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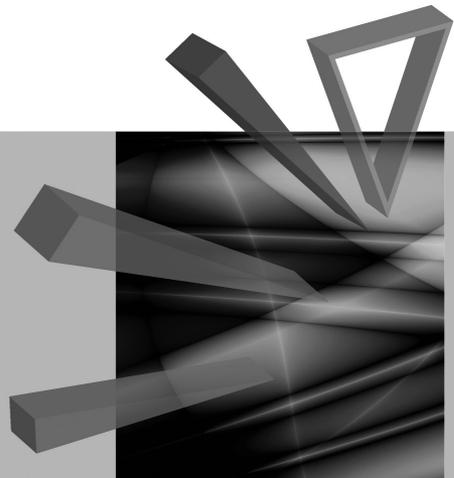
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Contents

Preface	7
Marcin Baron, Artur Ochojski: The cluster of clusters concept in the perspective of regional policy-making and business practice	9
Jacek Chądzyński: Cooperation between communities and non-governmental organizations in Poland – results of a survey	27
Niki Derlukiewicz: Prospects for innovation development in the European Union according to the new Europe 2020 strategy	37
Paweł Dziekański: Financial synthetic index and the economic security of the region in the context of local government efficiency	46
Dariusz Głuszczuk: The enterprise financial sources and expenditure for innovation – case of Polish regions	62
Magdalena Kalisiak-Mędelska: Some aspects of public administration reforms in Poland after 1989 – the revenue autonomy of local governments	70
Magdalena Łyszkiewicz: Cost assessment in the delivery of municipal services	82
Anna Mempel-Śnieżyk: Smart specialisation and clusters in economic growth	92
Katarzyna Mischczak: Contemporary spatial planning and case of Poland ...	104
Mirosława Marzena Nowak: Place of dairy cooperatives in the regional development: case of Łódzkie voivodship, Poland	117
Ирина Солошич, Валентина Пидлиснюк: «Зеленая» экономика в контексте обеспечения перехода Украины к устойчивому развитию	126
Monika Szymura: Protection of authors' rights in knowledge-based market economy	136
Teresa Topczewska, Waldemar Siemiński: Integrated urban development planning at the regional level in Poland	144
Mehmet Topcu: Impacts of gated housing estates on housing values: Case of Konya, Turkey	155
Alicja Zakrzewska-Półtorak: Metropolization of the Polish space and its implications for regional development	167

Streszczenia

Marcin Baron, Artur Ochojski: Koncepcja klastra klastrów w perspektywie polityki regionalnej i biznesu	26
Jacek Chądzyński: Współpraca między społecznościami i organizacjami pozarządowymi w Polsce – wyniki ankiety	36

Niki Derlukiewicz: Perspektywy rozwoju innowacji w Unii Europejskiej według nowej strategii Europa 2020	45
Paweł Dziekański: Syntetyczny wskaźnik bezpieczeństwa ekonomicznego regionu w kontekście działalności władz lokalnych	61
Dariusz Głuszcuk: Wydatki oraz źródła finansowania innowacji w przedsiębiorstwach – przypadek polskich regionów	69
Magdalena Kalisiak-Mędelska: Wybrane aspekty reform polskiej administracji publicznej po 1989 roku – samodzielność dochodowa jednostek samorządu terytorialnego	81
Magdalena Łyszkiewicz: Zarządzanie kosztami w procesie świadczenia usług komunalnych	91
Anna Mempel-Śnieżyk: Inteligentne specjalizacje i klastry a wzrost gospodarczy	103
Katarzyna Miszczak: Współczesne planowanie przestrzenne na przykładzie Polski	116
Mirosława Marzena Nowak: Miejsce spółdzielni mleczarskich w rozwoju regionalnym: przypadek województwa łódzkiego, Polska	125
Iryna Soloshich, Valentina Pidlisnyuk: Green economy within the framework of implementation of sustainable development in Ukraine	135
Monika Szymura: Ochrona praw autorskich w gospodarce opartej na wiedzy	143
Teresa Topczewska, Waldemar Siemiński: Zintegrowane planowanie rozwoju miast na poziomie regionalnym w Polsce	154
Mehmet Topcu: Wpływ zamkniętych osiedli mieszkaniowych na wartość mieszkań: przykład Konya w Turcji	166
Alicja Zakrzewska-Półtorak: Metropolizacja polskiej przestrzeni i jej skutki dla rozwoju regionów	175

