crisis caused by Russia's invasion of Ukraine”* at National Scientific Conference – *Young Sociologists Forum*, organizer: Warsaw Chapter of Polish Sociological Association, Warsaw, Poland
4. 20.05.2022 – *“The Role of Women in Response to Crisis”* at Risk & Crisis Research Centre Seminar Series, organizer: Risk & Crisis Research Center/ Mid Sweden University, Östersund, Sweden
5. 11-12.04.2022 – *“The Role of Women in Response to Crisis”* at Mid Sweden FGV Forum Days, organizer: Forum for gender studies/Mid Sweden University, Undersåker, Sweden

9. ANNEXES

Annex 1. Approval for conducting the research



KAUNAS UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY RESEARCH ETHICS COMMISSION

APPROVAL FOR THE CONDUCTION OF THE RESEARCH

6 February 2023 No. M6-2023-03

Following the Guidelines for the Assessment of Research Ethics at Kaunas University of Technology approved by Order No. A-201 of the Rector of Kaunas University of Technology of 23 April 2021, and the Protocol No. M4-2023-03 of the Research Ethics Commission of Kaunas University of Technology (hereinafter – Committee) of 6 February 2023, the conduction of the following research is approved:

1.	Title of the research	Community Resilience to Crises and Uncertainty in Polish Border Communities
2.	Programme, title, number of the project	–
3.	Duration of the research	13 February 2023 – 13 February 2024
4.	Doctoral student	Natalia Beldyga
5.	Contact information	+48 507 747 821; natalia.beldyga@ktu.edu

The project of the planned research does not contradict the general principles of research ethics.

Chairperson of the Commission

Ramunė Kasperė

Annex 2. Interview questions – Community members

Community resilience to crisis and uncertainty: interview guide

Date:

Interviewer:

Interviewee:

In person:

Teleconference:

Start time:

End time:

Interviewer: I would like to conduct an interview with you in which I will ask you questions related to your experiences of helping Ukrainian refugees arriving in Poland after the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

Background questions:

1. Please tell me a little about yourself (age, occupation).
2. Think of the moment when you learned about Russia invading Ukraine and Ukrainian refugees arriving in Poland and describe your first reactions in as much detail as possible.
3. How would you describe the community?
4. Can you name major values related to your community?

Topics:

Community resilience

Agency

5. Did you take any action on your own to support Ukrainian refugees arriving in Poland?
6. Did you look for any groups or initiatives supporting Ukrainians so that you could contribute or join in too?
7. Were you aware of the activities of volunteers from Angels from PKP/ Museum of Biecka Land in Biecz?
8. Did you support the group in any way?

Resources

9. What kind of (human, material, non-material) resources did you provide to support Ukrainian refugees?
10. How did you get access to these resources?
11. Would you have been able to support Ukrainian refugees without these resources?

Self-reliance

12. Was it possible for you to remain self-reliant and not ask others for any additional support?
13. Do you think you can already have everything within the community to make it self-reliant?

Collaboration capacity

14. Who did you cooperate with?
15. What kind of collaboration was it?
16. What is your experience in cooperating with volunteers and the municipality in supporting Ukrainian refugees?
17. Has anything changed in your collaboration with others since the invasion?

Social networks

18. What are your experiences of using personal and/or professional social network to support Ukrainian refugees?
19. What are your experiences of using networking sites to support Ukrainian refugees?
20. Whom did you contact?
21. What do you think about cooperation based on a personal or/and social network?

Local knowledge and leadership

22. Have you ever responded to a similar situation before?
23. How did you know how to support Ukrainian refugees?
24. Was there any leading organization in the city in charge of supporting Ukrainian refugees?
25. Were you approached by volunteers or the municipality to receive updated information about the situation of Ukrainian refugees in your city?
26. Were you asked by volunteers or the municipality to solve a problem or respond to an emergency involving Ukrainian refugees?
27. What are your thoughts about your role in supporting Ukrainian refugees?
28. What are your thoughts about the role of the volunteers (Angels from PKP/ Museum of Biecka Land in Biecz) in supporting Ukrainian refugees?
29. What are your thoughts about the Municipality in supporting Ukrainian refugees?

Human values

30. Why did you decide to support Ukrainian refugees?

Crisis management cycle

Reconstruction and recovery (proactive phase)

31. Do you have any information about the situation of Ukrainian refugees who decided to stay in Suwałki/Biecz?
32. What are you doing now for the Ukrainian refugees who decided to stay in Suwałki/Biecz?
33. Have you noticed any changes in Suwałki/Biecz since the invasion which started almost a year ago?

Civil preparedness (proactive phase)

34. If it happened again, how would you respond?
35. Has any volunteer or the municipality asked the group to share your thoughts, observations, reflections and recommendations so that your experience in supporting Ukrainian refugees can be applied for a future crisis management strategy?
36. What are the biggest challenges?
37. What are the lessons learned for the future?
38. What can you recommend for better preparedness?

