



**AN ACTIVE
SOCIETY
IN A CHANGING
WORLD**

**Reflections after five
years of the operation
of National Freedom
Institute – Centre
for Civil Society
Development**



National Freedom Institute
Centre for Civil Society Development

An active society in a changing world

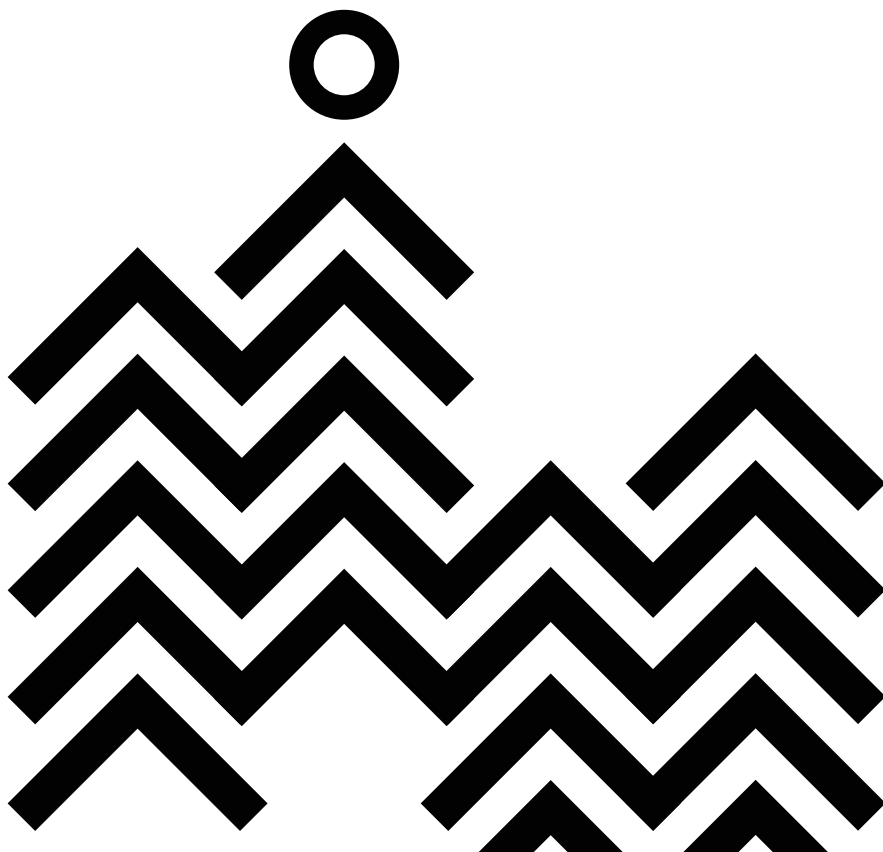


An active society in a changing world



Reflections after five years
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Institute – Centre for Civil Society
Development

EDITED BY WOJCIECH KACZMARCZYK
AND KONRAD BURDYKA





Funded by the National Freedom Institute –
Centre for Civil Society Development
from the resources of Civic Initiatives Fund NOWEFIO
for the years 2021-2030



Funded by the National Freedom Institute –
Centre for Civil Society Development
from the resources of Civil Society Organisations
Development Programme for the years 2018-2030



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SPOŁECZEŃSTWA OBYWATELSKIEGO // NATIONAL FREEDOM INSTITUTE –
CENTRE FOR CIVIL SOCIETY DEVELOPMENT, WARSZAWA 2022

ISBN 978-83-963801-6-6

The National Freedom Institute – Centre for Civil Society Development,
al. Jana Pawła II 12, 00-124 Warszawa

PUBLISHING “Elpil”, ul. Artyleryjska 11, 08-110 Siedlce

<https://doi.org/10.54253/9788396380166>

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PIOTR GLIŃSKI

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

CHAIRMAN OF THE PUBLIC BENEFIT COMMITTEE

https://doi.org/10.54253/9788396380166_pp-9-12

Foreword

On anniversaries one might think of summaries of what has been, but also of presentations of prospects for the future. It seems important to recall the genesis of the reforms of the system of state support for civil society in Poland. The programme of changes that we are implementing today was developed in 2013 by Wojciech Kaczmarczyk and myself as a parapolitical project, indeed as part of a broader political programme. Over ten years ago, I wrote an article about this in the non-governmental press. At that time – together with a number of civically engaged people who are now rather on the other side of the political scene in Poland – we also put forward an initiative for these reforms. For third sector organisations, a process of change initiated from within the system is surely the most natural. And so it is in the case of the Polish third sector, the only difference being that in recent years we have had more leverage than before in terms of the political decisions supporting these changes. Therefore, the reforms have gone much further in terms of the breadth and scale of state support. Hence the transfer of support for the sector to a central place in government, the Chancellery of the Prime Minister; hence the establishment of the Public Benefit Committee and the National Freedom Institute.

Established five years ago by the Act of 15 September 2017, alongside the Committee for Public Benefit, the National Institute of Freedom – Centre for Civil Society Development is the first

governmental executive agency focusing entirely on supporting civic organisations. The name of the Institute emphasises the idea enshrined in the preamble of the Act that the executive agency it created is to support the development of civil society in Poland by strengthening the organised voluntary actions of citizens for various aims important to society, which is to refer to the centuries-old heritage of the Polish community of free citizens and at the same time fulfil the ideals of freedom. Its main task is to manage programmes supporting the development of civil society.

When we started in 2017, there was only one programme, the Civic Initiatives Fund (CIF), well-known for a number of years now, and we now have nine programmes that both reach out horizontally to the entire third sector and also target selected parts of the sector, including scouting organisations, think tanks, civic media, folk high schools, international meeting centres, craft guilds, youth organisations, youth councils in local government or organisations providing various forms of counselling. President Andrzej Duda was personally involved in the counselling programme, whose Chancellery organised a “Counselling Congress” in 2019 together with the National Freedom Institute at Warsaw University of Technology. It was then that we concluded there must be a separate programme of support for citizen counselling, since its main purpose – in the areas of law, family, environment, health, or any other area – is to make it easier for ordinary citizens to access the tools that strengthen their position relative to more powerful partners in democracy. The infrastructure has been created and the resources increased many times over. This has made possible the adjustment we announced would take place. Analyses clearly indicate that today, there is incomparably greater access to public funds for small organisations, provincial organisations, organisations which for the first time have opportunities to obtain grants, as well as organisations which can, generally speaking, be called “community-patriotic”, i.e. simply dealing with areas undervalued or marginalised for political reasons during the period of the Third Republic. This marginalisation was a consequence of a particular project for the development of Poland, which can generally be called a “dependent project”. This project

struggled with subjectivity and adapted to the expectations of the stronger players in the global political arena, so it mainly supported non-governmental actors who met these expectations. My political circles have a different vision for Poland, but this does not mean that there is no pluralism and freedom in Poland today. At this time, we have managed to introduce balanced competition in the area of the entire third sector.

For almost three years we have been living in a dynamically changing world, directed first by the pandemic and now also by the war in Ukraine. I think that the Polish third sector has passed a difficult test in this challenging time. For example, thousands of individuals and organisations got involved during the pandemic to help seniors. From the first moments of the war, volunteers and Polish NGOs, together with Polish state services, rushed to the aid of war refugees.

Not stopping there with what we have already achieved, we are looking at everyday challenges as we prepare the next elements of the third sector support system. Final work on a draft law on NGO reporting is underway. Reporting obligations will be significantly simplified. For example, a full financial report will be submitted by approximately 5% of organisations whose revenues exceed PLN 1 million. At the same time, a publicly accessible database of reports will be created, fulfilling the demand for openness of the third sector articulated as early as 1996 at the First National Forum for Non-Governmental Initiatives, but never in fact implemented until now. Next year, it is also planned to strengthen volunteer management as part of the existing systematic volunteer support programme.

I would like to conclude by thanking, above all, those who are active and who feel responsible for our community. Here, I am also thinking of people with different political views, for whom civil dialogue is an important value. For it is precisely the lack of dialogue that destroys democracy, whose fundamental feature is debate. If someone says that there is no democracy in Poland, then there really is nothing to talk about. However, we will continue to do our job: we will talk, debate and propose further reforms and solutions.

We can argue about the shape of the proposed solutions – we do, after all, have different views – but to say that there is no freedom and democracy in Poland is simply a lie. It should be remembered that when debate is killed, invective is used and language affected (firstly by changing or even inverting the meanings of words, secondly by replacing rational arguments with extreme emotions), then the only ones who can benefit are those who do not want democracy in Poland and want us to be a constantly divided and feuding community. Of course, disagreement is necessary, but with the observance of basic rules, such as mutual respect, which is due to all members of the community.

Those who have carried out the difficult reforms and challenging work described here also deserve a few words of gratitude. These are large teams of people – operating locally, in the regions and at the central level – led by committed and competent leaders. Mention should be made of our allies in the world of politics, without whose approval these changes would not have come into effect, as well as the volunteer ambassadors. By the way, it is certainly no coincidence that the programme for the promotion of volunteering implemented by NIF refers to the concept of solidarity – in the real sense, solidarity means being together for the public good. Beyond that, there is also a historical reference to the beautiful traditions of 1980–1981 and afterward. As a member of the Solidarity generation, I am delighted that one NFI programme, the Solidarity Corps, refers to the incredible achievement of Polish Solidarity, which contradicts Norwid’s reflection that Poles are a great nation but a civically weak society. Solidarity was a miracle and is a miracle worth remembering. That is why together we are building different institutions that also refer to this incredible event. Many thanks to all those who have been successfully carrying out this reform in Poland and for the good of Poland in recent years in building civil society! ■

Introduction

Non-governmental organisations, expressing the interests of civil society and shaping the system of values, carry out four important functions in a mature democratic society: monitoring, advocacy, innovation and provision of services¹. Nine functions of the civic sector in a democracy can be identified: articulation and advocacy of interests and defence of the values of various social groups, control of power, participation in the processes of preparation, consultation and implementation of political decisions (public participation), formulation of alternative goals of development, self-administration of various spheres of social life, signalling dangers and social conflicts, generation of general norms and trust (social capital function), civic education, and cultural creation². The civic sector, when it carries out its functions to the fullest and is strong enough, can be a force in democracy and balance the power of political, economic and media forces. Operating properly, civil society best creates and fills the space of freedom.

The fifth anniversary of the establishment of the National Freedom Institute – Centre for the Development of Civil Society under the Act of 15 September 2017 prompts reflection. The Institute is

¹ L.M. Salamon et al., *Global Civil Society. An Overview*, Center for Civil Society Studies, Institute for Policy Studies. The John Hopkins University, Baltimore 2003, p. 20–25.

² P. Gliński, *Idealna wizja polskiego sektora obywatelskiego. Jak mogłoby być i dlaczego tak nie jest?*, Trzeci Sektor 2012, no. 26, p. 15

the first government executive agency responsible for supporting civil society, public benefit activities and volunteerism. The normative text of the law is preceded, which is extremely rare, by a preamble that refers to “the free and Christian ideals of citizens and local communities, encompassing the traditions of the Polish intelligentsia, of independence, national, religious, socialist traditions and the tradition of the peasant movement, seeing in them a continuation of the centuries-old traditions of the Polish Republic and thus protecting the rich heritage of the community of its free citizens”. The statutory task of the National Institute of Freedom is to support the development of civil society in Poland by implementing programmes to support the civic sector.

In 2018, The National Freedom Institute assumed the operation of the Civil Initiatives Fund Programme 2014–2020, which had been previously managed by the Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy. The main goal of the Programme is to increase the involvement of citizens and NGOs in public life. The CIF Programme is intended to enable citizens to engage in various activities for the benefit of their communities and in the creation, implementation and monitoring of public policies. Specific objectives include growing the number of grassroots initiatives, raising the number of citizens involved in NGO activities and local initiatives, increasing citizen participation in public affairs, and strengthening the potential of the third sector.

In 2018, significant changes were introduced to the operation of the CIF Programme. Beneficiaries are no longer required to make their own contribution and can use part of the grant to develop their organisations. Preferences were introduced for smaller organisations with an annual budget of up to PLN 100,000, from small towns of up to 50,000 residents. The system of evaluating grant applications allows evaluation of the most interesting ideas, not just the best written applications. The database of experts reviewing applications has been expanded. The changes introduced in the implementation of the Programme have made it more accessible for organisations with less experience and from smaller communities: 70 per cent of NFI-supported organisations received funding for

the first time, and more than 60 per cent were small organisations and from smaller towns. It should be emphasised that the NFI-CIF Programme, introduced in 2021 with the prospect of a decade until 2030, has been increased by PLN 20 million annually.

