

Citizen Empowerment in Crisis Management

Sławomir Stanisław Górski

ORCID: 0000-0002-4228-4393

Ministry of Interior and Administration, Poland

Abstract. The article is devoted to issues of empowerment of citizens in the process of crisis management. The role of citizens in this process was analyzed from the research perspective based on functional approach to crisis management. The indication of the functions allowed to specify the objectives, methods of implementation and entities implementing particular activities within crisis management process. Special attention was paid to the role of Volunteer Fire Brigades in crisis management, perceiving their activities as vital part of empowering citizens in the process of social participation for civil security.

DOI: 10.5604/01.3001.0013.8199

<http://dx.doi.org/10.5604/01.3001.0013.8199>

Keywords: civil security, crisis management, social engagement, citizen empowerment.

Introduction

Security science arises from social sciences, in which *social fact* described by Émile Durkheim¹ is as real as any *other* ontology. Therefore, *social reality* determines also the perception of security. In commonly used language, we have such phrases as 'safe town, neighborhood, street'. The nature of these statements is directly related to individual experience, which through reinforcement results in a wide range of assessments and prolongs itself in the social consciousness. From the perspective of sociology, perceived as relationships between values and human activities², we can regard security as a value that encourages individuals to undertake specific actions³.

Everyday life situations usually do not focus much of our attention. They constitute a natural background of activity and do not require special commitment in terms of safety management. The situation changes when the accepted balance between the state of threat and the state of *being secure* is violated. In such situations the processes of crisis, disaster and risk management become more important and visible from a citizen perspective. Obviously, these processes are not born at the time of crisis situations, but exist before their occurrence, in the background of social, economic and political life. However, emergencies reveal the importance

¹ See: Durkheim É, *Zasady metody socjologicznej*. Warsaw 2000, pp. 28–41.

² See: Znaniecki F, *Wstęp do socjologii*. Warsaw 1988, p. 196.

³ See: Górski S, *Bezpieczeństwo a dobro wspólne*, [in:] Wiśniewski B, Prędecka A, Bryk J, Szela A (Eds), *Bezpieczeństwo uczestników zgromadzeń religijnych*. Wydanie II — uzupełnione. Warsaw, 2017.

of crisis management. The natural social expectation is to ensure the appropriate level of prevention and mitigation of the consequences of crisis situations. We can observe the frequently manifested social approach expecting state institutions and services to respond immediately to emergencies. Therefore *response* becomes a determinant of state activity in such situations. While highly important, *response* is not the only crisis management activity. The immanent features of crisis management are also *prevention* and *mitigation* of consequences of crisis situations, as well as *restoration* of lost goods (resources, infrastructure etc.).

Crisis management as the activity of the state and the citizens

Crisis management, from the state perspective, as well as business practices, is perceived as activities countering threats or ensuring business stability. Crisis management is often combined with disaster management and means strengthening resilience, preparedness and response to natural and man-made disasters and mitigation of their consequences⁴. It is often understood as a process of strengthening resilience and the ability to respond to threats and mitigate their consequences and therefore it is regarded as an important element of the security system of a modern state. The perception of the process is often oriented on its commitment to emergencies. However, the nature of emergency/crisis situations causes difficulties in terms of separating crisis situations from everyday life threats and challenges. Consequently, it is difficult to determine the moment at which crisis management 'begins'. Taking into account the continuity of planning processes and permanent civil protection activities, it can be stated that crisis management 'works' constantly in the background of social life.

The division of crisis management into phases is one of the ways to organize the process and cluster activities carried out within its framework. The planning documents set up the division of crisis management into four phases: *prevention, preparedness, response and restoration*⁵. Focusing on threats (in order to prevent their occurrence or mitigation of their consequences) makes *response* the most recognizable phase of this process. This phase is crucial from the perspective of actions taken by the state to protect life, health, infrastructure and environment. At the same time it is important to prepare to respond and carry out post-crisis activities. Such actions are part of *preparedness* and *restoration* phases. The least spectacular area of crisis-related activities takes form of *prevention* phase and consist of preventive measures aimed at strengthening resilience

The 'phase approach' towards crisis management can be useful in terms of incorporating the crisis management process into 'administrative framework' of the state. It facilitates the composition of planning documents, and consequently

⁴ See: Polish Act of 26 April 2007 on Crisis Management (consolidated text), PL Journal of Laws of 2013, item 1166.

