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COLLABORATION BETWEEN LOCAL SOCIAL POLICY ENTITIES AND THEIR READINESS TO IMPLEMENT SOCIAL INNOVATIONS

WSPÓŁPRACA MIĘDZY RÓŻNYMI PODMIOTAMI LOKALNEJ POLITYKI SPOŁECZNEJ A ICH GOTOWOŚĆ DO WDRAŻANIA INNOWACJI SPOŁECZNYCH

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Summary: The aims of the article are: 1) to present the extent of collaboration between different local social policy entities located in 29 rural communes of Łódzkie Province, 2) to analyze these entities' readiness to implement social innovations, 3) to verify the relationship between non-governmental organizations' potential to collaborate with other entities of local social policy and their readiness to implement social innovations. The results of the presented research show that in the studied rural communes non-governmental organizations are not considered by communal offices as true partners equally responsible for the implementation of the local social policy. NGOs' readiness to implement social innovations is related to openness to cross-sectoral collaboration and assuming the role of real partners in this collaboration.

Keywords: local social policy entities, social innovations, collaboration, public institutions, non-governmental organizations.

Streszczenie: Cele artykułu obejmują: zaprezentowanie zakresu współpracy między różnymi podmiotami lokalnej polityki społecznej usytuowanymi na obszarze 29 gmin wiejskich województwa łódzkiego, analizę gotowości tych podmiotów do wdrażania innowacji społecznych, zweryfikowanie zależności między potencjałem współpracy organizacji pozarządowych z innymi podmiotami lokalnej polityki społecznej a ich gotowością do wdrażania innowacji społecznych. Wyniki zrealizowanych badań wskazują, że na obszarze badanych gmin wiejskich organizacje pozarządowe nie mają dla urzędów gmin statusu pełnoprawnych partnerów współodpowiedzialnych za realizację lokalnej polityki społecznej. Jednocześnie gotowości organizacji pozarządowych do wdrażania innowacji społecznych towarzyszy otwarcie na współpracę międzysektorową oraz przyjmowanie w ramach tej współpracy roli autentycznego partnera.

Słowa kluczowe: podmioty lokalnej polityki społecznej, innowacje społeczne, współpraca, instytucje publiczne, organizacje pozarządowe.

1. Introduction

The socio-economic changes occurring in the 1990s in Europe included changes in local social policy. The concepts of active, multisectoral, citizen-based and pluralistic social policy developed at the time [Karwacki, Kaźmierczak, Rymsza 2014; Rymsza 2013; Grewiński, Karwacki, Rymsza 2010; Grewiński 2009]. According to M. Rymsza and A. Karwacki, this trend can be associated with the search for "a kind of another way, something in between the concept of deconstruction of welfare state and decentralization or marketization of the social sphere and the protection of the social order based on welfare state" [Rymsza, Karwacki 2015, p. 101]. Applying these concepts is conducive to the implementation of social innovations [Zajda, Kretek-Kamińska 2017; Sempruch 2012; Grewiński, Karwacki (eds.) 2015; Grewiński, Smolec 2016] understood as changes in solving social problems including the development of social practices alternative to the dominant ones [Zajda 2017a, cf. Grimm et al. 2013; Unceta, Castro-Spila, Fronti 2016; Bosworth et al. 2016].

The aims of the article are: (1) to present the extent of collaboration between different entities of local social policy located in rural communes, (2) to analyze these entities' readiness to implement social innovations, (3) to verify the relationships between variables such as: a) NGOs' readiness to participate in meetings with representatives of other local organizations to exchange information on the commune residents' needs and problems and the ways of solving them, b) NGOs' role assumed in relations with their partners, and their readiness to look for atypical, different ways of solving the problems affecting commune residents.