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COOPERATION BETWEEN COMMUNITIES AND NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS IN POLAND – RESULTS OF A SURVEY

Abstract: The article presents selected results of a questionnaire survey conducted under the research project “Local authority between the state, society and the market: cooperation and competition.” The project has been set up and carried out by the staff of the Chair of Local Government Economy, University of Łódź. The object of the analysis is respondents’ opinions on the cooperation between the surveyed communities and their institutions, on the one hand, and non-governmental organizations, on the other.

Keywords: community, non-governmental organizations, inter-sectoral cooperation and competition.

1. Introduction

The aim of concepts such as *public management* or *local governance* that have for years been promoted in the literature is to provide local governments with a management system where the development policy is created, the necessary implementation decisions are made, and the policy’s assumptions are directly fulfilled through a process that engages not only local authorities¹ and their institutions, but also other players, such as local residents, private sector entities and organizations in the non-governmental sector² that constantly expands and grows in importance. In practical terms, the system requires the public sector to focus on cooperation, but also to be able to compete on a “healthy” basis with local

¹ For the purpose of this article, local government should be understood as self-government entities at the community level as specified in the law.

² More information on these concepts can be found, for instance, in [Zalewski 2007; John 2004, pp. 6–22; Jewtuchowicz 2005, pp. 125–129].

entities representing other ownership sectors, which includes the creation of opportunities allowing them to become part of a public service delivery system.

The NGO sector goes by many names. The most popular of them is “a third sector,”³ but “a civil sector,” “a social sector,” “a non-profit-sector,” “a voluntary sector,” or “an independent sector” are also used. As far the sector’s organizations are concerned, the situation is similar. Therefore, there are the third-sector organizations, the non-profit or not-for-profit organizations, the civil organizations, the community organizations, the voluntary organizations, etc.⁴ The Polish public benefit activity and volunteerism act introduced on 24 April 2003 [Ustawa z 24 kwietnia 2003] disentangled the definitional problem by providing a legally binding description of a non-governmental organization. Article 3, item 2 of the act specifies that NGOs are corporate or non-corporate entities other than public sector entities specified in the public finance act, which are established under relevant laws and carry on their activities on a non-profit basis, inclusive of foundations and associations.

The most important thing about NGOs is, though, that their role and significance are growing, because their existence is viewed as a major element of democracy and a civil society. People becoming NGO members gain an opportunity to make real changes in their communities, either “directly” or by “highlighting that a problem exists and pushing the authorities to provide a solution.” Their activity can also improve the range, availability and quality of services that meet vital public needs⁵. This fact was appreciated by the Polish legislature, which consequently provided article 5 and the subsequent articles of the said act with rules regulating the scope and types of cooperation between NGOs and public administration.

2. The field of research and primary methodological assumptions underlying the presented project

The main purpose of this article is to answer the question about how frequently Polish communities use the statutory forms of cooperation with NGOs and to

³ In connection with a concept dividing socio-economic activity in modern states into a business (or private) sector (consisting of profit-oriented, privately-owned entities that create the material foundations for society and function on market principles), a public sector (made of state and self-government authorities responsible for the smooth functioning of the state, whose main purpose is to meet public needs), and a third sector (with non-governmental organizations which are outside the official structures of the state and act to meet the needs of individuals, groups, or the general public and to instil and consolidate a sense of unity in society, rather than for profit). See, for instance, [Wygnański 2005, pp. 11–14].