At the end of 2018. The National Freedom Institute launched new government programmes to support the development of civil society:

- The Civil Society Organisations Development Programme for 2018–2030, CODP, established by resolution no. 104/2018 of the Council of Ministers of 7 August 2018;
- The Solidarity Corps – Long-term Volunteering Support and Development Programme for 2018–2030, established by resolution no. 137/2018 of the Council of Ministers of 2 October 2018;
- The Scout Movement Development Programme for 2018–2030, established by resolution no. 138-2018 of the Council of Ministers of 2 October 2018.

These new programmes initiated a new approach to institutional support of the third sector, helping to build the human and material resources of civic organisations, as well as supplementing the system of executing public works mandated by the Act on Public Benefit Activity and Volunteerism. The programme addressed to scouting organisations that operate under the honorary patronage of the President of the Republic of Poland also paved the way for programmes supporting specific areas in the sector. Thus, in subsequent years the following were launched:

- The Folk High Schools Development Programme for 2020–2030, established by resolution no. 77/2020 of the Council of Ministers of 18 June 2020;
- The International Meeting Centres Development Programme for 2021–2030, established by resolution no. 163/2020 of the Council of Ministers of 13 November 2020;
- The Polish Craft Incubator Programme, established by resolution no. 73/2021 of the Council of Ministers of 19 May 2021;

- The Youth Fund Programme for 2022–2033, established by resolution no. 159/2022 of the Council of Ministers of 19 July 2022;
- The Support for Non-Governmental Organisations Programme for 2022–2033, established by resolution no. 160/2022 of the Council of Ministers of 19 July 2022.

Programmes to support the development of civil society make it possible to equip organisations with resources that are scarce in the third sector: staff employed on a full-time basis, finances that make possible the purchase and renovation of organisations' offices or facilities, and the purchase of equipment, which has become particularly important with the rapid development of digital forms of public service delivery during the pandemic and afterwards.

Additionally, in 2020 the Institute implemented the NGO Emergency Support Programme for countering the effects of COVID-19. The aim of the programme was to support the institutional existence of civil society organisations at risk as a result of unforeseen situations and events related to the current epidemic situation and to support activities related to countering COVID-19.

Between 2018 and 2022, the Institute provided more than PLN 800 million to around 4,500 organisations, increasing their potential as organisations and their capacity to act. Instead of a single Civic Initiatives Fund Programme in 2017, which has been known for well over ten years, we now have nine programmes reaching out horizontally to the entire third sector, while at the same time quadrupling the volume of funds addressed to organisations through government programmes. To show just a small part of the picture of funding under the programmes, we can see, among other things, that:

- each year, approximately PLN 15 million is allocated to scouting organisations under the honorary patronage of the President of the Republic of Poland for the renovation of physical infrastructure and the training of instructors, as well as the organisation of scouting events;
- 22 new folk high schools were established and eleven existing ones were supported;

- support was provided to ten international meeting houses hosting meeting projects not only dedicated to Polish-German cooperation (as previously), but also with partners from the Czech Republic and the area of the Three Seas Initiative;
- 42 organisations are preparing to build an endowment by implementing a three-year preparatory project to develop a strategy for raising capital, identify sources of income and prepare an endowment investment strategy;
- more than 500 craft guilds and organisations have received funding for new equipment in 2021-2022, including for dual-training projects;
- support is also provided to grassroots local media and think tanks.

The National Freedom Institute has adopted a number of horizontal principles in the support system, among which, besides support for institutional development, the most important are the principle of partnership (the implementation of public works by NGOs should stimulate partnerships and produce a synergy effect), the principle of sustainable development in the civic sector (in the area of public benefit, the primary value is to shape such social conditions in which initiatives large and small, experienced and new, from all regions of the country and regardless of the sphere of public benefit, representing the wealth and diversity of the sector, can develop), regional diversification (the availability of funds under the Programme should be as equal as possible in all regions of the country, taking into account the socio-demographic potential of the region), as well as reduction of barriers to access (NGOs from small centres, distant to the centres of social life, without sufficient resources have difficult access to public funds, therefore it is acceptable to introduce preferences in the rules of competitions for small organisations and organisations from smaller towns, and making an own contribution should be treated as a possibility resulting from the specifics of the project, and not a formal requirement).

In its five-year history, the Institute's educational and outreach activities should not be overlooked. This is served by the NFI Academy formula created to support NGOs in their day-to-day activities.

The Academy is a series of webinars and workshops in which we share our experience and knowledge about operating an NGO. The topics are tailored to the needs reported by third sector organisations, with regard to both know-how and tools to help them in their daily activities. The NFI Academy also draws on the knowledge and experience of Institute staff, gained, among others, during monitoring visits, verification of reports and applications submitted to the Institute. The NFI Academy is for civil society organisations, beneficiaries of government programmes managed by the Institute, community workers, volunteers, representatives of local government units, employees of companies dealing with corporate social responsibility.

Every year, the Institute organises a number of activities addressed to the third sector, including annual topical conferences held in November, volunteer forums, conferences and topical seminars on specific aspects of the programmes. A competition for the best volunteer and volunteer coordinator of the Solidarity Corps has been running since 2020, as has as a competition for doctoral dissertations and master's theses related to civil society since 2021.

As part of its statutory responsibilities, the Institute also maintains a database of public benefit organisation reports and publishes a list of PBOs entitled to raise funds from 1% of personal income tax.

The Institute continues to develop its support system for the civic sector. The spontaneous social upsurge, flowing from the heart during the pandemic and felt towards those fleeing the war zone in Ukraine, showed the potential to develop volunteering among NGOs. However, these activities proved to be effective only in the short term. Over time, problems became apparent, particularly those related to the management of permanent and systematic volunteering. Spontaneous assistance proved insufficient and ineffective in the long run, e.g. due to lack of support (e.g. psychological support for volunteers), or problems with recruiting a large group and organising its work. These shortcomings were compounded by a lack of standards for organising volunteer work, insufficient competence of volunteer coordinators, a lack of resources to employ professional volunteer coordinators, and insufficient knowledge

of how to organise volunteers among management and NGO teams. This situation has compelled many organisations to change their management to a more professional, planned and systemic approach.

The above shortcomings result in the absence of a unified, systemic model for the organisation and management of volunteering, which would be uniform for all organisations working with volunteers. As a result, non-governmental organisations and volunteers mainly undertake spontaneous volunteering, which leads to the consolidation of the model of action volunteering, which does not require investment of greater substantive, personal, financial resources. There is high turnover among volunteers, as these volunteers do not receive proper substantive and psychological support which would result in their retention in the organisation, as a result of which the development of long-term volunteering cannot reach the desired level.

In view of these challenges, the Solidarity Corps will launch a volunteer management support pathway for NGOs with the main objective of strengthening NGOs in terms of a professional approach to volunteer coordination. Education, the promoting the full-time employment of coordinators and the inclusion of this element in the development of long-term volunteering will be important here. Organisations will be able to apply for funding for the costs of employing a volunteer coordinator, covering the costs of providing volunteer service within the Corps and other ongoing expenses related to the management of volunteers, which will result in building sustainable organisational solutions for managing volunteering in the organisation, enhancing the competence of the volunteer coordinator and sharing experiences.

As I place this anniversary volume in the hands of readers, I would like to express my sincere thanks first and foremost to civic organisations, especially those who are willing to share their experience with us, often critically. It is out of the wisdom of their social action that ideas are born to support the professionalisation of organisations.

I must thank Piotr Krygel, together with whom I have worked, since 2013, under the guidance of Professor Piotr Gliński on preparing programmes to support the development of civil society. It was

also at that time that the idea of a government agency acting on behalf of civic organisations was conceived. Together with Piotr, and later also Weronika Najda, as deputy directors, we laid the organisational foundations of the Institute from the first days of November 2017. I would like to thank the chairpersons of the Institute Council, in the first term Wojciech Jachimowicz, in the second term Minister Piotr Mazurek, together with all the Council members of both terms, for their contribution to the construction of institutional good. There is no doubt that the presence in the Government since 2015 of Prof. Piotr Gliński as Deputy Prime Minister and then, from 2017, also as Chairman of the Committee for Public Benefit, has opened the door to the implementation of the reform planned since 2013.

Finally, I would like to thank all the current and former staff of the Institute. Your efforts every day and, importantly – something emphasised during my many meetings with organisations, forums for non-governmental initiatives, conferences and seminars – the creation of a friendly atmosphere of cooperation, communication directed towards the good that flows from the organisation’s activities, builds the Institute’s brand and its image in society.

Finally, my most personal thanks. To Asia, Ania and Sasza, for accepting with a smile the presence of the Institute in my life – and partly in theirs. To all the friends, the good souls I meet along the way, for willingly and kindly sharing their experience and support with me. ■



Photo 1. Wojciech Kaczmarczyk appointed as Director of the National Freedom Institute – Centre for Civil Society Development (20 November 2017)



Photo 2. Members of the NFI-CCSD Council: Iwona Gibas, Professor Ewa Leś, Jarosław Bierecki and Wojciech Jachimowicz at the Belvedere Palace during the Fourth Solidarity Corps Volunteer Forum (24 June 2022)



Photo 3. Dr Barbara Fedyszak-Radziejowska (advisor to the President of Poland) and Professor Rafał Wiśniewski (Director of the National Centre for Culture) during the NFI-ccsd conference, Civil Society: a space of care for the common good (29 November 2019)



Photo 4. Carole Couvert (Vice-President of the Economic, Social and Environmental Council / Conseil économique, social et environnemental), Professor Marek Rymśa (advisor to the President of Poland) and Dr Agnieszka Rymśa (Deputy Director of the Civil Society Department, the Chancellery of the Prime Minister) participating in the panel “Strengthening civic dialogue institutionally” (29 November 2018)”



Photo 5. Ida Nowakowska – Solidarity Corps Ambassador



Photo 6. Jan Mela – Solidarity Corps Ambassador



Photo 7. Zofia Romaszewska (advisor to the President of Poland) participating in the discussion the work of the civic counselling team of the Public Benefit Committee (19 November 2020)



Photo 8. Dr Marcin Zarzecki (Chairman of the Polish National Foundation) during the discussion of the research report "Funding of NGOs by local government in 2020 and 2021" (26 November 2021)

I.

The transformation of the civic sector in Poland and its determinant factors

Polish informal social activism – tradition or modernity?

As much as the notion of civil society has already become firmly established in public discourse not only in Poland but also worldwide, it should be remembered that the relevance of the concept, both as an analytical tool and as a mobilising narrative, was restored by Eastern European dissidents engaged in grassroots civic activism in the 1980s¹. This text aims to present the dynamics of change in the informal participation of Polish society, with a special focus on the last decade. This choice is justified not only by the relatively short space available here for the discussion of such a broad issue, but also by the appearance of a turning point involving the emergence of an increasing pluralism or even divide in this area of public life in Poland. This article is based on the results of the first systemic study of non-institutional civic initiatives², but also on more recent analyses of these phenomena. The study will familiarise readers with arguments concerning both the occurrence of varieties of informal activism traditional to Poland and evidence of the emergence of modern manifestations of participation in public life, including those combining political and civic engagement.

¹ Z.A. Pełczyński, *Solidarity and "The Rebirth of Civil Society" in Poland, 1976–81*, in: *Civil Society and the State*, ed. J. Keane, Verso Books, London 1988, p. 363.

² The project, "Nieodkryty wymiar III sektora. Niezinstytucjonalizowane przejawy społecznikostwa w Polsce" was financed by the Civic Initiatives Fund.

The development of civil society and external support

In the first systemic study on non-institutional civic initiatives conducted in 2014-2015 and discussed in detail in the book *Krajobraz społecznościowy – Polska 2014*³, which I co-edited with Katarzyna Iwińska, we observed the coming of a generational change in Polish civil society. This was to be heralded by the increasingly popular informal grassroots activism already observed at that time, which not only broadened the definition of the civic sector, but also indicated a contestation of its institutional manifestation. In the book, we recalled that in the context of the consolidation of neoliberalism at the end of the 1980s, the concept of social capital emerged to explain and at the same time provide a solution to the weakness of the state and the market. Thus, civil society was assigned a strategic role and corresponding resources were allocated to top-down support for its development, and especially of its institutionalised variety⁴. The focus on social capital was intended to help depoliticise development, with non-governmental organisations becoming intermediaries for civil society.

Although at the beginning of the transformation in Poland the motto *first the market, then democracy* was taken for granted not only by domestic politicians, but also by external donors, over time the support of public and private funders was also directed to newly established NGOs. Piotr Gliński distinguished four areas of external assistance: financial, educational, cultural and political⁵. While it is acknowledged that this support unquestionably played a highly important role in the emergence and development of institutionalised civil society in Poland, its unintended effects have also been noted, including increased competition rather than cooperation

³ *Krajobraz społecznościowy – Polska 2014*, ed. G. Chimiak, K. Iwińska, Collegium Civitas, Warszawa 2015.