2. Social innovations and collaboration between local social policy entities

The concept of citizen-based, multisectoral and pluralistic social policy assumes that it is not the sole responsibility of local authorities to solve local social problems. Various local resources should be activated in the process so as to make the local community jointly responsible for solving the social problems that affect them. With reference to social policy it means the need to extend and diversify the spectrum of social services and their potential providers, initiating collaboration between different types of social entities in terms of carrying out the tasks of local social policy, individualization of social services, investing in human and social capital and activation programmes stimulating individuals' potential towards independence in all areas of life, from education, through health care, up to professional activity [Grewiński, Karwacki, Rymsza 2010; Kotarba 2014].

It is thought that the success of the process of implementing social innovations depends on cross-sectoral collaboration in solving local social problems, involving both formal (communal offices, communal social welfare centers, non-governmental organizations) and informal actors (residents who experience these problems, and their

informal representatives) [Davis et al. 2012, pp. 5, 6]. Collaboration between public institutions and other entities, especially non-governmental organizations, may result in the implementation of social innovations. Representatives of the social sector (at least partially) operate so as to solve local social problems, and their activities are not as bureaucratized and routinized as the activities of public institutions [Hailey, James 2004, p. 344; Salamon 2015; Shier, Handy, 2015, p. 2583; Dietrich et al. 2016, p. 1952; Zajda 2017a, b]. Yet, not all non-governmental organizations are interested in implementing social innovations and have the potential for it. K. Jaskyte and M.S. de Riobó observe that most non-governmental organizations look for unconventional solutions to social problems, critically approach their own activity, have the democratic and participatory leadership style, are able to learn from their own mistakes, and collaborate with other local entities interested in solving social problems [Jaskyte, de Riobó 2004, p. 76].

Referring to cited findings, the starting point for our analysis is the hypothesis that there is the relationship between non-governmental organizations' potential to collaborate with other entities of local social policy and their readiness to implement social innovations. Because of the importance of local social policy entities' cross-sectoral collaboration for their readiness to implement social innovations, it is worth analyzing the collaboration, especially with consideration of the specific character of relations between public institutions and non-governmental organizations in rural communes, connected i.a., with the dominant position of public institutions [Zajda 2017b].

3. Methodology of own study

The conclusions made in the work are based on the findings of the first stage of the study carried out in February and March 2017 as part of the project "Local Systems of Social Innovations in Rural Areas" (financed with a grant from the National Science Centre, Kraków[1]) in 29 rural communes of Łódzkie Province located in close proximity of towns with poviat rights. It included:

- 104 structured interviews with the presidents of randomly chosen non-governmental organizations located in selected rural communes, including i.a., questions concerning collaboration with other entities of local social policy and those NGOs' readiness to implement social innovations.
- 43 in-depth interviews were conducted with representatives of local government authorities, i.e., communal office workers: rural commune heads, commune secretaries, officers implementing projects aimed to solve social problems, and managers of communal social welfare centers, who were identified by rural commune heads and commune secretaries to be the most engaged in preparing and implementing projects devoted to solving local social problems.

[1] The project is being carried out in the years 2016-2019 (contract no.: UMO-2015/19/D/HS6/00690, decision no. DEC-2015/19/D/HS6/00690, project no. 015/19/D/HS6/00690).

The number of NGOs functioning in the selected communes was established on the basis of data from the Central Statistical Office. The purchased database included 397 non-governmental organizations. The data was verified through e-mail or phone contacts with the entities in the database. The activity of 142 organizations was confirmed. This number was used to establish the sufficient sample size for inference at the 0.95 confidence level, with the estimated value of 0.5 for unknown fraction and 5% estimation error. The value was $n_{min} = 103.87$. Thus, 104 organizations were randomly chosen as a representative sample of the studied communes.

In the project, social innovations were defined as changes in social problem solving which involve atypical social practices, alternative to the ones that are dominant in the local context.