⁴ More at <http://www.ngo.pl/>.

⁵ More in [Kietlińska 2010].

evaluate the outcomes of the cooperation. Answers will be provided based on the results of a survey conducted by the staff of the Chair of Local Government Economy, University of Łódź, as part of a larger research project “Local authority between the state, society and the market: cooperation and competition.”⁶ The primary aim of the project is to gain comprehensive knowledge about what role local authorities play as a component of the state-society-market system and about relations occurring within the system, so that an attempt can be made at creating an optimal model of intersectoral cooperation.

The research part of the project was divided into three stages:

1) a pilot study performed in December 2010 and January 2011, with questionnaire forms mailed to the mayors of 96 urban and rural communes (6 in each of the 16 voivodships – 2 rural communes, 2 urban-rural communes and 2 urban communes);

2) a “true” quantitative study conducted from October to December 2011; in this case questionnaire forms were distributed via surface mail or electronically, as requested by the recipient, to the mayors of all 2479 communes in Poland;

3) a qualitative study carried out between April and June 2012; this activity consisted of case studies covering 6 preselected communes (2 rural, 2 urban-rural, and 2 urban). The data were collected from free interviews with rural and urban mayors based on standardised lists of questions, as well as from questionnaire interviews with local residents, entrepreneurs and the representatives of non-governmental organizations.⁷

As regards the quantitative study presented herein, the respondents mailed back 484 completed questionnaires, which yields a return rate of 19.5%. In that number 311 (64.3%) were sent back by rural communes, 112 (23.1%) by urban-rural communes, and 61 (12.6%) by urban communes. This structure is very similar to the composition of Polish communes⁸.

⁶ An individual research project NN 114167138 financed from the 2010-2013 scientific fund of the Ministry of Science and Higher Education. Project authors and staff: Prof. E. Wojciechowski (head), Dr. M. Kalisiak-Mędelska, Dr. A. Podgórnjak-Krzykacz and Dr. J. Chądzyński.

⁷ The numbers of questionnaire interviews conducted in rural communes were the following: 150 with residents, 20 with entrepreneurs and 5 with the representatives of local NGOs. In the rural-urban communes the respective numbers were 200, 20 and 10, and in urban communes 250, 30 and 15.

⁸ The respective percentages of Polish communes are the following: 63.4 (rural communes), 24.3 (urban-rural communes) and 12.3 (urban communes). Source: developed based on GUS report on territorial self-government entities as on 9 May 2012, http://www.stat.gov.pl/bip/36_PLK_HTML.htm (26.06.2012).

3. The presentation of research findings on the cooperation between communes and NGOs

The definition of a non-governmental organization used in the presented research is the same as that provided in art. 3 item 2 of the public benefit activity and volunteerism act, but the scope of organizations selected for analysis was extended to include also corporate entities and organizations run by the Catholic Church and other Churches, religious associations, as well as social cooperatives and associations formed by local governments. Article 3, item 3 of the act allows these organizations to engage in public benefit activity and cooperate with local governments within its scope, but they must accept all consequences that arise from this cooperation, i.e. both privileges and responsibilities⁹. The discussion of research results presented in this article is limited to non-governmental organizations as strictly defined.

Among all communes covered by the survey only 8 (1.7%) did not cooperate with local NGOs at all. Where cooperation took place, it most frequently involved the delivery of public services commissioned by local authorities (see Table 1). In two-thirds of cases this form of cooperation was regular and in over one-fifth occasional. Interestingly, the willingness for cooperation and its actual frequency are clearly related to the size of the commune.¹⁰ All communes populated by not less than 50 000 people commissioned some public services at least occasionally. Those inhabited by 100 000 and more people made such requests on a regular basis.¹¹ The same relationship occurs when communes are analysed by their type, because rural units are typically smaller than urban-rural communes and these are smaller than urban communes.

