

Role of Non-Governmental Organizations on Rural Areas in Poland

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Abstract: The idea of the civil society is characterized historically in the past and currently in modern times by on the one hand participation in civil organizations, and on the other hand the extent and form of social self-organization. Therefore, due to the fact that nowadays a more common occurrence is a tendency to express civil society in terms of non-governmental organizations. This article concentrates upon civil society in rural areas of Poland through the prism of NGOs. Therefore the aim of this paper is to describe the process of shaping the civil society in Poland's rural areas.

Keywords: Civil society, Local development, Non-governmental organizations

1. Introduction

There is no doubt that Polish rural society is characterized by significant departures from the basic patterns of civil society. Nowadays all the countries (not only Poland) are facing challenges from the forces of change driven by the globalization. This changing situation causes greater stress upon the a growing significant role of non-governmental organizations, because they are expected to play a key role in terms of development. Furthermore domestic crisis of the European Union (affected by world economic crisis) has a huge impact on civil society. However the crisis is still very much a worrying subject and its effects are keenly felt. This is reflected, inter alia, into the needs of finding a new model of development in rural areas, which can be based on NGOs actions since the current one creates exclusion.

2. Essential Justification

The term "civil society" is capacious and supporting structure, is only a theoretical construct that is not reflected in reality (only some of its designates could be tested in an empirical way like condition of non-governmental organizations). In other words, civil society is a term ambiguously interpreted and scientifically imprecise. Today it is one of the most popular ideas of social theory and certainly one of the most popular political slogans (...). The concept of civil society remains primarily a contemporary vision of utopia, a useful but also mysterious catchword (Herbst, 2005, pp. 9–11). Therefore, because the idea of civil society evolves through time and now the main characteristic of a modern civil society (including the countryside) is on the one hand participation in civil organizations, on the other hand the extent and form of social self-organization, and due to the fact that nowadays a tendency to express civil society more often in terms of outside political activities or activities undertaken outside state institution, in this article civil society is considered as a set of non-governmental organizations.

Further deliberations were used such as sociological/community concepts of civil society, upon which characteristics of the third sector in rural areas in Poland was made. The choice of this tradition is supported by the fact that today there are increasing numbers of NGOs working for environment, community welfare and its inhabitants.

3. Research Information

Because in today's world the pursuit of development can take place not only in public institutions but also can be delivered by non-governmental organizations. Therefore this article reflects mostly on the results of research which was oriented on civil society in rural areas in Poland. The research was conducted by the Rural Polish Forum and Nicolaus Copernicus University within the project: "Good Start – support and information centre for non-governmental organization in rural areas" and was based on quantitative methods (surveys) which were performed providing depth to the information gleaned from a large representative sample of survey respondents (together, using CATI, 376 non-

governmental organizations took part)¹. The sample is representative of the non-governmental organizations in rural areas of Poland and so allows for generalization. Qualitative research will be conducted in March 2013 in order to complement the survey work.

The main objectives of the project/research were to develop a methodology for supporting the activity on the rural areas and developing mechanisms to support non-governmental organizations.

Also, it has to be mentioned that this research was financed with funds from Human Capital Programme and was a response to a real problem for the development of civil society in rural areas in Poland, which results from the weakening of the capacity of rural residents in the area of identifying and shaping their own individual lifestyle, needs and develop their own value systems and to influence decisions concerning their local environment by acting in non-governmental organizations.

4. Result and Discussion

In Poland the 3rd sector underwent deep transformation over the past 20 years. NGOs became truly effective in mid 1989, when civil society started to develop at a very fast pace. But the most dynamic moment of its development falls into the year 2000, so almost 10 years after the political system transformation, when according to the National Court Register there were registered 6000 associations and 400 foundations (Przewłocka, 2011, p. 7). Since then, every year across the country have been nearly 4000 new associations and 1000 foundations registered (Herbst, 2010, p. 10).

Currently there are over 100 000 registered organizations in Poland but in this place we have to face with a worrying phenomenon which is noticeable increase in the number of inactive organizations (25% of all NGOs are so called “dead souls”, in other sectors there is the concept of ‘churn’ (e.g. new subscribers to satellite television but older customers drop off)) (Przewłocka, 2011, p. 7). Non-governmental organizations in rural areas that have been tested are relatively young, two thirds of them have been created within the past 10 years – look at diagram no 1. This situation has its justification in the accession to the European Union in May 2004, as the accession has been created artificially. The main goal of many of this organizations was to apply for funding from various EU programs. Many foundations and associations were established only for the implementation of specific projects.