4. Results of own study

4.1. Collaboration between local social policy entities in the studied rural communes

The conducted free-form interviews show that communal offices and communal social welfare centers play the key role in the implementation of local social policy in rural communes. With regard to solving social problems, the participants mostly mentioned various organizational units functioning in communal offices which are obliged to collaborate with other public institutions, such as schools, health care centers, the police, and court-appointed guardians. These units were: communal anti-alcohol abuse commissions, a communal consultancy center, an interdisciplinary anti-domestic violence group, as well as communal councils and communal social welfare centers. Collaboration between all these informal was in most cases assessed well, and despite a number of legal regulations, in practice communication between their representatives was often informal. The majority of participating managers of communal social welfare centers confirmed they received constant support from the rural commune heads or communal secretaries. They emphasized that personal engagement of and good communication with representatives of communal offices had a positive influence on their activities. Only few managers of communal social welfare centers expressed other opinions, highlighting, e.g., difficulties connected with the need to convince communal council members to spend the communes' resources on assistance measures, insufficient support from the police, or problems with information flow between communal social welfare centers and court-appointed guardians. Isolated managers of communal social welfare centers felt they had to bear the whole responsibility for solving social problems in the commune and there was no real cooperation with local authorities. They perceived contacts with the authorities as a burdensome obligation connected with supervision of the communal social welfare centers' operation or limitation of their autonomy.

Representatives of local authorities and managers of communal social welfare centers only occasionally considered non-governmental organizations as partners in solving social problems. If the organizations were mentioned at all, they were those that assisted in the distribution of food relief or organized charity events and events to integrate the local community or activate certain social groups (the young, the elderly) – generally, entities participating in emergency assistance activities rather than significant providers of social services. They were also perceived as institutions that had to consult strategic documents, and the very process of consultation was regarded as a formal obligation, not as a plane of collaboration.

On the other hand, the quantitative study conducted among NGO leaders (a structured interview) showed that more than 3/4 of the respondents (76%) declared their organizations' readiness to participate in meetings with representatives of other local organizations to obtain information concerning the problems faced by commune residents and the ways to solve them. 12 NGO leaders (11.5%) expressed reluctance to engage in such activities, and 13 others (12.5%) did not give a clear answer to the question concerning this issue. All the participating leaders of NGOs declared

Table 1. Contacts between the studied organizations and other entities working as part of local social policy.

Entities the organization has contacts with	Any type and frequency of contacts		Regular contacts, constant information exchange or collaboration (the main partners)	
	Number of organizations	% of $N = 104$	Number of organizations	% of $N = 104$
Communal Office (rural commune head, communal council)	95	91	81	78
Church	71	68	28	27
School in the commune	71	68	25	24
Communal culture center	69	66	30	29
Other NGOs	64	61	43	41
Local entrepreneurs	62	60	9	9
Local Action Group	53	51	26	25
Communal social welfare center	35	34	11	11
Health care center	25	24	1	1
Local social cooperative	6	6	0	0
Other institutions (district office, village council, forest district office)	5	5	4	4

Source: own study.

that their organizations had regular contacts with other entities of local social policy functioning in the communes where they were operating. However, these contacts had different forms. The relationships with some institutions only involved informing each other of the planned directions of activity and consulting the drafts of normative acts; whereas collaboration with others included e.g., activities based on partner contracts.

In the light of declarations of NGO presidents, almost one fifth of the organizations (19%) had established contacts with up to three such entities. The vast majority (81%) had contacts with three or more local entities working to solve local social problems, and 22% of the organizations had contacts with at least eight. The NGO leaders usually mentioned: the communal office, the Catholic Church, a school located in the commune, a communal culture center, other non-governmental organizations functioning in the commune, local entrepreneurs, a local action group, a communal social welfare center, or a health care center located in the commune (see Table 1).

The dominant position of local government authorities (communal office, communal council, rural commune head) on the list of NGOs' partners is not surprising. The high significance of these contacts from the point of view of non-governmental organizations results from the fact that those institutions serve as the most important sources of financing of their activity. Collaboration with local action groups is often motivated by similar factors: NGO leaders perceive LAGs, not as entities that try to solve the residents' social problems, but as organizations that provide or help them obtain financial resources. As regards schools and communal culture centers, they allow NGOs work in their facilities or cooperate with them in organizing various educational and cultural events to activate the local community.