⁵ See: PL National Crisis Management Plan 2013/2015, Government Centre for Security. Electronic source: www.rcb.gov.pl, accessed: 03.11.2017.

improves the efficiency of activities aimed at responding to crisis situations and mitigating their consequences.

Taking into account the scope of crisis management, it can be concluded as a vital element of the state security policy, which efficient implementation lies in the hand of public administration, as well as depends on citizens' involvement in 'security environment'.

Citizen empowerment in crisis management — a functional approach

The empowerment of a citizen in the process of crisis management should take place in all its phases. It can manifest itself, *inter alia*, in activities below listed:

- educational (formal and informal education, life-long learning),
- information (citizen as a recipient and as a source of information in crisis situations),
- social (social participation, non-governmental organizations, social control),
- operational (involvement in rescue and humanitarian operations).

In order to analyze the ways of empowering citizens, we can apply a functional approach to crisis management. This means focusing on the functions of this process and indicating to what extent citizens can participate in them.

Deliberations concerning the perception of crisis management and the analysis of the scope of this concept (formally or informally defined) should be accompanied by reflection on the practical dimension of the process. The nature and objectives of crisis management can be determined by legally binding definitions and/or the common understanding (agreed language) settled within a local security environment (society, public institutions, non-governmental organizations, stakeholders etc.). On the other hand, the practical dimension of crisis management can be manifested in its functions. The following functions are intended to help better understand, organize and facilitate crisis management activities as well as to simplify the perception of this process from the perspective of 'crisis management providers and beneficiaries'.

- **Monitoring function** — the function realized by dedicated organizational structures (emergency management centers, police, monitoring and detection systems), as well as through public information channels (news services, social media). Monitoring is usually based on rules of practice (standards, procedures, habits) and is conducted in the 'background' of daily life. Due to the wide availability of the information, participation in this function is available for any member of the community (real or virtual) interested in monitoring and sharing information. Depending on the development of monitored events and their impact on public security, *monitoring function* can be smoothly transformed into *information function*.
- **Information function** — the function carried out both by the formal structures of crisis management (crisis management centers), as well as business oriented entities (media) and informal sources of information (citizens, social media). Functioning mostly visibly due to 'breaking news tickers' and

official reports distributed by public institutions, this function include public authorities, media, non-governmental organizations and individuals, who as the 'official actors' can disseminate information about events that may evolve into crisis situations. The *information function* bears a resemblance to *alarming function*, especially when situations require taking immediate actions (e.g. proper behavior of individuals or communities).

- **Alarming function** — the function indicating the need to prepare for immediate and specific action (behavior). Mostly this function initializes taking action by persons at risk (protection measures, rescue, evacuation, etc.). The function is conducted simultaneously by public authorities, police, non-governmental organizations, news media, social media and individuals. An essential attribute of *alarming function* is the orientation to persons at risk (end user).
- **Operational function** — the function dedicated to providing protection, rescue or evacuation activities by the public authorities or their subordinated services (Police, Fire Service, Sanitary Inspection etc.). Initial information, which can come from the routine monitoring systems or individuals, is predominantly transferred through formal information channels (eg. information systems supporting the emergency numbers as 112, 9XX), which are associated with command and control systems of various public services. In contrast to the *alarming functions* (primarily dedicated to persons at risk), *operational function* in practical terms means the formal launch of activities undertaken by the statutory bodies in accordance with binding 'rescue' regulations.
- **Planning function** — the function aimed at preparing to take preventive measures, protective actions, rescue operations, activities countering threats as well as mitigating their consequences. The function is implemented mainly by public authorities in a formalized manner, is expressed in contingency plans (crisis management plans, emergency plans, critical infrastructure protection plans etc.). This function can also be conducted, in a non-formalized way, by individuals and local communities throughout the process of public consultations.
- **Continuity function** — this function primarily refers to ensuring institutional continuity of public authorities and delivery of public services (civil protection, health care, environmental protection, education, public administration etc.). Its implementation should be correlated with the risk management process which would provide an assessment of risks, as well as prescribed way of their neutralization. The *continuity function* is also related to the *planning function*, which should aim not only to prepare action plans focused on specific threats, but also the details how the public institutions can maintain their functionality during a crisis. This particular aspect of the planning process should also take into account the sequential excluding specific public services and including the 'worst case scenarios'.
- **Educational function** — this function covers the transfer of knowledge, the development of social skills and competences in order to support desired outcomes in crisis situations. This function is carried out throughout formal education (system of public education, higher education, courses