Another form of cooperation that the public benefit and volunteerism act allows is exchange of information about future lines of action and cooperation between local authorities and NGOs for the purpose of their coordination. The rate of communes choosing not to exercise this option is higher than before – 18.9%, with cases of information exchange being also more sporadic – their low frequency is reported by 32.5% communes compared with 21.4% of those commissioning

⁹ Companies carrying on activities regulated by the sport act of 25 June 2010 were intentionally excluded from this group of organizations [Ustawa z 25 czerwca 2010].

¹⁰ The socio-demographic section of the questionnaire form contained 7 different groups of communes: 1) < 5000 residents, 2) 5000 – 9999 residents, 3) 10 000 – 19 999 residents, 4) 20 000 – 49 999 residents, 5) 50 000 – 99 999 residents, 6) 100 000 – 499 999 residents, 7) ≤ 500 000 residents. Among 484 communes that returned the questionnaires 112 were group 1, 176 group 2, 127 group 3, 41 group 4, 17 group 5, 9 group 6, and 2 group 7.

¹¹ The larger is a commune, the more potential recipients of services and, consequently, the more organizations to provide them. Moreover, the more organizations are in the market, the more opportunities for the community and its institutions to enter into cooperation with them. This seems to be the main explanation of the situation.

public services. In this case too, the size of the commune and its readiness to cooperate are interrelated. The rate of communes that do not exchange information is the smaller the larger their size.¹² An exception is units with populations ranging from 100,000 to 500,000. However, only 9 communes of this size were surveyed and only one of them did not use the option, so trying to find and explain a meaningful relationship based on a single case would be irrational. This case should rather be treated as an exception that does not challenge the general rule.

Table 1. The forms and frequency of cooperation between the surveyed communes and the NGOs (477 = 100%)

Form of cooperation	Frequency of cooperation		
	regular	occasional	no cooperation
Commissioning of public services	318 (66.7%)	102 (21.4%)	57 (11.9%)
Exchange of information about future lines of action and cooperation for coordination purposes	232 (48.6%)	155 (32.5%)	90 (18.9%)
Consultation meetings on normative acts which may affect the statutory activities of selected organizations	243 (50.9%)	121 (25.4%)	113 (23.7%)
The formation of joint advisory and initiative teams	105 (22.0%)	169 (35.4%)	203 (42.6%)

Source: developed by the author based on the survey results.

The third form of cooperation that the commune representatives were inquired about was the organization of consultation meetings for the purpose of discussing the drafts of normative acts which could have effect on the statutory activities of local NGOs. The percentage of communes that did not use this form of cooperation was even higher – 23.7%. This unfortunately means that almost every fourth commune makes decisions which can influence the functioning of local NGOs without involving them in this process, and thereby prevents them from contributing at the groundwork stage. Another 25% of communes call the meetings only occasionally, so NGOs participate in the decision-making process to a very limited degree. As a means of improving the situation and making sure that communes develop solutions that are more in line with what local NGOs expect joint advisory and initiative teams should be formed, allowing their NGO members to have direct influence on the locally designed and implemented policies affecting their business. Unfortunately, over 40% of the surveyed communes did not have those teams at all and another 35% called them “once in blue moon.” This situation is not very optimistic and it should not be expected that it will change quickly and radically.

¹² Among the smallest communes the rate is 26.1%; for those populated by less than 10 000, 20 000, 50 000 and 100 000 people its respective values are lower, i.e. 22.2, 14.3, 7.3 and 5.9%. In communes with populations under 500 000 the rate rises to 11.1%, whereas in the largest communes populated by 500 000 or more residents it is 0.