⁴ G. Chimiak, *Między Zachodem a Globalnego Południa: innowacje odwrotne w Polsce*, "Kultura-Historia-Globalizacja" 2014, no 16, p. 17–33.

⁵ P. Gliński, *Style działań organizacji pozarządowych w Polsce. Grupy interesu czy pożytku publicznego?*, Wydawnictwo Instytutu Filozofii i Socjologii PAN, Warszawa 2006.

between NGOs, their isolation from society or marginalisation in relation to policy makers.

However, it was foreign aid that proved crucial when it came to NGOs taking up issues that the state would only later start to address institutionally. This includes, for example, the provision of support to children and women affected by violence, as well as advocacy and educational activities vis-à-vis state institutions, the courts and the police that deal directly with these phenomena. Polish NGOs, which took on these difficult challenges, at the same time began to share their experience with civil society actors from other countries to the east and south of Poland. While it is necessary to recognise the important role that technical and financial assistance played in the formation of civil society in Poland after 1989, it was the social entrepreneurship of Polish women and men that conditioned the development of the third sector in the country.

Community fluidity

While social self-organisation in Poland of the 1980s had a communal nature⁶, it was already after the first decade after the overthrow of the previous system that this model began to lose its importance due to the spread of individualistic patterns⁷. However, this latter trend also proved to be temporary, as over time new varieties of social movements began to emerge, such as food co-operatives, which set themselves the aim of reclaiming the common good⁸, or urban movements, which channel the social activity of Polish urban

⁶ W. Wesołowski, *The Nature of Social Ties and the Future of Postcommunist Society: Poland after Solidarity*, in: *Civil Society. Theory, History, Comparison*, ed. J.A. Hall, Polity Press, Cambridge 1995, p. 113.

⁷ G. Chimiak, *How Individualists Make Solidarity Work*, Ministerstwo Pracy i Polityki Społecznej, Warszawa 2006.

⁸ A. Bilewicz, D. Potkańska, *Jak kształtuje społeczeństwo obywatelskie? Kooperatywy spożywcze w Polsce jako przykład nieformalnego ruchu społecznego*, "Trzeci Sektor" 2013, nr 31(3), p. 25–44.

residents⁹. The motivations for action in newly emerging grassroots initiatives were not only a desire for self-actualisation but, significantly, a desire to establish social ties. Thus, by design, the communitarian nature of these initiatives and the greater focus on bringing about change, especially in the local environment, were the main drivers for engaging in informal activism¹⁰. However, it turned out that tension between democratic impulses and egalitarianism could be observed, as some of those involved in non-institutional initiatives, while claiming to feel the need to fulfil a mission, persisted in their conviction that only they were able to cooperate in community initiatives, due to their own specific value system and competences¹¹.

These tendencies could then be interpreted as a symptom of the rebirth of the anti-institutional tradition of the Polish intelligentsia. This resulted in a renewal of commitment to the community, but also in the emergence of enclaves that questioned a lifestyle based on consumption on the one hand, while nurturing exclusive ties on the other. According to Robert Putnam's distinction between inclusive (bridging) and exclusive (bonding) social capital¹², the above informal activism corresponded to the latter type, as it nurtured a homogenous community rather than enabling the inclusion of representatives of other groups. In particular, participants in urban movements were inclined to take action on behalf of the community, imposing their vision on the rest of the population, as a result of the activists' desire to satisfy their individual needs.

Further characteristics of this type of involvement were described by Katarzyna Górniak, who drew attention to the haphazardness of the activities and, consequently, the interchangeability of their

⁹ A. Domaradzka, *Klucze do miasta Ruch miejski jako nowy aktor w polu polityki miejskiej*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Scholar, Warszawa 2021.

¹⁰ D.V. Polańska, *Motywacje osób niezinstytucjonalizowanego sektora społecznościowego*, in: *Krajobraz społecznościowy – Polska 2014*, p. 27–46.

¹¹ A. Bilewicz, *Odnowa etosu społecznikowskiego? O inteligenckim charakterze nie-zinstytucjonalizowanych inicjatyw społecznych*, in: *Krajobraz społecznościowy – Polska 2014*, p. 47–76.

¹² R. Putnam, *Making Democracy Work. Civic Traditions in Modern Italy*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 1993.

members and the fluidity of the community¹³. Dorota Jaworska-Matys, who examined the self-identification processes of participants in civic activities, distinguished four main dimensions of their identity: enthusiasts, rebels, those motivated by an ethos and neighbours¹⁴. However, she also concluded that the discourse around passion, dissent, ethos and locality was fluid. This raises the question as to whether the documented fluidity of the emerging relationships, resulting from the haphazard actions arising from disagreement with existing conditions, did in fact constitute a weakness of non-formalised civic activism? The transience, rotation and ephemerality of the civic "multi-participation" of Poles living in the British Isles also pointed to the pragmatic dimension of this type of commitment to the community¹⁵. We can conclude that this informal activism was a constructive response to the – perceived as dangerous – channelling of civic ferment in the institutionalisation of politics and grassroots engagement.

The development of informal contestative activism

Other varieties of informal activism also emerged during the period described above. Researchers¹⁶ studying activists in protest groups defined as right-wing or conservative noticed a "clear" increase in their activity between 2008 and 2011, while Marcin Ślarzyński's analysis of the network of unregistered associations centred around the weekly *Gazeta Polska* between 2005 and 2015 showed that the clubs' activities fit into the concept of contestative civil society.

¹³ K. Górniak, *Nieformalne inicjatywy społeczne w przestrzeni publicznej – wykluczające czy inkluzywne*, in: *Krajobraz społecznościowy – Polska 2014*, p. 77–92.

¹⁴ D. Jaworska-Matys, *Tożsamościowe dyskursy społecznikostwa*, in: *Krajobraz społecznościowy – Polska 2014*, p. 93–112.

¹⁵ P. Pustułka, *Pomijani multiuczestnicy? Polacy w inicjatywach nieformalnych w Wielkiej Brytanii*, in: *Nic o nas bez nas. Partycypacja obywatelska Polaków w Wielkiej Brytanii*, ed. J. Kucharczyk, Instytut Spraw Publicznych, Warszawa 2013, p. 105–132.

¹⁶ G. Ekiert, J. Kubik, M. Wenzel 2017 in: M. Ślarzyński, *Rola klubów „Gazety Polskiej” w sukcesie politycznym Prawa i Sprawiedliwości w 2015 roku. Aktorzy lokalni czy aktor ogólnokrajowej sfery publicznej III RP?*, „Przegląd Socjologiczny” 2018, nr 2, p. 139–158.

These unregistered associations, working in parallel with political actors, became involved by organising protests “in defence of media freedom”, “in defence of the Fourth Republic” or “upset with the disregard for society”, but also through Marches for Freedom, Solidarity and Independence. In 2010, these associations joined together in the spontaneous events immediately following the 2010 crash of the presidential plane in Smolensk, and shortly afterwards initiated a tradition of commemorating this tragedy on a monthly basis¹⁷. It is worth noting that *Gazeta Polska* clubs have also shown their commitment in international affairs, e.g. by protesting against the aggression of the Russian Federation in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine.

In addition to these activities in the sphere of civic and political self-organisation, Marcin Ślarzyński points out that chairpersons of *Gazeta Polska* clubs ran in local and parliamentary elections, and half of them were elected to parliament in 2015. Significantly, too, these clubs have started to absorb “all kinds of initiatives at the local level – both of a civil society and partisan nature”¹⁸, thereby consolidating local right-wing communities. Thus, while urban movements or food co-operatives, with some generalisation, can be classified as an area of activity of the urban intelligentsia, *Gazeta Polska* clubs are part of the local manifestation of informal activism. The latter involve the “local elite”, which includes circles whose origins are sometimes in the anti-communist underground; they do not include only people from NGOs, but also from the world of politics, the clergy, journalists or teachers¹⁹. Ultimately, this variety of informal activism has contributed to social change and, consequently, to change on the political arena as well.

¹⁷ See M. Ślarzyński, *op. cit.*

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 152.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 155.

The common good or polarisation?

The history of the evolution of social informal activism in Poland, outlined briefly above, on the one hand reflected the deepening socio-political divides, and – on the other – contributed to deepening this gap. However, the further dynamics of the emergence and development of subsequent types of non-institutional activism indicate the formation of new alliances. In this context, mention should be made of the emergence of the grassroots *Ogólnopolski Strajk Kobiet* (OSK – All-Poland Women’s Strike), which was joined by both affiliated and non-affiliated citizens, women and men, as well as by organisations of various types. The OSK is an informal, non-partisan women’s initiative that on 3 October 2016 organised what was called Black Monday in more than 200 cities in Poland and abroad, as a response to attempts to criminalise abortion. A survey of women activists in the movement found that an important motivation for involvement was a sense of solidarity with other women, i.e. this was not just about achieving their own private goals, but acting for the common good²⁰.

Thus, emotional solidarity transformed into political solidarity and enabled joint action by women from different backgrounds, characterised by similar traumatic experiences and empathy. This solidarity resulting from intersectional sensitivity²¹ resulted in further alliances in subsequent years. For example, in 2020, in response to the further tightening of anti-abortion laws in the country, the combined actions of the pro-choice, urban but also rural communities, the LGBTQA+ movement and elderly women’s activists provided another example of intersectional mobilisation of informal activists in Poland²². After the outbreak of war in Ukraine in 2022, OSK

²⁰ J. Ramme, C. Snochowska-Gonzalez, *Solidarność mimo różnic – solidarność dzięki różnicom. Działaczki Ogólnopolskiego Strajku Kobiet*, „Praktyka Teoretyczna” 2018, 30(4), p. 91.

²¹ *Ibidem*, p. 92.

²² M. Grabowska, *Tip of the Wave? New Forms of Intersectional Feminist Mobilizations in Poland*, in: *Gender, Voice, and Violence in Poland. Women’s Protests during the Pandemic*, red. A. Zabrzewska, J.K. Dubrow, IFIS PAN Publishers, Warszawa 2021, p. 197–203.

spontaneously and with considerable success implemented several humanitarian aid actions, also allocating its own funds to the people in war-affected regions in Ukraine.

It is worth noting that the OSK is also a response to the elitisation of public life in Poland. The Black Protests (*Czarne Protesty*) proved that the protesting women are not a “degenerate elite”, but “ordinary women”, whose activism accounts for the diversity of non-formal initiatives. The fact that the protesting women did not succumb to self-censorship and did not shy away from defining their involvement as political²³, testifies to the return of non-institutional grassroots activism of a civic nature, but with a political purpose, just like the Solidarity movement in 1980s Poland. Other research has also shown that for many of the female participants in the Black Protests, these areas of voluntary participation became “reservoirs of citizenship” and an opportunity to “transcend previous divisions, both political and private”²⁴. In this involvement, no tension was observed between civic participation and political action. On the contrary: participation in informal activism builds political awareness, while political activism serves civic empowerment²⁵.

The experience of social and political maturation of civic consciousness does not only characterise the individuals and initiatives involved in the Black Protests. Other groups, too, are no strangers to internal divisions even when there is an agreement on the general direction of the desired changes. In this context it is worthwhile to mention the activities of the so-called pro-life groups, which are pro-Church interest groups with varying degrees of formalisation. After 2015, two circles – “radical” and “moderate” – took shape in Poland, which contradicts the hypothesis that pro-Church interest groups are supposed to present a unified position on the scope of

²³ J. Ramme, C. Snochowska-Gonzalez, op. cit., p. 9.

²⁴ B. Kowalska, R. Nawojski, *Uwaga, uwaga tu obywatelki! Obywatelstwo jako praktyka w Czarnych Protestach i Strajkach Kobiet*, in: *Bunt kobiet. Czarne Protesty i Strajki Kobiet*, red. E. Korolczuk i in., Europejskie Centrum Solidarności, Gdańsk 2019, p. 68.

²⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 69.

sought-after changes to anti-abortion legislation²⁶. Also very importantly, these groups are “an instrument of the Church’s influence on the political system”²⁷. Thus, these actors, although by definition being part of grassroots informal activism, successfully combine political goals with civic engagement. The impact of other external factors on the informal activism of Polish men and women also merits attention. Certainly, significant changes in informal volunteering were brought about first by the Covid-19 pandemic, and later by the humanitarian crisis on the border with Belarus and the effects of the war in Ukraine. As Agnieszka Lissowska-Lewkowicz of the Volunteer Centre points out, the involvement of volunteers working with NGOs decreased as a result of pandemic restrictions. Despite this, grassroots engagement also by informal, neighbourhood and scouting initiatives have increased significantly. E-volunteering have also been on the rise. Recent studies of the non-governmental sector in Poland have shown that recently there has been a “clear trend showing a desire and need for social involvement, but without the need to act within specific structures”, which may pose a threat to institutional volunteering²⁸.