4.2. Local social policy entities' readiness to implement social innovations

Work in the area of solving social problems is hedged with legal standards, which partially limit the opportunities to implement atypical activities different from the common practice. The interviewed managers of communal social welfare centers regarded the implementation of atypical alternative solutions as costly, time-consuming, and hard to meet the legal regulations determining the framework of activity of social workers and ensuring them the sense of relative comfort and security. They could see some little space for implementing social innovations in social work [Zajda, Kretek-Kamińska 2017]. Representatives of communal offices declared their readiness to support any initiative that would enhance the effectiveness of actions taken in order to solve local social problems, without prejudice of the idea of implementing atypical activities alternative to the dominant ones.

Presidents of non-governmental organizations declared a higher inclination to implement social innovations. Almost one third of them (30%) claimed their organizations were soon going to implement some atypical, innovative ways of solving social problems affecting commune residents. Still, more than half of the

respondents (54%) declared their organizations were not ready to engage in such activities, and 16% of them found it hard to say. Only 14% of the participants from NGOs admitted their organizations were not seeking any atypical solutions in any situation. Others said such solutions were sought in the case of almost every issue, need or problem the residents had if the organization believed it was possible to find more effective ways than those used before (14%), if there were good conditions for it, e.g., a project, a contest, a new way of financing etc. (55%), or at least occasionally if it was impossible to solve the issue otherwise (7%).

Local social policy entities' openness to collaboration with other entities and their readiness to implement social innovations.

Statistical analyses were performed in order to answer the question of whether there is a statistical correlation between NGOs' potential of collaboration with other local social policy entities and their readiness to implement social innovations[2]. The analysis aimed to verify the relationships between the following variables:

Table 2. NGOs' openness to collaboration with other entities and their inclination to seek innovations (in %)

Organizations' openness to contacts with and collaboration with other entities		In what situations does the organization seek atypical, different ways of solving the problems affecting the commune residents?			
		never	occasionally, when the case is very difficult to solve in a standard way	when there are favorable conditions for it	in most cases
Readiness to participate in meetings with representatives of other local organizations to exchange information concerning commune residents' needs and problems and the ways of solving them	yes	14	4	63	19
	no	58	17	25	0
The role assumed in relations with partners	Usually another organization dominates	52	6	42	0
	Usually the decisions are taken together	7	7	60	26
	Usually the studied organization dominates	17	7	62	14

Source: own study.

[2] In both cases the significance level was = 0.000. Due to the nominal character of the variables, Cramer's *V* was used to determine the association between them.

- NGO's readiness to participate in meetings with representatives of other local organizations to exchange information on commune residents' needs and problems and the ways of solving them,
- the role the organization assumed in relations with its partners,

and the NGO's readiness to look for atypical, different ways of solving the problems affecting the commune residents.

Both relationships proved to be statistically significant. In the first one Cramer's *V* was 0.450, and in the second one, 0.354. Thus, the readiness to implement social innovations is related to the readiness to participate in networks of cooperation and with assuming the role of a real partner in this collaboration: having and allowing all entities which participate in the activity the right to plan activities and make decisions concerning the way of carrying them out and taking the responsibility for them.

5. Conclusions

The presented research shows that in the studied rural communes of Łódzkie Province communal offices do not consider non-governmental organizations as full partners equally responsible for the implementation of the local social policy. However it is non-governmental organizations that display greater readiness to implement social innovations, at least in declarations. This readiness is combined with openness to cross-sectoral collaboration, for example in the form of participation in meetings with representatives of other local organizations to exchange information on commune residents' needs and problems and the ways of solving them. These conclusions correspond with the results of S. Osborne's analysis. He stated (comparing the traditional and innovative voluntary and non-profit organizations) that the first one reported "their isolation from the wider environment, whilst the innovators emphasized their linkages, and a majority of these talked of the importance of their networks of inter-organizational relationships as being essential to achieving their organizational goals" [Osborne 1998, p. 137]. Moreover innovative organizations were aware of the meaning of agency forums and planning groups, which they consider to be important for implementing innovations.

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