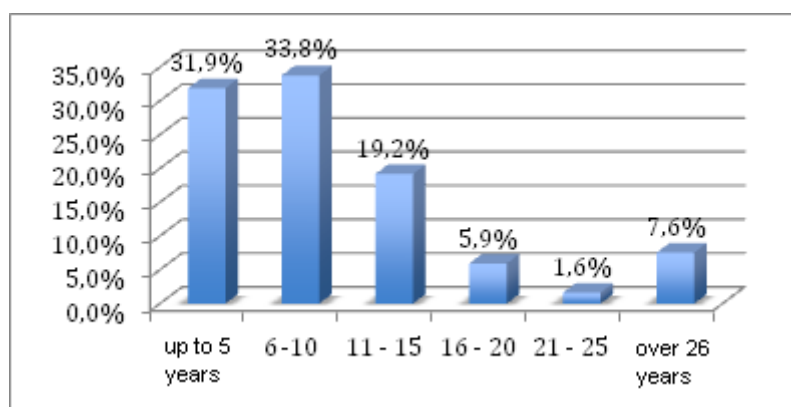


Chart 1: Age of NGOs on rural areas in Poland (Own analysis)

Reading the report *Basic facts about non-governmental organizations*, we find that in Poland we have a large number of associations involved in sport, tourism or simply single hobbies. We also have organizations involved in arts and culture, education and upbringing (Herbst, 2011, p. 29). This is reflected in the activity profile of the rural organizations. Most of them - 24% - deal with local development, which is a kind of novum, many groups of organizations are connected with social welfare (17,9%), education (13,6%) or sport and tourism (10,7%).

A general overview of non-governmental organizations shows, that the third sector in Poland is not very strong, because almost $\frac{3}{4}$ of Polish is not involved in the actions taken by civil organizations, and only 1 in 7 declare activity in one area – which is usually education. Moreover, last year, only 1 in 5 Poles partook in a voluntary unpaid work for their local community (CBOS).

The national data also shows that the overall condition of civil society is not the best what is directly connected to low level of civic engagement of Poles, which follows from different kind of historical burdens from the one hand and widely shared believe in the lack of influence of ordinary people on public issues from the other hand (CBOS).

The results of conducted research to date, which are connected with organizations acting on behalf of rural areas, also do not show NGOs in a good light.

Drawing on what we have known from the surveys, it would seem that among those who acting in the organizations are mostly officers (46%) and teachers (31%) – diagram no 2.

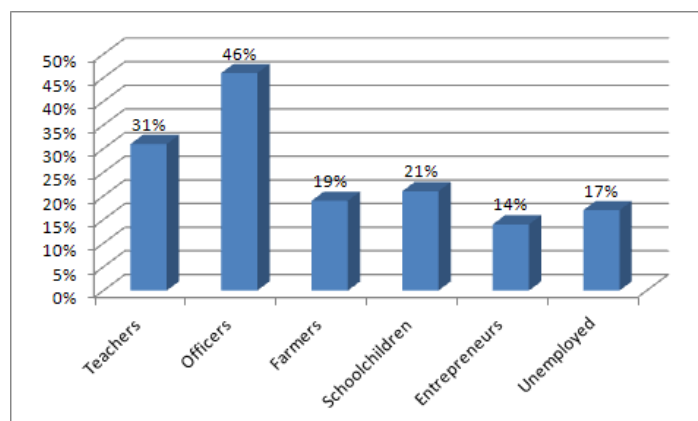


Chart 2: The most active members of organizations (Own analysis)

This first category is also working for both NGOs and public institutions. The fact that civil society involves specific members of communities is an example that ordinary people do not believe in the power of this kind organizations. In this way they are biting the hand that triesto feed them.

A similar situation occurs with the number of active members. In reality not many of NGOs participants are acting. In most cases it is up to 50 % (up to 25% - 35% of tested NGOs, 26- 50% - 35% NGOs, 51-75% - 12% NGOs and over 75% - 18% of NGOs).

Of course, from a subjective point of view, many good things may be said about condition of Polish rural NGOs, but like was mentioned, the 3rd sector in Poland is not very strong, what we can see in the annual budget of rural non-governmental organizations which is less than 50 000 PLN (about 12 000 euro) – diagram no 3.

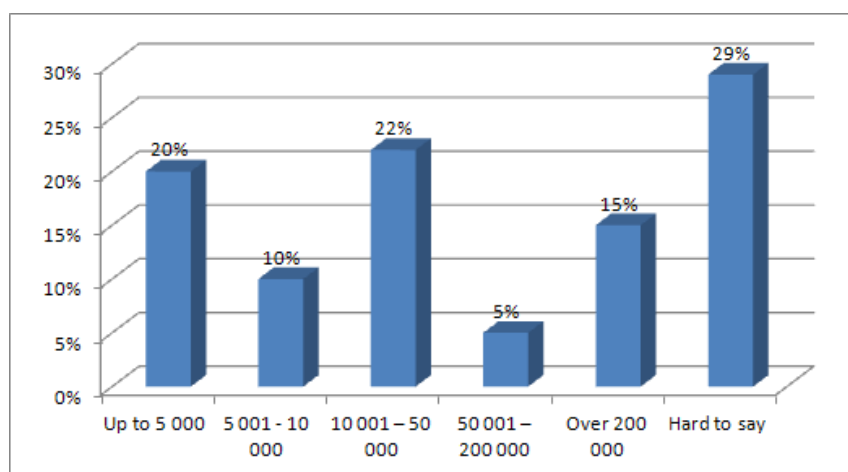


Chart 3: Annual budget (in PLN) (Own analysis)

This weakness issue also causes significant influence on the unfavorable situation of these institutions. The disadvantage of this issue means that NGOs are unable to conduct many activities and most of the organizations consisted of less than 2 projects. Furthermore most of the projects had budgets under 10 000 PLN (about 2 500 euro). Significantly regarding the funding, as much as 75% of organizations did not apply for funds and 70% of respondents did not intend to apply because of too complicated procedures and lack of needs, and it unfortunately is not sufficient. Looking more closely at the issue, we see that the vast majority of organizations assess their financial situation as average (39.6%). However, worthy of note is a fact that about 23% of organizations indicate financial problems.