and trainings), as well as informal methods of learning (experience, reading, social interactions, internet). This function also serves to strengthen resilience and improve the efficiency of public services through the accumulation of the experience gained during past emergencies (lessons learned). Education may also be focused on individuals, local communities and non-governmental organizations that remain vital stakeholders of crisis management process⁶.

These functions indicate the nature of the crisis management process and emphasize the benefits it brings to all participants of social life. They do not cover the full description of crisis management, but highlight its essential and fundamental features.

Polish Voluntary Fire Brigades — an example of citizen empowerment

The participation of citizens in building common security environments can take different forms. One of them is engagement in the process of crisis/disaster relief management. The most visible expression of this engagement is individual involvement of citizens in rescue activities. It can be of a spontaneous nature, or it may take the organized form. The example of structural participation in serving and protecting the local communities from the consequences of natural or man-made disasters is the activity of Polish Voluntary Fire Brigades.

In the Republic of Poland, approximately 450,000 events requiring intervention by fire brigades are registered annually. Between 2012 and 2016, a total of 2,192,947 events were registered, in which fire protection units intervened. The average was 438,589 events⁷. In 2017 the total of 125,892 fires and 354,741 local hazards⁸ were registered, which include traffic accidents, strong winds, rainfall, chemical and ecological hazards. This data illustrates the domination of 'everyday threats' over fires. The most common category of local hazards are transport-related accidents. In 2017, a total of 65,590 transportation events were registered, of which 55,551 concerned accidents involving passenger vehicles⁹. Interventions towards this threat require cooperation of state emergency services, in particular the State Fire Service and Emergency Medical Services with voluntary rescue organizations. Among the variety of rescue organizations it is worth highlighting the role of the Voluntary Fire Brigades, which are often the first responders in emergency situations.

⁶ See: Górski S, *Functional Approach to Crisis Management*, Schriften zu Mittel- und Osteuropa in der Europäischen Integration (SMOEI). Hamburg, 2017, pp. 193–199.

⁷ Sprawozdanie z działalności Związku Ochotniczych Straży Pożarnych Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej w latach 2012–2017, p. 24.

⁸ Public SFS HQ Data. *Electronic source*: <https://danepubliczne.gov.pl/dataset/statystyki-zdarzen-systemu-wspomagania-decyzji-panstwowej-strazy-pozarnej-swd-psz-za-rok-2017/resource/aa7ff25e-b7f2-4676-aa7a-03e956cbb22a>, accessed: 03.11.2018.

⁹ *Ibid.*

The Voluntary Fire Brigades (VFBs) are uniformed and equipped rescue organizations, cooperating on a daily basis with the State Fire Service (SFS) and other rescue organizations as well as with local authorities. Volunteer firefighters act primarily for the welfare of their homelands, saving human life, health, property and the environment¹⁰. They participate in rescue operations during fires, traffic accidents, ecological threats and natural disasters. They also undertake preventative measures by informing and educating local communities about a broad spectrum of potential hazards. They are also involved in activities related to environmental protection and education of local communities to build social resilience to natural and man-made threats. It should be highlighted that VFBs' members undertake not only rescue-oriented activities in the field of civil protection, but also support various forms of cultural and educational initiatives, promote historical knowledge of the firefighting movements, carry out artistic and sport activities.