Summary: the renaissance of linking informal activism to political objectives

This work briefly describes the process of the revival of civic engagement of a non-formal nature but with political objectives, and the conclusions drawn from the analysis of this phenomenon confirm the hypothesis that the model of active but non-political participation typical for the first decade of Poland’s systemic transformation

²⁶ K. Kowalczyk, *Wpływ prokościelnych grup interesu na ustawodawstwo. Casus regulacji antyaborcyjnych w Sejmie VIII kadencji*, “Annales Universitatis Mariae Curie-Skłodowska Lublin – Polonia” 2019, vol. 26, p. 93–106.

²⁷ Ibidem, p. 93.

²⁸ See B. Charycka et al., *2021 Kondycja Organizacji Pozarządowych*, Stowarzyszenie Klon/Jawor, Warszawa 2022, p. 49.

is no longer relevant²⁹. The statement concerning the elitist mode of local civil society in Poland is also becoming outdated³⁰. Just as the Solidarity grassroots movement and trade union more than 40 years ago was a “moral crusade”³¹ and, by its very nature, a political entity, today’s active informal grassroots initiatives also meet the criteria of “ethos groups”³², which successfully combine civic involvement with political maturity.

In this context, it is worth recalling Maria Ossowska’s formulation of the concept of the model democrat. She pointed out, among other things, that “taking part in public life [...] requires [...] civic courage”³³, i.e. the courage to state and defend one’s convictions, even when one puts one’s “vital interests” at risk by doing so. The men and women who participate in informal activism in Poland discussed above undoubtedly show this trait. However, absorbing other virtues is also required to achieve the role model of the democrat. The most relevant among these today seems to be “socialisation”, i.e. “qualities that contribute to a dignified coexistence”³⁴. This means that it is essential to also perceive the interests of others and be responsible for community life. Moreover, Ossowska reminds us that the model of the democrat is “neither elite nor class-based”, and “includes both men and women”³⁵. Like any ideal, Ossowska’s concept indicates the direction of the desired changes and refers to a certain process. While appreciating the civic engagement of various informal initiatives, it remains for us to work on inclusive

²⁹ A. Rychard, *Institutions and Actors in a New Democracy: The Vanishing Legacy of Communist and Solidarity Types of Participation in Poland*, in: *Participation and Democracy East and West: Comparisons and Interpretations*, ed. D. Rueschemeyer et al., Routledge, New York 1998, p. 31.

³⁰ J. Kurczewska, *Local civil societies in the nineties. A diagnosis*, “Polish Sociological Review” 2002, no 139(3), p. 310.

³¹ Z.A. Pełczyński, op. cit., p. 372.

³² S. Nowak, *The Premises, Hypotheses and Problems of Research Concerning Peace and Internal Order in Poland*, “Dialectics and Humanism” 1990, no 2, p. 125.

³³ M. Ossowska, *Wzór demokracji. Cnoty i wartości*, Daimonion, Lublin 1992 (1944), p. 20–21.

³⁴ Ibidem, p. 24.

³⁵ Ibidem, p. 33.

social capital and to respect the rights to self-determination of all participants in public life in Poland.

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The development of social services in Poland – between the state, the market and the civic sector

Introduction

The fifth anniversary of the work of National Freedom Institute – Centre for Civil Society Development (NFI-CCSD) is an appropriate opportunity to reflect on the accessibility of the services of non-governmental organisations to society, as well as the financial and personnel status of the organisations themselves. Referring to the typology of the functions of civic organisations¹, let us recall that the direct satisfaction of society's needs in various areas of life is among the fundamental roles of social organisations, in addition to the function of articulating and representing values and interests, the role of providing expertise, and the monitoring and scrutiny of those in power. The “green light” for the development of multi-sectoral social service policy with the participation of non-governmental service providers was given in the 1970s by the public goods theory of the American economist Burton Weisbrod. Its main argument is the thesis of the failure of the market in the social sphere and the limitations of the state in meeting collective needs. This justifies the presence of social organisations. In recent years, the investment theory of social policy has emphasized the need to expand public and private institutions as well as those belonging

¹ P. Gliński, W. Kaczmarczyk, *Zadania i wyzwania polskiej polityki na rzecz rozwoju społeczeństwa obywatelskiego*, in: *Dla Niepodległej. Obywatele i Ich Organizacje 1918–2020*, ed. E. Leś, Kancelaria Prezydenta Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej, Warszawa 2020, p. 355.

to social organisations as the material basis for meeting individual and group needs². Social policy reforms in Poland in the second and third decades of political transition process (1999–2019), which aimed at combining cash benefits with broadening access to social services, have made NGOs one of the providers of both institutional services and less formal social programmes.

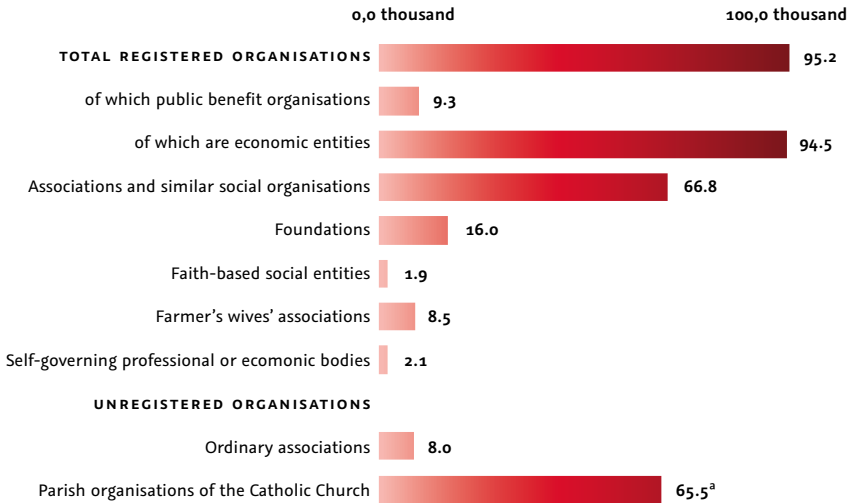
Social services are defined as services aimed at satisfying the non-material needs of citizens, in particular in the areas of education, vocational support and development, health care, social assistance, public safety and order, culture, sport, recreation and tourism. Public statistics distinguish two types of social services provided by non-profit organisations: services that are institutional in nature and services in less institutional forms. In both cases, they operate on the basis of legal regulations. The distinctive feature of institutional services is their fixed-site nature and the regularity of the provision of services (crèches, kindergartens, schools, day and 24-hour social welfare institutions, museums, galleries).

Supporting the welfare state through civic organisations

If one measures the economic health of civic organisations by the number of such institutions, there was an unprecedented increase in the number of foundations, associations, unions, guilds and chambers of commerce from 3,546 to over 95,000 organisations between 1988 and 2020. Figure 1 shows the number of non-profit organisations registered in 2020 in the National Court Register and social organisations not registered in this list (ordinary associations and parish organisations of the Catholic Church).

² M. Grewiński, *Usługi Społeczne we współczesnej polityce społecznej. Przegląd problemów i wizja przyszłości*, Dom Wydawniczy ELIPSA, Warszawa 2021, p. 146.

Figure 1. Number of registered and unregistered non-profit organisations in 2020



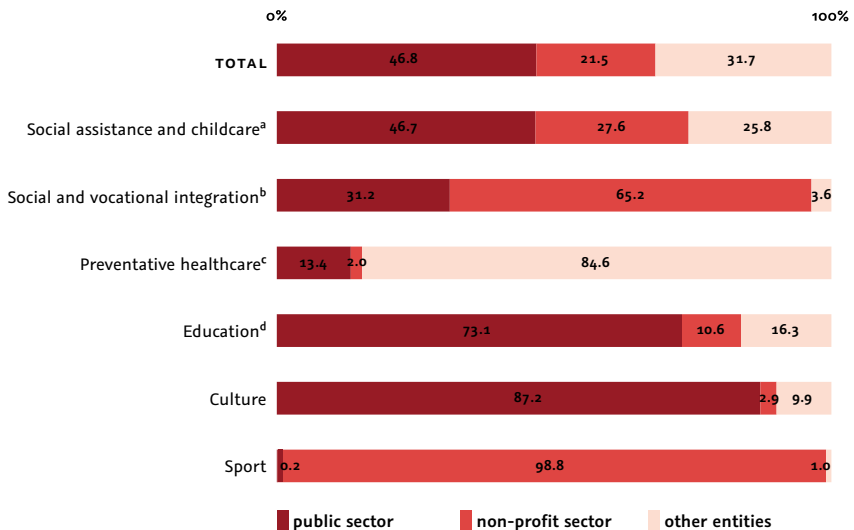
^a Data for parish organisations of the Catholic Church are for 2018

Source: *Działalność stowarzyszeń i podobnych organizacji społecznych, fundacji, społecznych podmiotów wyznaniowych, kół gospodyń wiejskich oraz samorządu gospodarczego i zawodowego w 2020 r. – wyniki wstępne, Informacje Sygnalne GUS, Warszawa 2021, p. 2.*

A significant proportion of social service providers are operated by non-governmental bodies (Figure 2). Civic organisations provide social services in institutional forms: crèches, kindergartens, schools, occupational therapy workshops and vocational centres for people with disabilities, day and 24-hour social welfare centres, recreational and sports facilities, cultural centres, museums and galleries. In addition, they provide social programmes in the form of projects for economically inactive people; mothers with interruptions in employment; young people in the NEET group; migrants and refugees; as well as services to support healthy families, including parenting support and early intervention, as well as specialised services to meet the specific and complex needs of children and families; senior citizen clubs. They offer many other

forms of activities to help people at risk of social exclusion. They target individuals, social groups, and sometimes society as a whole³.

Figure 2. Share of the non-profit sector in the total number of social service providers and by field in 2016, in %



^a Data do not include branches of residential social assistance facilities.

^b Data exclude social integration clubs.

^c The high share of other entities is due to the large number of outpatient care units.

^d Data do not include Universities of the Third Age.

Source: Statistics Poland 2018.

Non-governmental organisations bring intrinsic values to the delivery of services, such as competence in individualising activities to particular groups receiving services – children, young people, adults, seniors and people with disabilities – tailoring forms of support to individual and group needs, and usually a high quality of services provided. The third sector ensures wide availability of

³ E. Leś, *Rola organizacji trzeciego sektora w usługach społecznych w Polsce*, in: *Polityka społeczna*, ed. G. Firlit-Fesnak, J. Męcina, Wydawnictwo PWN, Warszawa 2018, p. 479.

social services, as more than 80% of social entities provide them free of charge⁴.

In 2016, 88.6% of non-profit organisations worked to meet the needs of individuals and groups. In that year, they supported 18.6 million people, of whom 4.6 million people regularly used the services of social welfare centres, social and vocational integration, child-care, education and sport offered by the associations. Organisations ran 20% of all childcare services, including almost 50% of day-care centres for children, young people and older adults, and more than half of Universities of the Third Age.

Non-profit organisations are the main providers of social and vocational integration services for people with disabilities and run occupational therapy workshops (OTWs), vocational activity centres (VACs) and social integration centres (SICs). Between 2015 and 2020, NGOs established the majority of the 94 newly established reintegration facilities for people with disabilities and social and vocational support and activation centres. However, there is still a service gap and spatial inequalities in the access to similar services (more than three quarters of SICs and VACs operated in cities).

Between 2007 and 2014, secular and faith-based community organisations tripled the share of pre-schools they operated. In 2014, they administered 9% of pre-schools used by 6% of children aged three to five. In the 2020/2021 school year, public governing bodies managed almost 70% of pre-schools, commercial establishments came second and NGOs came third⁵. According to data as of 30 September 2020, 90.1% of children aged 3–6 participated in various forms of pre-school education. Despite the wide availability of these services, regional and territorial inequalities in early childhood education have not been completely addressed. There is still a need to involve the third sector more widely in the provision of pre-school education services. Reducing the service gap for pre-school education and crèche care is now among the social and family policy

⁴ K. Goś-Wójcicka, T. Sekuła, *Polskie społeczeństwo obywatelskie. Obraz statystyczny (1989–2018)*, in: *Dla Niepodległej. Obywatele i Ich Organizacje 1918–2020*.