The most frequent form of cooperation between commune authorities and their institutions, on the one hand, and non-governmental organizations, on the other, is the promotion of physical culture and sport (it is reported by over 70% of the surveyed communes). Less popular forms are, by order of importance, social welfare (55% of communes), then culture, arts, the preservation of cultural goods

Table 2. Cooperation between the surveyed communes and the opinions on its results

Area of cooperation	No. of cases	Share (484 = 100%)	Ranking for share	Average grade	Ranking for grade
Social welfare	266	55.0%	2	3.69	8
Charitable activities	212	43.8%	10	3.56	11
Maintenance of national tradition, fostering of Polish identity and national, civic and cultural awareness	250	51.7%	4	3.94	2
Work on behalf of national minorities	111	22.9%	20	2.87	20
Protection and promotion of health	205	42.4%	12	3.73	7
Work on behalf of disabled people	227	46.9%	7	3.76	5
Promotion of employment and occupational activity	156	32.2%	17	3.19	17
Promotion and protection of women's rights and activity in support of equal rights of men and women	126	26.0%	19	2.81	21
Promotion of economic development, including enterprise development	160	33.1%	16	3.05	18
Support for the development of local groups and communities	188	38.8%	14	3.43	13–14
Science, education, upbringing	230	47.5%	6	3.75	6
Sightseeing and recreation of children and young people	231	47.7%	5	3.83	4
Culture, arts, preservation of cultural goods and traditions	261	53.9%	3	3.93	3
Promotion of physical culture and sport	342	70.7%	1	4.16	1
Ecology, protection of animals and of natural heritage	213	44.0%	9	3.32	15
Public order and security and the prevention of social pathologies	224	46.3%	8	3.66	9
Promotion and protection of human rights and freedoms and civil liberties, as well as activities advancing democracy	148	30.6%	18	2.96	19
Rescue services and protection of population	194	40.1%	13	3.65	10
Promotion of European integration and the development of contacts and cooperation between societies	174	36.0%	15	3.28	16
Promotion and organization of volunteerism	207	42.8%	11	3.43	13–14
Others (state what?)	8	1.7%	21	3.50	12

Source: developed based on the survey results.

and traditions, and the maintenance of national tradition, fostering of Polish identity and national, civic and cultural awareness (53.9 and 51.7%, respectively). This ranking is not particularly surprising, because a survey the Klon/Jawor Association conducted in 2010 showed sport, recreation, tourism and hobbies to be the main areas of interest among Polish NGOs. They were chosen as the most important by 36% of the sampled organizations.¹³

The other end of the scale is represented by work on behalf of national minorities (less than 23% of answers). This is quite understandable, as these NGOs typically operate in the largest concentrations of people who declare their nationality as non-Polish or mixed.

A somewhat worrying phenomenon is the marginal role given to cooperative efforts in areas such as the promotion and protection of women's rights and equal rights of men and women, the promotion and protection of human rights and freedoms and civil liberties, as well as activities advancing democracy (see Table 2). While an assumption can be made that these areas lie outside the jurisdiction of local governments and are less important for the development of a single community than, for instance, cooperation on social welfare, it is difficult to accept it unconditionally and without criticism. At the same time, it is indisputable that the relatively infrequent cooperation with NGOs promoting employment, occupational activity and economic development, including local enterprise, is an alarming phenomenon. It is partly explainable, though. Surveys which the Polish Business and Innovation Centres Association conducts on a regular basis show that the NGOs' role as a component of an expanding enterprise support system has been shrinking steadily and significantly since 1990s in favour of business corporations established under public-private partnerships and organizations created and run by public administration entities [Matusiak 2010, pp. 24, 25]. It is even worse than that because cooperation in these two areas is also rated low, so the problem lies not only in how often these NGOs take actions but also in their quality, as viewed by the respondents. Complaints that the services of organizations committed to enterprise and innovation development are inconsistent with the expectations of both prospective and existing entrepreneurs and of people seeking to improve their occupational skills or retraining are raised by both local authorities and the beneficiaries. Revisiting the respondents' opinions on the effects of cooperation between the communities and the NGOs we can see that communities usually have very good opinion about NGOs' performance in those areas where cooperation is frequent, however with three exceptions. These are social welfare which ranked second for the number of cooperative efforts and only eighth for the cooperation impacts, and then ecology, protection of animals and