The current domination of fire prevention and fire fighting in the daily practice of VFBs is being gradually transferred to other types of response activities, mainly technical rescue during road accidents, where other techniques, not related to fire fighting are in use. Depending on the specific nature of a protected local area, it is necessary to emphasise the activities of VFBs undertaken on water reservoirs and activities dedicated to flood prevention. In terms of other aspects of civil protection the VFBs are trained to evacuate people and property during major fires, floods and other disasters (especially those resulting from weather anomalies). VFBs also participate in providing accommodation, food and other social assistance at the local community level during crisis situations¹¹. A significant part of the VFBs, which are independent non-governmental organizations, are members of the Volunteer Fire Brigades Association of the Republic of Poland. This association is a nationwide non-profit organization that unites over 16,200 VFBs with almost 700,000 members. Among them there are almost 70,000 women and over 225,000 firefighters who can be engaged directly in rescue operations. In terms of operational preparedness, VFB's resources include 15,455 stations with 23,506 garages for rescue and firefighting vehicles¹². According to statistical data in years 2012–2016 the share of VFBs fire vehicles engaged in events reached 39% of the total number of dispatched vehicles and members of VFBs constituted 46% of personnel engaged in rescue operations¹³.

¹⁰ Information provided by Main Board of the Voluntary Fire Brigades Association of the Republic of Poland. Materiał informacyjny ZG ZOSP RP, 2018.

¹¹ PL Ministry of Interior and Administration website. *Electronic source*: <https://www.mswia.gov.pl>, *accessed*: 07.10.2018.

¹² PL Voluntary Fire Brigades Association Report..., *op. cit.* p. 25.

¹³ *Ibid.*

Participation of Voluntary Fire Brigades in the National Rescue and Firefighting System

Cooperation and carrying out joint rescue operations of the State Fire Service with 'social partners' represent the organizational formula of the National Rescue and Firefighting System (NRFS). This System enables structural cooperation of all entities included¹⁴ to ensure the desirable level of management of all available resources and to undertake preventive, protective and rescue actions adequately to address all hazards. The basic assumption in the construction of the NRFS was to create a uniform and coherent system, bringing together various rescue entities, so that any rescue action can be effectively taken¹⁵. The operational cooperation between SFS and VFBs is apparently visible at the district (poviat) level, where 'boots on the ground' activities take place. The quality of this cooperation determines the success of specific operations — undertaken hand-in-hand by SFS and VFB's units. The cooperation between SFS and VFBs is not only visible through the perspective of common conducted rescue operations and exercises, but also in 'pre-securing' by VFBs the operational area of the SFS units, especially in case when these units need to be supported to occurrence of many threads (of high intensity and impact) or/and are dispatched outside their 'primary' territory.

Inclusion of Voluntary Fire Brigades into the National Rescue and Firefighting System

The Regulation of the Minister of the Interior of 15 September 2014, regarding the scope, detailed conditions and modes of inclusion of fire protection units into the National Rescue and Firefighting System, specifies which units can be included in the NRFS. In terms of inclusion, the applying unit must meet certain requirements — possess at least one medium or heavy rescue and firefighting vehicle, twelve or more trained rescuers, a sufficiently effective notification and alarm system, and communication devices connected into the radio network of the rescue system. The applying unit must also be ready to autonomously undertake ground rescue operations. The assessment of VFBs units is made by a District Commander of the SFS and approved by the Voivodship Commander of the SFS. The rules of engagement and mutual commitments are prescribed in an agreement between a District SFS Commander and a local VFB commander as well as the commune governor (local authority representative). The rules contain the determined level of operational readiness (forces of a given VFB unit), rescue tasks provided for the unit, appropriate number of rescuers and the manner in which the unit's readiness for rescue operations is maintained. The official records of units included into NRFS are

¹⁴ See: Rozporządzenie Ministra Spraw Wewnętrznych i Administracji z dnia 3 lipca 2017 r. w sprawie szczegółowej organizacji krajowego systemu ratowniczo-gaśniczego, Dz.U. of 2017, item 1319.