Moreover, organizations often do not apply for resources from the EU because there is a required contribution, which they do not have. They emphasize the need for policy change, otherwise small non-governmental organizations will have to reduce or suspend their activities. Another, an oft-pointed reason for not applying, is the lack of social trust, which binds to the precedents that took place in the local community (on several occasions it was indicated that the associations were deceived by people who were recruited from the outside to raise funds). Only in the one of southern province – Opolskie Voivodeship – does much of the organization does not indicate greater difficulties/barriers. Perceive their situation as good. This is mainly due to the fact that they are related to the German minority, so most of their funding comes from the German government.

Non-governmental organizations also face many other problems. They have to face if they want to exist. Next to the already mentioned financial problems (58.9%), NGOs point out the difficulties of administrative difficulties (33.3%) and lack of interest of the local population (21.1%) – diagram no 4.

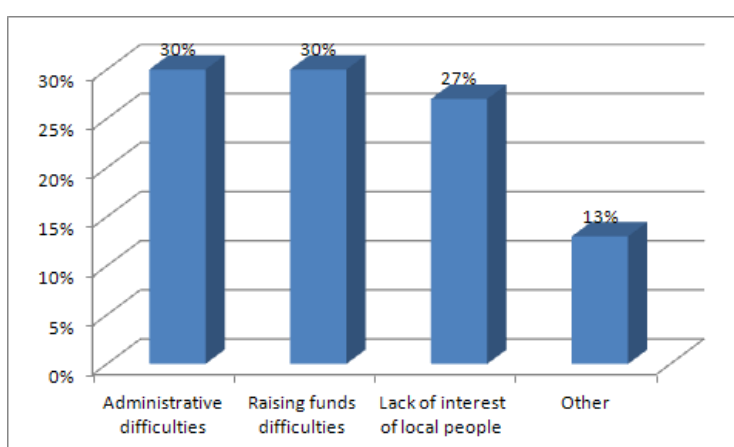


Chart 4: Difficulties according to NGOs activities (Own analysis)

We can see, that non-governmental organizations could be the motor of change and be one of the main factors that led to develop civil society in rural areas in Poland. But unfortunately they are not.

This picture emerges from the way of thinking of the members of NGO, which emphasized that there is no one solution for improving the condition of civil society on rural areas, but in overcoming this negative situation, which has arisen, especially helpful could be additional financial support (like as was mentioned by 82%). But to overcome the obstacles accordance to running NGOs also is needed specialist knowledge that may be provided to members in the form of training, especially in the field of fundraising and mobilizing people.

The preliminary analysis give not a uniform picture emerges of NGOs and rural development in Poland. Surveyed organizations are diverse in many ways, such as in the size, by the profile of action, development prospects, to financial resources. Profile reflects the characteristics of the surveyed organizations of all NGOs operating in the country.

Therefore, results that were obtained show only the problem of civil society development in rural areas in Poland, which results from the weakening of the capacity of rural residents in the area of identifying and shaping their own individual lifestyle, needs and their own value systems and to influence on decision concerning their local environment. Furthermore studies undertake in this project had increased understanding of the importance of sustainable development as well as bottom-up actions. They illustrate mechanisms that allow for more efficient building integrated and informed community primarily and increase the involvement of villages' residents in making pro-development

initiatives in the sphere of civic activities. Demonstrably that which was implied was a non-possibility of overcoming the crisis of rural area without full involvement of the local population.

5. Conclusion

Civil society has been an important area of study for sociology and another social studies. The research examined civil society variously as a multidimensional phenomenon, an objective and subjective measure. This research provided an integrated and interdisciplinary knowledge. It allowed analysis of environmental problems of a human nature and understanding the role of social factors in the community developing process.

This article has increased understanding of the importance of local development caused by non-governmental organizations because it is common knowledge that NGOs play one of the leading roles primarily and allow for more efficient building of integrated community secondly. And finally, in the long-term goals non-governmental organizations can better adapt their activities to the needs of local communities.

NGOs become a tool of social change. Is helpful and facilitating factor in the development of civil society. A progressive tool to change society for more egalitarian. It is a good beginning, because we cannot change all world but we can start somewhere. Therefore we can say that civil society has many different faces, Mr. Hyde may be the result even where Dr. Jekyll is the objective (Edwards, 2009, p. 109).

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