⁵ *Oświata i wychowanie w r. szk. 2020/2021: Informacje statystyczne*, GUS, Warszawa–Gdańsk 2021.

priorities for balancing work and family roles and strengthening the right of both parents to work and have a career, as well as reducing the indirect costs of having children identified in the Demographic Strategy 2040.

Both the scale and the range of NGO services aimed at families need to be increased. The majority of non-profit services for families and children are provided free of charge (63.5%). They are mainly addressed to children and young people (81.6%), single parents (20.5%), people with disabilities (17.6%) and the poor (11.9%). In 2014, only 4% of the total number of NGOs in Poland (3,300 organisations) were active in work for families, i.e. they indicated family and children as a priority in their statutory area of activity.

This makes it all the more important to emphasise the great significance of the launch by NFI-CCSD of the governmental Programme for Supporting the Development of Counselling Organisations (including family and professional counselling) for 2022 to 2033 and the provision of funding for it. This initiative is the realisation of the programme proposal of the President of the Republic of Poland, Andrzej Duda, presented at the Counselling Congress in July 2019, and constitutes the implementation of the agreements made by the President of the Republic of Poland and Deputy Prime Minister Piotr Gliński, Chairman of the Public Benefit Committee.

Despite the substantial increase in the scale and scope of service provision by government, local authorities and NGOs in recent years, new public, non-governmental and private initiatives in this area are still needed. This is confirmed by the results of the pilot law of 19 July 2019 on the implementation of social services by Social Services Centres (SSC). The Act is the result of a legislative initiative by the President of the Republic of Poland, Andrzej Duda. The Presidential Decree was prepared by the Office of the President and experts of the National Development Council to the President.

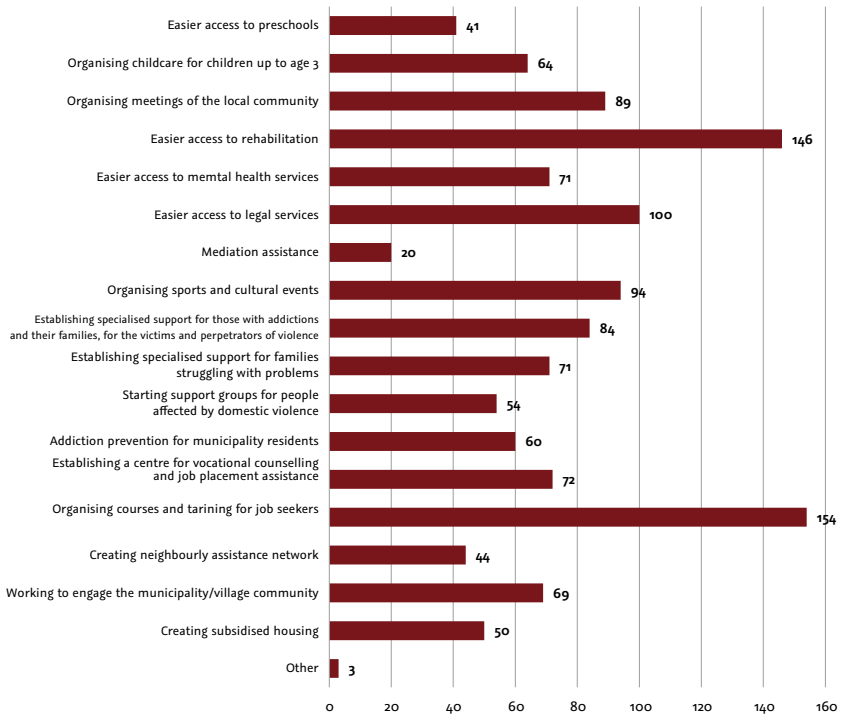
The Act on social service centres entered into force on 1 January 2020 (Journal of Laws 2019)⁶.

This Act has been implemented in pilot form since 2021 and is expected to allow increased access to social services for residents in municipalities, including new social programmes that the municipality had not previously provided by providing appropriate and individualised services. In the vast majority of rural, rural-urban and urban municipalities included in the pilot programme, residents' access to social infrastructure was low. In the municipalities participating in the pilot programme, the initial identification of local needs and resources carried out on the basis of municipal strategies for solving social problems, programmes, plans and local documents, and the conclusions of the full diagnosis of social needs, after the establishment of a SSC, revealed the existence of many service gaps in addressing biographical, health and life difficulties and crises. In most municipalities there was a lack of early childhood care, parenting and education services, day-care facilities for schoolchildren and family counselling services. The activities of municipalities for adults and recent graduates in terms of labour market services and job creation were found to be inadequate. The need to expand employment support services was indicated, including access to courses, apprenticeships and training for unemployed adults and young people to improve their professional qualifications, as well as access to career counselling and vocational development. In this context, it is important to emphasise the need to include in particular women with interruptions in employment due to difficulties in combining employment with care for children and dependent family members, as well as people aged 20–29 who are not in education, employment or training, most of whom are women. The gap in labour market services can be reduced by providing the status of bodies running institutional services in the long term to organisations operating in the social economy. As is apparent, the

⁶ For more on this topic, see: M. Rymsza (red.), *Centrum Usług Społecznych: Od Koncepcji do Wdrożenia Przepisów Ustawy*, Narodowa Rada Rozwoju, Kancelaria Prezydenta Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej, Instytut Pracy i Spraw Socjalnych, Warszawa 2021, p. 15.

services offered in this area by public authorities and actors in the social economy needs to be strengthened.

Figure 3. The need for services as perceived by residents of municipalities in Lublin Voivodeship



Source: Plan for the introduction of social services centres in municipalities (2021).

Residents of the pilot municipalities in which ssc were established also indicated low availability of family-friendly programmes, including clubs and day care centres, therapy centres for children and young people, parent clubs, mediation centres and therapy for parenting couples. Residents of a Lublin municipality that had established an ssc (Figure 3) indicated that the creation of early care, parenting and education services was a priority, including improved programme offerings for children, young people and counselling for couples in marital, family and parenting crises.

Some of the municipalities that have established an ssc have adopted an expanded catalogue of services; these include innovative community health service programmes, including home visits by a nurse/emergency medical technician, the launch of mobile psychologist and mobile physiotherapist services.

The rules of the competition⁷ “Support for the creation of social service centres and the development of the services they provide” promote the strengthening of the service role of local organisations and social cooperatives by providing them with more stable operating conditions. Social service centres are obliged to allocate a minimum of 30% of the direct costs of the project (creation of an ssc) to the outsourcing of social services to non-profit organisations or social economy organisations. As indicated in a 2021 application for ssc funding, “The creation of an ssc will have a very positive impact on the NGO sector, which will be able to be contractors of the ssc and provide social services as part of [...] their statutory activities, financing them from the centre’s budget [...]”.

Preliminary findings from the analysis of the research material on municipalities that have established an ssc indicate that those locales where civic organisations with the required profile had already been active have become contractors for services on behalf of the centres. In this context, it is worth noting that more than 60% of the organisations supported by NFI government programmes in recent years were small organisations in smaller towns⁸. This proves that the emphasis on strengthening the civic sector in small locales was the proper one and this is now paying off in the form of increased civic activity outside of urban agglomerations and big cities.

The implementation of competitive projects under the ssc law has created the prospect of strengthening the service delivery role

⁷ Regulamin Konkursu *Wsparcie tworzenia centrów usług społecznych i rozwój dostarczanych przez nie usług* realizowanego w ramach Programu Operacyjnego Wiedza Edukacja Rozwój na lata 2014–2020. Oś priorytetowa II *Efektywne polityki publiczne dla rynku pracy, gospodarki i edukacji*. Działanie 2.8 *Rozwój usług społecznych świadczonych w środowisku lokalnym*.

⁸ P. Gliński, W. Kaczmarczyk, op. cit., p. 364.

of both local civic organisations and public and private entities that deliver services. However, in the case of some of the smallest municipalities, due to the lack of local NGOs in general or the absence of organisations with the required profile, this potential has yet to be mobilised with the participation of the local government administration and the residents of municipalities where there is no NGO operating and which have an SSC or are preparing to establish one. To this end, it would be advisable to consider broadening the scope of the currently operating government NFI programmes aimed at the smallest municipalities and village administrations to include support for initiative groups planning to set up an SSC in their area.

NGO activities during the COVID-19 pandemic

The 2020-2021 pandemic restrictions were not conducive to civic activism; however, for many people the pandemic period represented a turning point, activating their willingness to help others⁹. Data from public statistics indicate that 15.8 per cent of non-profit organisations undertook additional civic activities in 2020¹⁰. Referring to the typology of the functions of civic organisations cited above¹¹, it should be emphasised that during the COVID-19 epidemic, non-profit organisations primarily were involved in direct service provision (63% of organisations of this type). During this period, 37.7% of non-profit organisations provided material and in-kind assistance, and about 9% of organisations provided financial support to people in need and provided public information (warning of the danger). Rescue, social and humanitarian aid and employment and health organisations accounted for the largest proportion of non-profit associations that took additional action during the 2020

⁹ E. Leś, *Aktywność obywatelska w czasie pandemii COVID-19 i system wsparcia publicznego dla organizacji pozarządowych*, „Studia Politologiczne” 2022, no 3, vol. 65, p. 135.

¹⁰ *Działalność stowarzyszeń i podobnych organizacji społecznych, fundacji, społecznych podmiotów wyznaniowych, kół gospodyń wiejskich oraz samorządu gospodarczego i zawodowego w 2020 r. – wyniki wstępne*, Informacje Sygnalne GUS, Warszawa 2021, p. 5.

¹¹ P. Gliński, W. Kaczmarczyk, op. cit., p. 355.

COVID-19 outbreak (Figure 4). In 2020, 15.8% of NGOs undertook additional activities for the public¹² (Figure 5).

Referring to the typology of functions of civic organisations¹³, it should be pointed out that in the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic, as part of their additional activities, civic organisations most often provided social services (45.8%) and provided information (45.3%). In-kind and financial support was provided by approximately 25% and 9.1% of organisations respectively¹⁴. In 2020, five million citizens benefited from civic support¹⁵. Individuals were the most frequent recipients of support, accounting for almost 55%, followed by local communities (neighbourhood, village, an entire municipality) and health care institutions. This would not have been possible without the substantial assistance to NGOs from the public administration during the pandemic.

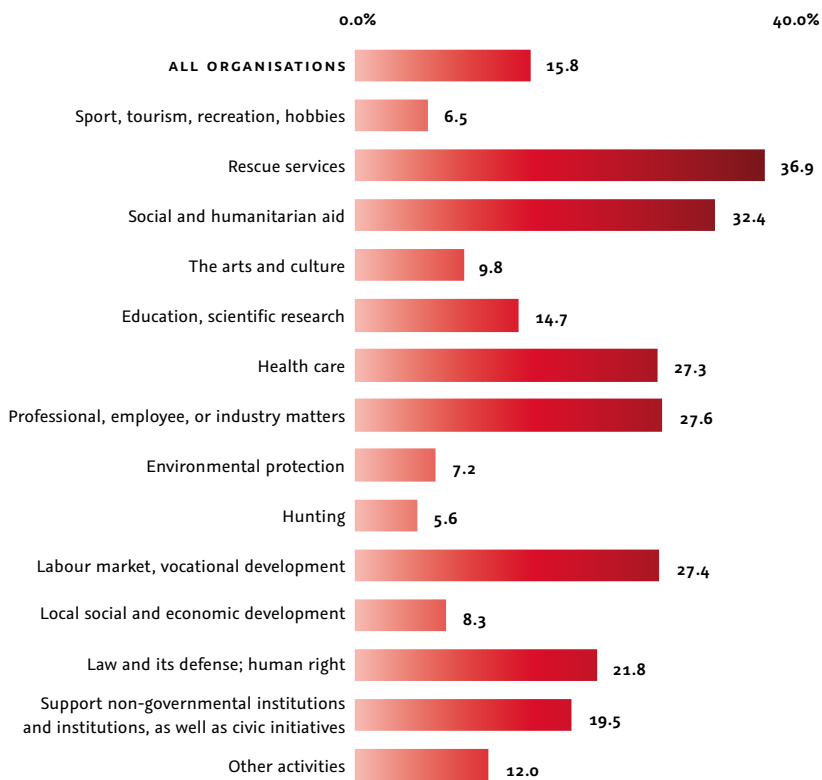
¹² *Działalność stowarzyszeń i podobnych organizacji społecznych...*, p. 5.

¹³ P. Gliński, W. Kaczmarczyk, op. cit., p. 355.

¹⁴ *Działalność stowarzyszeń i podobnych organizacji społecznych...*, p. 5.