¹⁵ PL National State Fire Service HQ website. *Electronic source:* <http://www.straz.gov.pl>, accessed: 02.11.2018.

provided by the Commander-in-Chief of SFS¹⁶. So far, over 4 300 VFB's units have been included in the NRFS¹⁷.

Partnership and mutual commitments

Cooperation between VFBs and SFS takes place on a voluntary basis. Regardless of whether VFBs are included in the NRFS or not — mutual relations of professional rescue forces and social rescue organizations are clearly defined. In the case of units included into NRFS, they take the form of both, legal regulations and voluntary agreements. It is slightly different when the VFBs operate outside the NRFS. In those situations, mutual obligations are prescribed in the statutes of individual VFBs as well as in SFS rescue plans covering areas of cooperation. Although formal and legal regulations are important, the 'real' partnership manifests itself in joint rescue operations. However, in order to prepare volunteers to conduct them, it is necessary to train, equip and provide funds for operational activities of VFBs (purchase rescue equipment, vehicles, uniforms and personal protection equipment). In this regard, VFBs are supported by SFS, which conducts specialist training and provides volunteers with rescue equipment. The support for VFBs also includes financial assistance from the state budget. The Ministry of Interior and Administration annually determines the financial resources and their distribution among all fire protection units operating under the umbrella of the NRFS. The allocation of funds dedicated to VFBs operating within NRFS is made by the SFS Commander. Those funds can be spent only to ensure the rescue readiness of such units. Every year, the Ministry of Interior and Administration also provides financial support for all VFBs (not only included into NRFS) in order to increase their ability to conduct rescue and firefighting operations. The rules for granting this support are prescribed in the Act on Public Benefit and Volunteer Work of 24 April 2003. In return, the VFBs are obliged to maintain operational readiness and to take immediate actions to protect lives, property and the environments of local communities.

Conclusions

The role of citizens (individuals) in crisis/disaster management remains of key importance, especially within the context of the functional approach to the process. The role of citizens in undertaking monitoring, information, alarming and operational activities in crisis situations should be perceived as an expression of social commitment and advancement in a common security environment.

In particular, citizen involvement should express itself through engagement in information sharing (monitoring, alarming, early warning), as well as participation in operational activities (aid and rescue operations). The vital element of citizen

¹⁶ Rozporządzenie Ministra Spraw Wewnętrznych z dnia 15 września 2014 r. w sprawie zakresu, szczegółowych warunków i trybu włączania jednostek ochrony przeciwpożarowej do krajowego systemu ratowniczo-gaśniczego, Dz.U. of 2014, item 1317.

¹⁷ PL National State Fire ..., *op. cit.*

empowerment is ongoing education (formal and informal) where citizens combine simultaneously the role of learner and educator.

In terms of citizen engagement in operational activities during emergencies, Polish Voluntary Fire Brigades remain the most important 'social partner' in fulfilling the tasks of civil protection. They strengthen the resilience of local communities, raise awareness of threats, educate in terms of safe behavior, raise social awareness and increase citizen involvement in local security. Its activity serves to empower and raise the role and status of citizens in emergency/crisis situations.

As long as citizens remain the core of social, economic and political life, crisis situations should not limit their role merely to issues of rescue or humanitarian operations. For this reason, the policy and decision makers should create the legal and organizational solutions enabling citizens to contribute, in partnership, to monitor, prevent and mitigate crisis situations as well.