Risk and uncertainty

Risk perception (individual, local, regional, global)

39. How do you and your close ones feel about living in Suwałki/Biecz?
40. Could you name the biggest risks related with living in Suwałki/Biecz?
41. What kind of dangers are related to the Suwałki Gap?
42. What are your thoughts about Western media narratives about the Suwałki Gap?
43. How did you feel when you learned about a missile which landed on the territory of Poland?
44. What are your thoughts about the fact that Poland is a NATO member?
45. Do you think the world can feel threatened by World War III or any other risk?

General follow-up questions:

46. Would you like to add anything else related to the discussed topics?

Interviewer: I would like to thank you for participating in this interview.

Annex 3. Interview questions – Volunteers

Community resilience to crisis and uncertainty: interview guide

Date:

Interviewer:

Interviewee:

In person:

Teleconference:

Start time:

End time:

Interviewer: I would like to conduct an interview with you in which I will ask you questions related to your experiences of helping Ukrainian refugees arriving in Poland after the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

Background questions:

1. Please tell me a little about yourself (age, occupation).
2. Think of the moment when you learned about Russia invading Ukraine and Ukrainian refugees arriving in Poland and describe your first reactions in as much detail as possible.
3. How would you describe the community?
4. Can you name major values related to this community?

Topics:

Community resilience

Agency:

5. Did you take any action on your own to support Ukrainian refugees arriving in Poland?
6. Did you look for any groups or initiatives supporting Ukrainian so that you could contribute or join in too?
7. How did you learn about volunteers from Angels from PKP/ Museum of Biecka Land in Biecz?
8. Why did you join this particular group?
9. What was your role in the group?

Resources:

10. What kind of (human, material, non-material) resources did the group provide to support Ukrainian refugees?
11. How did the group get access to these resources?
12. Would the group have been able to support Ukrainian refugees without these resources?

Self-reliance:

13. Was it possible for the group to remain self-reliant and not ask others for any additional support?
14. Do you think you can already have everything within the community to make it self-reliant?

Collaboration capacity:

15. Who did the group cooperate with?
16. What kind of collaboration was it?
17. What is your experience in cooperating with local individuals and the municipality in supporting Ukrainian refugees?
18. Has anything changed in the group's collaboration with others since the invasion?

Social networks:

19. What are your experiences of using personal and/or professional social network to support Ukrainian refugees?
20. What are your experiences of using networking sites to support Ukrainian refugees?
21. Whom did you contact?
22. What do you think about cooperation based on a personal and/or social network?

Local knowledge and leadership:

23. Have you ever responded to a similar situation before?
24. How would you describe the decision-making process conducted in the group?
25. Was there a leader in the group?
26. How would you describe this leadership?
27. How did the group know how to support Ukrainian refugees?
28. Was there any leading organization in the city which was in charge of supporting Ukrainian refugees?
29. Was the group approached by local individuals or the municipality to receive updated information about the situation of Ukrainian refugees in your town?
30. Was the group asked by local individuals or the municipality to solve a problem or respond to an emergency involving Ukrainian refugees?
31. What are your thoughts about the role of the group in supporting Ukrainian refugees?
32. What are your thoughts about the role of local individuals and the Municipality in supporting Ukrainian refugees?

Human values

33. Why did you decide to support Ukrainian refugees?

34. Why did you decide to join the group?

Crisis management cycle

Reconstruction and recovery (proactive phase)

35. Do you have any information about the situation of Ukrainian refugees who decided to stay in Suwałki/Biecz?

36. What is the group doing now for those Ukrainian refugees who decided to stay in Suwałki/Biecz?

37. Have you noticed any changes in Suwałki/Biecz since the invasion which started almost a year ago?

Civil preparedness (proactive phase)

38. If it happened again, how would the group react?

39. Has any local individual or the municipality asked the group to share your thoughts, observations, reflections and recommendations so that your experience in supporting Ukrainian refugees could be applied for a future crisis management strategy?

40. What are the biggest challenges?

41. What are the lessons to be learned for the future?

42. What can you recommend for better preparedness?

Risk and uncertainty

Risk perception (individual, local, regional, global)

43. How do you and your close ones feel about living in Suwałki/Biecz?

44. Could you name the biggest risks related with living in Suwałki/Biecz?

45. What kind of dangers are related to the Suwałki Gap?

46. What are your thoughts about Western media narratives about the Suwałki Gap?

47. How did you feel when you learned about a missile which landed on the territory of Poland?

48. What are your thoughts about the fact that Poland is a NATO member?

49. Do you think the world can feel threatened by World War III or any other risk?

General follow-up questions:

50. Would you like to add anything else related to the discussed topics?

Interviewer: I would like to thank you for participating in this interview.