¹³ Other reported activities included education and upbringing (15% of answers), culture and arts (14%), social services and social welfare (7%), protection of health (7%) and local development (5%). See [Przewłocka 2011, pp. 9, 10].

natural heritage that ranked, respectively, ninth and fifteenth. The third exception is protection and promotion of health that ranked twelfth for the number of cooperative efforts but seventh for their effects. This must lead to the question about the causes of the situation. Do commune authorities frequently cooperate with a particular type of NGOs, because they appreciate the outcomes of joint efforts? Or perhaps they give them high grades because of frequent cooperation? Unfortunately, this research is unable to show the direction of this relationship. It remains to hope that local government officials and local administration staff act rationally, i.e. seek opportunities for cooperation whenever they find it useful.

In the opinion of the representatives of a surveyed commune it is very rare for their partner NGOs to have to compete against council-run institutions operating in the same area. Out of 445 commune representatives that gave their opinions on this subject less than 10% pointed to cases of competition, in which those believing that such situations occurred frequently or permanently represented below 1% and those who could not give any other answer but „I don't know” accounted for more than 9%. This suggests that non-governmental organizations are invited to cooperate in these areas where the council-run institutions are not available or where they are too few to handle a given public task.

Sadly, even this first and still cursory analysis of interviews with NGO representatives which were conducted in relation to the third stage of the presented research project and the partial findings of another project, in which the author was involved, that directly dealt with the NGOs in the Łódź voivodship, suggest that the situation about cooperation and (non)-competition from the council-run institutions may, in fact, be less favourable than presented by the representatives of local governments.

4. Conclusions

The conclusions that can be drawn from the analysis of data collected during this survey and those offered by the pilot stage data are similar, i.e.:

- the main form of cooperation between the surveyed communes and the non-governmental organizations is the commissioning of public services (this cooperation is usually regular and systemized), whereas joint supervisory and initiative teams established to deal with areas of particular interest for the third sector organizations are the least frequent;
- physical culture and sport is the area where cooperation is initiated definitely the most frequently, whereas cooperative efforts benefitting national minorities are the rarest;
- the size of the commune is related to its willingness to cooperate and the actual frequency of cooperation;

- communes usually have high opinions on NGOs' performance in areas where cooperation is frequent;
- NGOs rarely have to compete against public sector institutions operating in the same area.

Cooperation between NGOs and local governments authorities would certainly be more frequent and more effective if NGOs had more opportunity to contribute, for instance via joint advisory and initiative teams, to the formulation and implementation of development policies already at the stage when specific solutions that can effect NGOs' activities and their capacity for expansion are designed. This approach would allow a much better, if not full, use of the potential of the organizations, thus helping local communities better meet their needs and develop the areas where they live. For this to happen, human mentality and habits will frequently have to change and people on both sides will have to believe that cooperation is necessary. Learning to cooperate will certainly be a long process, but once it is complete many benefits can be expected for all.

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WSPÓLPRACA MIĘDZY SPOŁECZNOŚCIAMI I ORGANIZACJAMI POZARZĄDOWYMI W POLSCE – WYNIKI ANKIETY

Streszczenie: W artykule przedstawiono wybrane wyniki badania ankietowego przeprowadzonego w ramach projektu badawczego „Władza lokalna między państwem, społeczeństwem a rynkiem: współpraca i konkurencja”, który został przygotowany i zrealizowany przez pracowników Katedry Gospodarki Samorządu Terytorialnego Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego. Przedmiotem analizy są opinie respondentów na temat współpracy władz samorządowych badanych gmin oraz podlegających im podmiotów z organizacjami pozarządowymi.

Słowa kluczowe: gmina, organizacje pozarządowe, współpraca i konkurencja międzysektorowa.