References

1. Durkheim É, *Zasady metody socjologicznej*. Warsaw, 2000.
2. *Electronic source*: www.danepubliczne.gov.pl.
3. *Electronic source*: www.mswia.gov.pl.
4. *Electronic source*: www.straz.gov.pl.
5. *Electronic source*: www.zosprp.pl.
6. Górski S, Bezpieczeństwo a dobro wspólne, [in:] Wiśniewski B, Prędecka A, Bryk J, Szela A (Eds), *Bezpieczeństwo uczestników zgromadzeń religijnych*. Wydanie II — uzupełnione. Warsaw, 2017.
7. Górski S, *Functional Approach to Crisis Management*, *Schriften zu Mittel- und Osteuropa in der Europäischen Integration (SMOEI)*. Hamburg, 2017.
8. Information provided by Main Board of the Voluntary Fire Brigades Association of the Republic of Poland. *Materiał informacyjny ZG ZOSP RP*, 2018.
9. Rozporządzenie Ministra Spraw Wewnętrznych i Administracji z dnia 3 lipca 2017 w sprawie szczegółowej organizacji krajowego systemu ratowniczo-gaśniczego, *Dz.U. of 2017*, item 1319.
10. Rozporządzenie Ministra Spraw Wewnętrznych z dnia 15 września 2014 r. w sprawie zakresu, szczegółowych warunków i trybu włączania jednostek ochrony przeciwpożarowej do krajowego systemu ratowniczo-gaśniczego, *Dz.U. of 2014*, item 1317.
11. *Sprawozdanie z działalności Związku Ochotniczych Straży Pożarnych Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej w XIII kadencji w latach 2012–2017*.
12. *Tryb i zasady udzielania dotacji dla jednostek Ochotniczych Straży Pożarnych w 2018 roku*.
13. Ustawa z dnia 24 sierpnia 1991 roku o Państwowej Straży Pożarnej, *Dz.U. of 1991*, No. 88, item 400.
14. Znaniecki F, *Wstęp do socjologii*. Warsaw, 1988.

About the Author

Ślawomir Stanisław Górski, PhD of social sciences in the discipline of security studies. Doctoral thesis dedicated to conditions of civil protection in the Republic of Poland was defended at the Police Academy in Szczytno (2015). A graduate of the University of Warsaw (1995, Institute of Applied Social Sciences), National School of Public Administration (1999) and the George C. Marshall European Center for Security Studies (2004, 2007). Author of publications on civil security, civil protection and emergency/crisis management. Civil Servant in the Office of Crisis Management and Civil Protection (1999–2000), Headquarters of the State Fire Service (2000–2001) and the Ministry of Interior and Administration (since 2001) — Deputy Director of Crisis Management and Defence Issues Department (2006–2009). During Polish EU Presidency (2011) Counsellor General in the European Union and International Cooperation Department (2009–2012) — coordinator of the area of civil protection. Former Director of Rescue and Civil Protection Department (2012–2016). Counsellor to the Minister in Civil Protection and Crisis Management Department (2016–2017) and in the International Affairs Department (since 2017). Co-author of formal strategic and policy papers in the area of civil security (e.g. Rescue and Civil Protection Programme 2014–2020). E-mail: slawomir.gorski@mswia.gov.pl.

Streszczenie. Artykuł poświęcono problematyce upodmiotowienia obywateli w procesie zarządzania kryzysowego. Rolę obywateli w tym procesie przeanalizowano wykorzystując funkcjonalne podejście do zarządzania kryzysowego. Wyodrębnienie funkcji pozwoliło na użytkowe określenie celów, sposobów realizacji oraz podmiotów realizujących poszczególne działania w ramach procesu zarządzania kryzysowego. Szczególną uwagę poświęcono roli ochotniczych straży pożarnych w zarządzaniu kryzysowym, postrzegając jej działania jako element procesu upodmiotowienia obywateli w partycypacji na rzecz bezpieczeństwa powszechnego.

Резюме. Статья посвящена вопросу расширения прав и возможностей граждан в процессе управления в случае возникновения чрезвычайной ситуации. Роль граждан в этом процессе проанализирована с использованием функционального подхода к управлению в чрезвычайных ситуациях. Указание функций предоставило возможность определить цели, способы реализации и субъекты, осуществляющие конкретные мероприятия в рамках процесса управления в случае возникновения ЧС. Особое внимание уделяется роли Добровольной пожарной службы в случае возникновения ЧС, рассматривая ее деятельность как один из элементов процесса расширения прав и возможностей граждан в процессе обеспечения общей безопасности.