Annex 4. Interview questions – Municipality

Community resilience to crisis and uncertainty: interview guide

Date:

Interviewer:

Interviewee:

In person:

Teleconference:

Start time:

End time:

Interviewer: I would like to conduct an interview with you in which I will ask you questions related to your experiences of helping Ukrainian refugees arriving in Poland after the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

Background questions:

1. Can you tell your about yourself (age)?
2. Think of the moment when you learned about Russia invading Ukraine and Ukrainian refugees arriving in Poland and describe your first reactions in as much detail as possible.
3. How would you describe the community?
4. Can you name major values related to this community?

Topics:

Community resilience

Agency:

5. Could you describe the actions and initiatives of the municipality in response to Ukrainian refugees coming to Suwałki/Biecz?
6. What kind of support did the Municipality offer?
7. What was your role in those actions and initiatives?
8. Did the Municipality contact its twin/partner city in Ukraine?
9. Was the Municipality aware of the initiatives of volunteers from Angels from PKP/ Museum of Biecka Land in Biecz and local individuals?
10. Did the Municipality support the volunteers and local individuals?
11. Could you tell me more about this particular support?
12. How did you learn about volunteers from Angels from PKP/ Museum of Biecka Land in Biecz?

Resources:

13. What kind of (human, material, non-material) resources did the Municipality provide to support Ukrainian refugees?
14. How did the Municipality get access to these resources?
15. Would the Municipality have been able to support Ukrainian refugees without these resources?

Self-reliance:

16. Was it possible for the Municipality to remain self-reliant and not ask others for any additional support?
17. Do you think you can already have everything within the community to make it self-reliant?

Collaboration capacity:

18. Who did the Municipality cooperate with?
19. What kind of collaboration was it?
20. What is your experience of cooperation with local individuals and the volunteers in supporting Ukrainian refugees?
21. Has anything changed in the Municipality's collaboration with others since the invasion?

Social networks:

22. What are the municipality's experiences of using personal and/or professional social network to support Ukrainian refugees?
23. What are your experiences of using networking sites intended to support Ukrainian refugees?
24. Whom did you contact?
25. What do you think about cooperation based on a personal or/and social network?

Local knowledge and leadership:

26. Has the Municipality ever responded to a similar situation before?
27. How would you describe the decision-making process conducted in the Municipality?
28. Was the Municipality approached by any local individual, volunteers or any other organization to receive updated information about the situation of Ukrainian refugees in the city?
29. Was the Municipality asked by any local individual, volunteers or any other organization to solve a problem or respond to an emergency involving Ukrainian refugees?
30. Could you provide examples where some organizations approached the municipality?

31. Did the Municipality approach any local individuals, volunteers or any other organization to receive updated information about the situation of those people in the city?
32. Did the Municipality ask any local individual, volunteers or any other organization to solve a problem or respond to an emergency involving Ukrainian refugees?
33. What is the opinion of the Municipality about the role of the Municipality itself in supporting the refugee crisis?
34. What is the opinion of the Municipality about the role of volunteers (Angels from PKP/Museum of Biecka Land in Biecz) and local individuals in supporting Ukrainian refugees?

Human values:

35. Why did the Municipality decide to support Ukrainian refugees?

Crisis management cycle

Reconstruction and recovery (proactive phase)

36. If it happened again, how would the Municipality react?
37. What are the biggest challenges?
38. What are the lessons to be learned for the future?
39. What does the Municipality recommend for better preparedness?
40. Does the Municipality have any information about the situation of Ukrainian refugees who decided to stay in Suwałki/Biecz?
41. What is the Municipality doing now for those Ukrainian refugees who decided to stay in Suwałki/Biecz?
42. Has the Municipality asked any local individual, organization or volunteers to share their thoughts observations, reflections and recommendations so that their experience in supporting Ukrainian refugees can be applied for a future crisis management strategy?
43. Has the Municipality already developed any long-term program or strategy for the purpose of integrating/assisting Ukrainian refugees in Suwałki/Biecz?
44. Has the municipality developed any civil preparedness program with drills or exercises addressing its citizens?
45. Which organization should be responsible to preparing citizens for crises?
46. Have you noticed any changes in Suwałki/Biecz since the invasion which started almost a year ago?

Risk and uncertainty

Risk perception (individual, local, regional, global):

47. How do you and your close ones feel about living in Suwałki/Biecz?
48. Could you name the biggest risks related to living in Suwałki/Biecz?
49. What kind of dangers are related to the Suwałki Gap?

50. What is the opinion of the Municipality about Western media narratives about the Suwałki Gap?
51. What was the reaction of the Municipality when a missile landed on the territory of Poland?
52. What are your thoughts about the fact that Poland is a NATO member?
53. Do you think the residents of the Municipality feel safe because of the fact that Poland is a NATO member?
54. Do you think the world can feel threatened by World War III or any other risk?

General follow-up questions:

55. Would you like to add anything else related to the discussed topics?

Interviewer: I would like to thank you for participating in this interview.

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