¹⁵ *Organizacje non profit w czasie pandemii COVID-19 (marzec–sierpień 2020)*, Informacje Sygnalne GUS, Warszawa 2020; *Działalność stowarzyszeń i podobnych organizacji społecznych...*, p. 5.

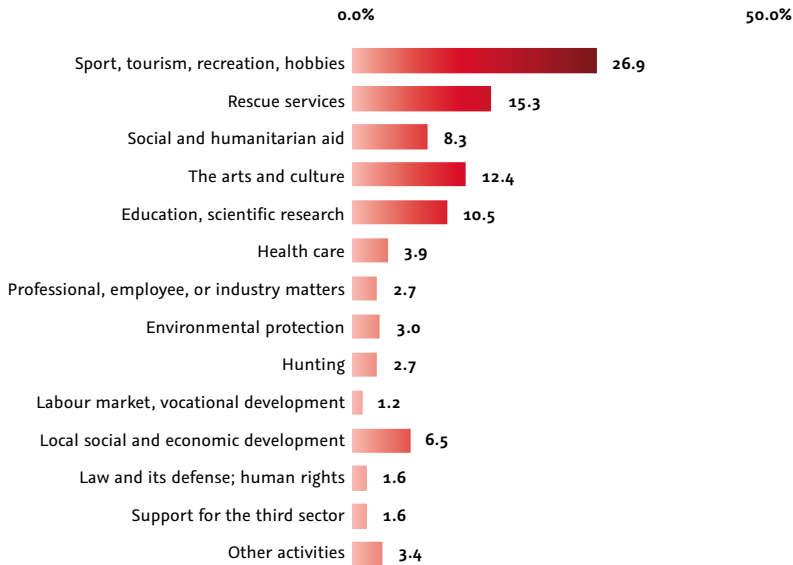
Figure 4. Percentage of non-profit organisations* undertaking additional outreach in the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic by main area of activity



* The basis for calculation of percentages was non-profit organisations that declared that their statutory activities had been affected by the COVID19 pandemic in 2020.

Source: *Działalność stowarzyszeń i podobnych organizacji społecznych*, Informacje Sygnalne GUS, Warszawa 2021.

Figure 5. Structure of non-profit organisations by their main area of statutory activity in 2020.



Source: *Działalność stowarzyszeń i podobnych organizacji społecznych, fundacji, społecznych podmiotów wyznaniowych, kół gospodyń wiejskich oraz samorządu gospodarczego i zawodowego w 2020 r. – wyniki wstępne*, Informacje Sygnalne GUS, Warszawa 2021.

Why is civil society in Poland the way it is today?

In order to assess the performance of civic organisations, it is essential to understand the economic resources of NGOs, especially financial and personnel reserves. Although between 2010 and 2020 the revenues of organisations increased by 26.8% in real terms and the number of people they employed grew by almost 32%, weak finances and instable sources of funding are still a feature of most organisations. The reason for this is relative instability of income from public sources, which is the main source of funding for the work of Polish social organisations. In 2019, the total revenue of non-profit organisations amounted to PLN 31 billion. More than 60% of revenues came from non-market funds, 45% of which came from public funds. Of this pool, funding from local government resources

amounted to 19.6%. The share of revenue from market sources was approximately 28.5%, including 14.8% from payment for statutory activities and 11.6% from economic activities¹⁶.

NGOs are also characterised by high income polarisation and a low share of repayable financing in their receipts. In 2019, the average budget of a non-profit organisation was PLN 350,000, but half of organisations had an income of less than PLN 29,000 per year¹⁷. That year, only 2% of organisations used financing in the form of loans and credit.

A problem for third sector organisations is a large funding gap. An evaluation survey by the Ministry of Development Funds and Regional Policy, based on an assessment of planned but uncompleted expenditures for development in NGOs, showed a level of budget shortfall of more than PLN 1 billion¹⁸.

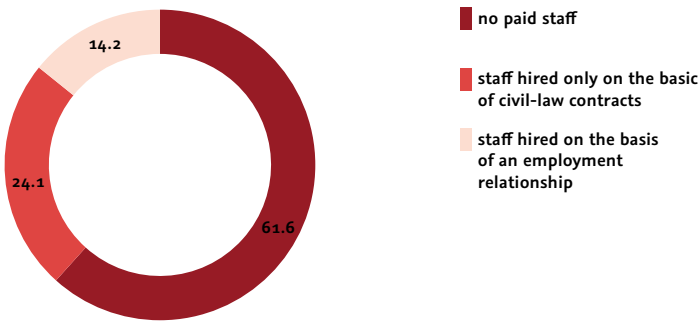
A consequence of the modest financial base of most NGOs is a deficit in paid staff. Admittedly, although the number of employees increased by almost 32% between 2010 and 2020 as mentioned above, freelance employment is the main form of work in NGOs. In 2020, 24.1% of organisations employed staff only on the basis of civil-law contracts, while only 14.2% of associations provided full-time employment. This means that 61.6% of Polish civic organisations base their social and economic potential exclusively on community work. This limits the scale of social services that civic organisations can manage. Paid work in institutions of this type corresponds to only about 2.1% of employment in the national economy, i.e. 323,200 full-time equivalents. Figures 6 and 7 show the share of employment and volunteering in NGOs in general and in the activities of selected groups of non-profit organisations in 2020.

¹⁶ *Działalność stowarzyszeń i podobnych organizacji społecznych...*, p. 4.

¹⁷ D. Murzyn, *Debata Instytutu Pracy i Spraw Socjalnych pt. Ekonomia społeczna i solidarna: na ile „społeczna” i „solidarna”?* [online] <https://debaty.ipiss.com.pl/debaty/przyszle/6-ekonomia-spooleczna-i-solidarna-na-ile-spooleczna-i-solidarna> [dostęp: 05.05.2022].

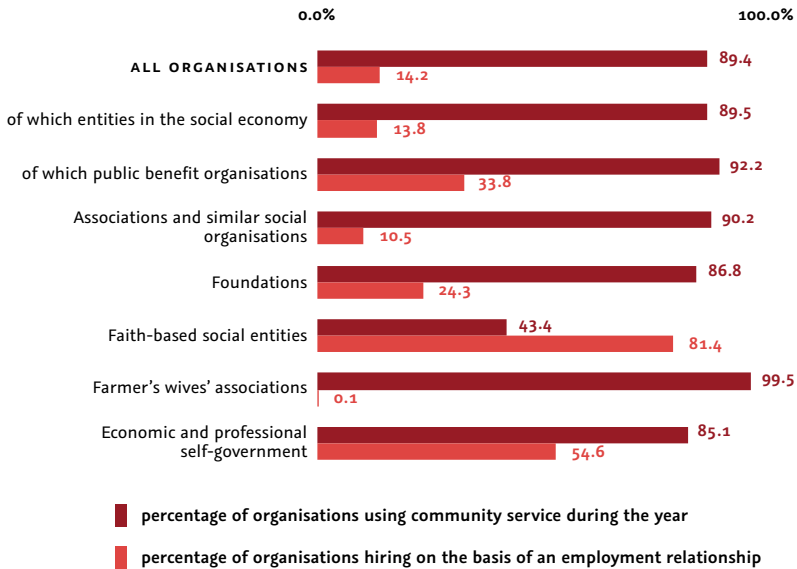
¹⁸ *Ibidem*.

Figure 6. Structure of non-profit organisations by paid staff in 2020 r.



Source: *Działalność stowarzyszeń i podobnych organizacji społecznych...*, p. 3

Figure 7. Percentage of non-profit organisations using community service and hiring on the basis of an employment relationship in 2020 by type of organisation



Source: *Działalność stowarzyszeń i podobnych organizacji społecznych...*, p. 4.

Strengthening the service delivery role of NGOs requires increasing access to funding, which is currently the most important constraint on aid institutions. NFI, in response to the barriers to civic participation resulting from the poor financial condition of non-profit organisations, has consistently introduced government programmes to support civil society and recapitalise NGO initiatives. Thanks to these programmes, as well as the assistance of local authorities and the determination of citizens, the prospects for increasing NGO participation in social services are improving.

Summary

It should be emphasised that the modern welfare state plays a special role in generating social trust. This is influenced by the quality of the delivery of social benefits and programmes by institutions of the welfare state. The National Freedom Institute – Centre for Civil Society Development is a new public social policy entity. Through its programmes to support the development of civil society, the expansion of public funding for organisations and the consistent pursuit of its work, over the past five years NFI-CCSD has made a significant contribution to improving NGOs' access to funding, expertise and technical assistance. This has enabled many organisations to better meet their material, personnel and technical needs, consequently facilitating citizens' access to scarce social services. Thus, NFI-CCSD as well as civic organisations and volunteers today are together creating the Polish welfare state, contributing to greater equality in the social structure and activity in public life. This creates a real prospect of reducing the problem of inherited social exclusion and improving citizens' trust in the state.



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Civil society as a common good?

In search of a new civil society

It is surprising how little space in debates on the current state of civil society in Poland is devoted to the Solidarity movement of 1980–1981, even though it is perhaps the most important domestic democratic tradition, a collective experience historically close to us, the actors of the movement are among us, much closer than the accounts of Polish noble democracy.¹ Few realise that Solidarity 1980–1981 shaped contemporary civil society in at least four ways: firstly, it largely organised a kind of civic proto-matter, instilling horizontal thinking among the people; secondly, it created a project, admittedly abandoned for years and still unrealised, for a grassroots political system; thirdly, it generated a spirit of self-government; and fourthly, it elevated social self-organisation to the status of a value.

Solidarity 1980–1981 (beyond the “mass movement” stereotype) was organised horizontally. The basic structure was made up of regions (horizontal division) rather than branches (vertical division). These regions were made up of hundreds and thousands of micro-centres, in and through which it was possible to look at an issue from multiple points of view, by different specialists working in a common working group. Solidarity 1980–1981 was a creation

¹ A. Wyka, A. Kościański, *Elementy wzoru obywatela w świetle oczekiwań Polaków A.D. 2002*, *Bariera świadomości obywatelskiej*, in: *Niepokoje polskie*, ed. H. Domański, A. Ostrowska, A. Rychard, IFiS PAN Publishers, Warszawa 2002, p. 259–287.

of extremely competent and hard-working micro-centres, and only more important issues were taken up at the regional level, and finally the most important were transferred to the national forum – the very forum for the exchange of ideas and concrete ideas for repair in the collective group of regional delegates.² It was only then that a hierarchy of national problems was established, and priorities were chosen for the repair of the country as a whole, leaving the resolution of issues particular to individual regions to those regions. This is how the “Self-governing Republic” programme came into being. It was only because this movement was organised horizontally that it being outlawed did not much affect the continuity of substantive work in the micro-centres and allowed it to continue underground. The temporary loss of leaders also did not affect the work of their rank-and-file subordinates.³

Solidarity was not immune to either centrifugal or external actions that distorted the ideal of horizontal organisation or self-government. Hierarchies emerged and solutions proposed by the emerging elite were imposed from above on local micro-centres to a greater extent than solutions developed from below by regional structures were adopted. The very idea of civil society was reduced to the role of a “batt to crush communism”. After 1989, the weakness of civil society was explained by, among other things, the fact that Solidarity activists had abandoned the ideas of civil society as soon as they gained political power after the Round Table talks and the elections of June 1989⁴.

It is clear that neither political freedom nor civic autonomy had any place in the ideas at the Round Table. Citizenship was reduced to economic freedom, which was later limited by a system of complicated taxation and concessions, and a peculiar understanding of an open society, i.e. a liberal, or rather libertine, version of a plurality of worldviews. The new elites of the Third Republic were convinced

² A. Wyka, A. Kościański, *Elementy wzoru obywatela w świetle oczekiwań Polaków A.D. 2002, Bariery świadomości obywatelskiej*, in: *Niepokoje polskie*, ed. H. Domański, A. Ostrowska, A. Rychard, IFiS PAN Publishers, Warszawa 2002, p. 283

³ *Ibidem*

⁴ A. Mielczarek, *Śpiący rycerze*, Stowarzyszenie Wolnego Słowa, Warszawa 2006

that civic engagement was about the times when the struggle for democracy was taking place. The NGO sector (also called the “third sector”) became a substitute for political pluralism. The development of this sector helped to inhibit the development of other, new political forces and to limit the development of social movements that were able to reach the critical mass of pluralism and begin the march toward, sometimes highly radicalised, political growth in society. If this was only to prevent radicalisation, then of course it had the desired result.⁵ However, its side-effect was a reduction of civic consciousness in Poland. The growth of NGOs did not increase the quality of citizen involvement and self-organisation. For many years, even today, many researchers have regarded the number of social organisations as an indicator of the development of civil society and yet at the same time this does not prevent them from complaining about the immaturity of civil society.⁶ Non-governmentality has superseded a political character in citizenship, which has been summed up in a kind of citizenship that has to manifest itself only through NGOs, today understood as a sector representing citizens (not party-based) and defining the nature of civil society in post-transformation Poland. Non-governmentality is so dominant in the language of description and self-identification of civil society in Poland that the existence of other manifestations of activities and initiatives than those of the NGOs has not been visible for years.

The citizen in the Polish People’s Republic, the citizen-oppositionist in the PPR, and finally the new citizen who emerged after 1989 as a participant in civil society became an abstract figure in the 1990s. What appeared as a somewhat degenerated form was the “professional citizen” – a very engaged social activist employed on a full-time basis in an NGO. Neither the rights nor the responsibilities of members of civil society were precisely defined at the time, and the system of civic values was constructed haphazardly, in isolation from the needs and conditions of the environment. The prevailing

⁵ A. Kościański, *Partycypacja obywatelska a syndrom zmiany orientacji życiowych w społeczeństwie Polskim*, in: *Przemiany kulturowe we współczesnej Polsce*, ed. J. Kurczewska, IFiS PAN Publishers, Warszawa 2016.

⁶ *Ibidem*

belief was that democracy, especially liberal democracy, would make citizens feel more assigned their role than aware of the true course of political and social processes.

In retrospect, the weaknesses of the civic ethos after 1989 are apparent. The civic virtues projected at the end of the war by Maria Ossowska included, among others, kindness, sacrifice, responsibility and compassion⁷. However, to this day it is not clear what exactly this ethos is or what constitutes it. It is difficult to establish a catalogue of duties and privileges that is shared by the majority of civil society without objection. Little is known about how citizens are supposed to fulfil the demands of this ethos, having to choose between two extreme options: either to improvise their role as a good citizen (imitating the behaviour of Western Europeans) or to lock themselves up in their local environment and be excluded as an ideal citizen. Civic virtues are threatened by the centralisation of social initiative on the part of the highest authorities, which fosters attitudes of indifference to the fate of others. The fundamental principle of solidarity, which was supposed to unite economically, politically or ideologically diverse communities, turned out over time to be an increasingly stripped-down facade behind which political actors sometimes hid⁸.

Civil society in Poland has taken the shape of a population based on a kind of allegorical form of relations, modelled on the relations between the popular characters in the film *Sami Swoi*, Kargul and Pawlak. This means that relations are based primarily on a high degree of mutual unfriendliness, resentment and anger, and what

⁷ M. Ossowska, *O człowieku, moralności i nauce. Miscellanea*, ed. M. Ofierska, M. Smoła, Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, Warszawa 1983, p. 521, 549. See also A. Wyka, A. Kościański, *Elementy wzoru obywatela w świetle oczekiwań Polaków A.D. 2002, Bariery świadomości obywatelskiej*, in: *Niepokoje polskie*, ed. H. Domański, A. Ostrowska, A. Rycharz, IFiS PAN Publishers, Warszawa 2002, p. 259–287.

⁸ K. Sowa, *Uwagi o przejawach i przyczynach kryzysu moralnego w życiu publicznym współczesnej Polski*, in: *Kondycja moralna społeczeństwa polskiego*, ed. J. Mariański, Wydawnictwo WAM Publishing House, PAN, Kraków 2002, p. 17–23.

common interests appear incidentally are simply the result of a community of negativity.⁹

Sociological research conducted in Poland over the past twenty years confirms the hypothesis of the existence of a hybrid civic pattern, which is shaped by both the communist experience and the post-transformation experience of the Poles surveyed. The four dimensions of the civic model (legalism, independence of opinion, participation in elections, altruism) and the detached (absent from it) dimensions of civic engagement and political participation are so internally integrated that it is almost impossible to reintegrate them into a single whole. The fracturing of the model is not like one simple crack. It runs both along and across both types of experience.¹⁰

Polish democracy needs corrections if we want its representative forms to work better and to move towards participatory democracy. Without thorough civic education as a necessary condition, but not sufficient on its own, these goals cannot be achieved. Such education should begin as early as possible and should also include adults.

However, one can, and indeed should ask how we are to build a model of a desirable and socially acceptable citizen? Perhaps this is a matter preordained to fail. Awareness of subjective agency in a democratic society seems to contribute little here. Let us remember, however, that at one point in time there was a unity of conviction among citizens with different axiological orientations united in solidarity around a common goal – freedom and democracy. This can be linked primarily to a kind of alternatives for consideration: violence (revolution) or reason. The concept of rational action assumed that a reality would be created, based precisely on the principle of rationality, understood as a principle of action related to the construction of a democratic, free and open society, because only an open civil society is one that will realise its ideals, seeking truth or consensus.

⁹ G. Ekiert, J. Kubik, *Rebellious Civil Society: Popular Protest and Democratic Consolidation in Poland, 1989–1993*, University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor 2001.

¹⁰ A. Wyka, A. Kościański, *Elementy wzoru obywatela w świetle oczekiwań Polaków A.D. 2002, Bariery świadomości obywatelskiej*, in: *Niepokoje polskie*, ed. H. Domański, A. Ostrowska, A. Rychard, IFiS PAN Publishers, Warszawa 2002, p. 259–287.

It therefore seems entirely legitimate today to ask whether we should not return to the point of establishing a moral community united in the pursuit of the common good? This would imply the recognition of a specific set of moral values which should function above politics and which, as fundamental values, would form the consensual foundation of the common good. These values would primarily have a social dimension, combined sometimes with an institutional context. In the social consciousness, they would build the essential elements and foundations of civil society. Being primary in nature vis-à-vis any state legislation, they would at the same time be the moral anchor of society, not subject to questioning or rejection by the majority of citizens.

With a republican vision of civil society in mind, it is worth recalling that its ethical goal as a political community is a good life for the whole, and that civic virtues are necessary for this to occur. The state, conceived as an institutional structure, depended on the degree to which civic virtues were manifested in public life. Where particular interests prevailed, the common good and the institutional order degenerated. The principle was the rule of law over the rule of the people. For the purposes of the reflections discussed here, it should be stressed that this understanding is based on the conviction that personal interests must be subordinated to the common good. Civil society is conceived as a moral community striving for the common good. Civil society and the state constitute a unity, which is why it is sometimes referred to as a 'civic community' in the sense of a political community. This was an exclusionary and elitist concept. Citizenship entailed belonging to a community of individuals actively participating in public life, in decision-making and in responsibility for the common good. It did not imply entitlement of the individual, only a duty of public service. Citizens owed their freedom to the fact that they participated in the political life of the community. It had nothing to do with the modern notion of individual freedom, meaning freedom from coercion¹¹.

¹¹ B. Constant, *O wolności starożytnych i nowożytnych*, transl. Z. Kosno, "Arka" 1992, no 42, p. 74–82.

Return to a moral community?

In the conception of democratic order based on the freedom of the individual with an entire catalogue of rights (freedoms), the principle of the common good as a classical element of the democratic order – substantive democracy – becomes unacceptable. In this view, the democratic method is an institutional solution to arrive at political decisions that achieve the common good. Citizens decide on solutions to their problems by electing individuals who carry out the will of the people. However, there is no clear definition of the common good recognised and accepted by all¹². Neither the common good, which under liberalism assumes character of a postulate, nor the community, but only the individual and his or her entitlements are the basis for the existence of civil society. The factor that creates bonds is the need for security, not the common good and a life with dignity. The state becomes an institution that meets the needs of citizens: the protection of property and freedom¹³. In this conception, civil society is understood as an intermediary area between the individual and the state, thus creating a space of independence and economic freedom for individuals, which the state cannot violate. Associations and voluntary organisations are an expression of social self-organisation, built on formal rather than communal ties. This is an individualistic society based on the principle of citizens consciously engaging in public affairs according to their own particular interests. It is difficult to identify a place for the common good here, which can only in certain situations be seen and accepted in the form of an emergent common interest.

A certain kind of compromise solution is the idea that in a democratic order the common good can be present in the form of institutions and procedures. The common good and interests will not

¹² J. Schumpeter, *Kapitalizm, socjalizm, demokracja*, transl. M. Rusiński, PWN, Warszawa 1995, p. 312–314; P. Śpiewak, *W stronę wspólnego dobra*, Aletheia, Warszawa 1998, p. 5–33.

¹³ As an aside, it is worth noting that Maria Ossowska, in the final phase of her work as an academic and journalist, claimed that the basic function of morality is to satisfy the need for security. Thus, it is moral values that underlie the organisation of social life.

consist of objects, activities or relationships, but rather of practices, institutions and procedures that contribute to the benefit of a substantial number of citizens who, for this reason, recognise them as a value¹⁴. The common good in any particular democratic order will also be its identity, giving it a unique character (style or ethos), both procedural and substantive. It would be such an expression of democracy that the majority of citizens would be inclined to recognise it as the highest value, thus being able to shape the hierarchy of goods¹⁵.

Civil society as a relational good

One proposal is the concept of civil society as a relational common good. Pierpaolo Donati sees the common good as the nucleus of a new civil society and civil democracy¹⁶. He understands the common good as the moral good of the community, as well as a social relationship. However, it is not a simple sum of the individual goods that constitute it. He emphasises that this is not a synthesis of the common good as an object of state policy that is central to the creation and management of civil society and its structures. Donati believes that contemporary social science can and must broaden its view of the common good to include the relational dimension he proposes. The common good is the *raison d'être* of political power. Therefore, it must provide civil society with cohesion, unity and organisation, so that through the contribution of all citizens the common good can be attained¹⁷. The author points out that the social sciences emphasise the existence of a certain type of goods, which

¹⁴ R. Dahl, *Demokracja i jej krytycy*, transl. S. Amsterdamski, Znak, Fundacja im. Stefana Batorego, Kraków–Warszawa 1995, p. 426.

¹⁵ M. Grabowska, T. Szawiel, *Budowanie demokracji. Podziały społeczne, partie polityczne i społeczeństwo obywatelskie w postkomunistycznej Polsce*, PWN, Warszawa 2001, p. 75–77.

¹⁶ P. Donati, *Relational Goods and Their Subjects: The Ferment of a New Civil Society and Civil Democracy*, "Recerca. Revista de pensament i anàlisi", no 14, April 2014, p. 19–46.

¹⁷ P. Donati, *The Common Good as a Relational Good*, "Nova et Vetera" 2009, English Edition, Vol. 7, No. 3, p. 607–608.

are neither material things, nor ideas, nor functional actions, but constitute social relations and are therefore called relational goods¹⁸.

Donati writes with passion and commitment about the hopes and possibilities offered by the application of the relational concept of the common good. It becomes a concern not only for citizens and the state, but also for intermediate social bodies¹⁹. However, “networks are always meant to be networks of relations” (and not networks of material objects or simply “nodes”) and therefore, since social relation implies mutual action, networks should be understood as “relational networks”. Relational goods are not “things”, but consist of social relations that have a sui generis reality; they are produced collectively by those who participate in them; the good that accompanies them is an emergent effect that benefits both the participants and those who share in its consequences from the outside, without any entity being able to appropriate it. They are not particularistic and closed goods, such as those sought by groups linked to lobbyists or the mafia. In any case, relational goods are necessary to make society less impoverished, risky, insecure, distrustful and pathological in many ways. They are goods that do not have an owner or belong to the collective in general. They are an asset of the human community, an asset crucial to the very existence of society, which could not survive without them. If these goods are ignored, rejected or suppressed, the entire social fabric will be impoverished, mutilated and deprived of its lifeblood, causing serious damage to people and social organisation as a whole²⁰.

In Donati’s view, the common good becomes a responsibility shared among individuals, the state and – in a completely new way – intermediate social bodies (“civil societal networks”). Here we come to the core of this scholar’s proposal, which defines civil society through participation in the realisation of the common good.

¹⁸ P. Donati, *Relational Goods and Their Subjects: The Ferment of a New Civil Society and Civil Democracy*, “Recerca. Revista de pensament i anàlisi”, no 14, April 2014, p. 20.

¹⁹ P. Donati, *The Common Good as a Relational Good*, “Nova et Vetera” 2009, English Edition, Vol. 7, No. 3, p. 609.

²⁰ P. Donati, *Relational Goods and Their Subjects: The Ferment of a New Civil Society and Civil Democracy*, “Recerca. Revista de pensament i anàlisi”, no 14, April 2014, p. 20–24.

The author explains his understanding of the term “civil society” as follows: “A civil societarian strongly supports the institutions of civil society. These include families, corporations, religious groups, private schools, charities, trade associations, and the other peaceful, voluntary collective organizations that promote our individual and collective well-being in so far as they are relational networks. These are the civil societarian networks [...]”²¹. It should be added that civic action to realise the common good is based on the principle of subsidiarity and solidarity. It is action involving multiple actors oriented towards each other, based on mutual solidarity and subsidiarity. Subsidiarity is seen here as “horizontal modality” between the state and civil society organisations (for example, the municipality and voluntary organisations); “lateral modality” taking place among civil society subjects (for example, between the family and the school, between the company and the families of employees and customers, etc.). Solidarity can also take different shapes: through redistribution or voluntary, unpaid giving.

Donati emphasises that the model of action he proposes will produce common goods outside the configurations established in social thought: those in which civil society refers to the state as absolute power (Hobbes’ Leviathan) or to the ethical State (Hegel), those in which it is an expression of the hegemonic forces of civil society (A. Gramsci) or acts as a political representation of the Market (R. Dahl). The author emphasises that in the “relational configuration” the third and fourth sectors (consisting of families and informal networks) play a central role precisely because they operate through “voluntary giving” and reciprocity. These two sectors are able to express their potential because their members are not treated as if they only need the assistance, rules and control of the complex state and market. Third sector organisations and family associations become social actors with their own powers, independent of the state and the market. Concrete examples are the community foundations widespread in many countries, charter

²¹ P. Donati, *The Common Good as a Relational Good*, “Nova et Vetera” 2009, English Edition, Vol. 7, No. 3, p. 609.

schools in the United States, or family association forums in Italy, Spain and other countries²².

Donati argues that modern society is no longer pyramidal or hierarchical, but reticular and autopoietic in its structures and morphogenetic processes. It no longer relies on the primacy of command and/ or profit (as in liberal labour systems), resulting in common goods being produced more effectively, efficiently and equitably. This is made possible by modalities that maximise criteria based on subsidiarity and solidarity. Specific examples are fair trade, health NGOs in developing countries, so-called epistemic communities, transferring knowledge and learning outside the commercial circuit. The main problem here is a political system that can no longer represent and govern civil society. Civil society strengthens its development potential far beyond the ability of political systems (local, national and supra- national) to govern and control it. The author of this concept of the common good makes the observation that “[...] in some cases, in fact, we see that the political systems try to corrupt civil society, because they introduce into civil society such ideological and interest-based divisions typical of the political parties, rather than directing the civil actors towards the promotion of the common good”²³. This seems to be the situation in Poland, where the civic sector has been strongly polarised since 1989.

Donati also sees a threat to the success of the realisation of his concept. The fundamental problem, in his view, is whether these new actors, creating the common good by working together for subsidiarity and solidarity, can identify a generalised model of action for the governance of a globalised society. It therefore becomes necessary to generate principles for an emerging global civil society that is no longer constrained by nation states. These principles can provide the foundation for a new way of developing and promoting the rights and responsibilities of individuals and social rights in civil society networks. In his view, these should be civic constitutions that are

²² Ibidem, p. 620–621.

²³ Ibidem, p. 621.

an expression of the self-regulatory actions of civic actors. They are to be normative regulations that:

1. concern the field of fundamental rights of the human person – this is why they are constitutional;
2. are civic in nature, since they are not the product of political parties or coalitions, but of the world of associations in the economy and non-profit sectors, for example the WTO or NGOs, etc;
3. they give shape to deliberative rather than representative forms of democracy, because the social actors to whom civic constitutions are addressed (and applied) are at the same time the actors who have to reinforce them through forms of social governance (not through political government). In other words, the subjects of these constitutions are at the same time the bearers of rights and duties and the subjects responsible for their implementation

In Donati's view, civil constitutions transcend the territorial boundaries of states because they are developed and implemented by global networks, often international, composed of civil actors. They thus position themselves alongside (not against) the classical political relationship of citizenship (namely the relationship between the individual citizen and the nation-state), assuming specific functions, in particular the advocacy and reinforcement of the rights-duties of individuals and social bodies. The author emphasises that this is a new scenario that makes the previous liberal-labour configuration of society obsolete²⁴. A relational, pluralistic, somehow de-territorialised society is emerging, with different criteria of justice. These phenomena create such radical challenges that we need a new vision: we need to reconfigure human rights from the point of view of the common good, which means understanding them as a common good. In Donati's view, we are dealing with the advent of a posthuman, transhuman, nonhuman, superhuman era; we are dealing with the hybridisation and metamorphosis of humanity²⁵.

²⁴ Ibidem, p. 622–623.

²⁵ Ibidem, p. 624.

Can we call the reflections presented here an attempt to respond positively to Robert Nisbet's assertion about the abrupt, non-cumulative nature of the changes occurring²⁶ The new order is the result of the chaotic actions that preceded it. It is the result of the declining effectiveness of previous forms of socialisation and the search for new ones that are more appropriate for the changing world. This will result in completely different forms of organisation of social life in the post-modern era. This will lead to the deterritorialisation of the nation and the emergence of new transnational links between individuals²⁷. In Donati's concept, there is a clear foreshadowing of change. He posits a large quantifier, seeing a global civil society based on civil constitutions. But will this be applicable everywhere, in all socio-cultural conditions?

Civil society as a common good seems a promising developmental and epistemological perspective. A good complement would be ethical reflection, in which the common good, only understood as the good of the community, is exposed to the charge of unilateralism. "The good is common because it unites the good of the individual person and the good of the community and unites the good of action (*operari*) and of being (*esse*), and above all because it unites a plurality of persons 'from within'. It is also a source of authentic attitudes, such as those of solidarity, opposition and dialogue, and at the same time an obstacle to the emergence of inauthentic attitudes, such as conformism and avoidance"²⁸.

²⁶ See R. Nisbet, *Introduction The Problem of Social Change*, in: *Social Change*, ed. R. Nisbet, Harper and Row, New York 1972, *passim*.

²⁷ See M. Marody, *Przemiany więzi społecznych w sferze publicznej i ich konsekwencje dla sfery publicznej*, in: *Zmiana czy stagnacja? Społeczeństwo polskie po czterech latach transformacji*, ed. M. Marody, Scholar, Warszawa 2004, *passim*.

²⁸ J. Gałkowski, *Dobro wspólne a polityka. Komentarz do myśli Jana Pawła II*, vol. 7, Wydawnictwo KUL, Lublin 2020, p. 88.

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Civil society and the civic sector in Poland: status, developmental trends and recommendations for public policy

When evaluating the condition of civil society and the functioning of the civic sector in Poland in the years around 2020, one should pay particular attention to four determinants: (1) the entrenchment of project-grant culture in the activities of non-governmental organisations, (2) deepening political polarisation that results in growing and consolidating social divisions and, consequently, the phenomenon of increasing polarisation within the third sector, (3) the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on the shape and scale of social activities implemented, (4) the formative impact of the campaign involving all of society to help war refugees from Ukraine. Each of these determinants will be discussed in turn, and the resulting conclusions and generalisations will be used to formulate recommendations for shaping activities aimed at strengthening civil society and developing the third sector in Poland.

Project-grant culture

In the period following Poland's political transformation and the country's accession to the European Union, the project-implementation formula dominated the management of the activities of third sector organisations. Consequently, structured social and civic activity became embedded within a project-grant culture.

The entrenchment of this culture in the third sector is the result of the simultaneous influence of three factors. The first of these is the popularity in Europe since the late twentieth century of a management trend known as new public management (NPM). The concept of NPM involves the implementation of solutions developed in the business world into the sphere of collective action carried out by public institutions and civic sector actors. This concept has brought to the third sector and intersectoral cooperation the logic of competition, the focus on achieving measurable results in the short term, the tendency to outsource tasks to subcontractors and the phenomenon of fragmentation and flexibility of structures created around individual projects as limited-time ventures with their own implementation budget. At the same time, it fosters the subordination of NGOs (as contractors of commissioned tasks) to public administration. It can be said that NPM practices set in motion the simultaneous processes of commercialisation and governmentalisation of the civic sector¹.

Consequently, the solutions characteristic of the second strong contemporary trend in public management, namely governance (co-governance), which is closer in its assumptions to the logic of civic participation, based on cooperation rather than competition between partners, and a readiness to also carry out long-term activities with less measurable results, are recognised in the third sector at a merely declarative level and are only to a limited extent translated into social practice.

The second factor is national legislation. An important role in embedding project-grant culture in the Polish third sector was played by the 2013 Act on Public Benefit Activity and Volunteerism – the most important piece of Polish legislation in the area of regulating the interaction between public administration and NGOs. The provisions of the Act introduced a model of intersectoral cooperation², in which the key role is played by the commissioning of

¹ A. Rymsza, *Zagubiona tożsamość? Analiza porównawcza sektora pozarządowego w Polsce i w Stanach Zjednoczonych*, MRIPS, Warszawa 2013.

² Cf. *Państwo a trzeci sektor. Prawo i instytucje w działaniu*, ed. M. Rymsza, G. Makowski, M. Dudkiewicz, Instytut Spraw Publicznych, Warszawa 2007.

public tasks by the administration to NGOs for payment, using the institution of calls for tenders or solutions regulated by the law on public procurements. The application of the latter is a direct implementation of know-how from the business world, marking the entry of non-profit organisations into competition with commercial entities for public funds. The call for tenders was conceived as a procedure containing an element of competition in a safe version (internal competition – business entities cannot submit bids) and at the same time a “softened” version (use of socialised criteria for evaluation of bids). This version, it seems, should most accurately be described by the term project-grant culture used here.

The principles of granting are as rational as possible. It is based on the conviction that in the system of commissioning public services for payment there is a permanent imbalance between demand and supply: the capacity of organisations to perform exceeds the ability of the administration to pay³. The grant procedure therefore consists of an open call for proposals from interested organisations and a procedure for the objectivised selection of offers that are judged – using criteria made public in advance – to be the best. Successful bids, after the appropriate bilateral agreement has been signed, become projects to be implemented and settled by the staff of the winning organisations. It is difficult to question the validity and desirability of preparing grant competitions. The problem is not the competitions themselves (especially as many public entities prefer tendering procedures, which are more efficient in their implementation), but the orientation (too) many organisations have towards raising funds for statutory activities mainly by submitting bids. This orientation of the organisations themselves is the third factor in the perpetuation of a project-grant culture.

However, after the initial enthusiasm of the non-governmental sector for the logic of project-based action, its shortcomings also began to be noticed. Entanglement in the project-grant culture

³ Cf. T. Schimanek, *Plusy i minusy polskiego grantodawstwa*, "Trzeci Sektor" 2010, no. 20, p. 40–47.

acquired in colloquial discourse the pejorative moniker “grantosis”⁴. It has been pointed out that this excessive entanglement leads to a loss of ideals, burnout and makes organisations dependent on external sponsors. The evolution of attitudes to grants here resembles a gradual shift from a fascination with freelance civil law employment as offering the chance to function in the labour market on one’s own terms to a critique of “junk contracts” as an institution that does not so much ensure independence as push people into a social group called the precariat. In doing so, we may note the functional relationship between project-based organisational activities and the flexible employment model. The project-grant culture, by denying organisations financial stability, reduces their ability to employ staff on open-ended contracts.

There has been a growing interest in stabilisation in the Polish third sector in recent years. This, it seems, is a structural trend, as it can be seen on both sides of third sector employment relationships: management looking to stabilise an organisation’s budget in the medium term and executive staff interested in stabilising their employment and improving working conditions.

Political and social polarisation

For a number of years now, the political scene in Poland has been shaped by deepening polarisation. This tendency began during the parliamentary and presidential elections of 2005, after which the two largest political parties – Civic Platform (PO) and Law and Justice (PiS), which had previously planned to govern together (the intended coalition was referred to by the acronym PoPiS) – not only failed to form a government together but moved to strongly antagonistic positions. In the years that followed, political polarisation “grew” into social polarisation. Political preferences increasingly overlapped with social divisions around key developmental issues

⁴ The discussion was triggered by the journalistic text by A. Graff, *Urzędasy, bez serc, bez ducha*, “Gazeta Wyborcza”, 6.01.2010, p. 19–20.

and cultural transformations, such as the format of European integration, the shape of the national judicial system, the role of the Church and religion in social life and others. Polarisation has been fostered by the development of identity-based social media and new information dissemination technologies, through which the phenomenon of social bubbles is on the rise, signifying the permanent narrowing of social contacts to self-isolating homogeneous circles, drawing information about the world mainly from sources that reinforce the beliefs already held and the disappearance of the desire and ability to debate with people who think differently.

Deepening polarisation is a challenge for the practice of civic virtue. Civil society is a community that embodies two values simultaneously: pluralism and the common good⁵. The third sector, as a formalised part of civil society, has the task of ensuring that both of these values remain in social circulation. This is the origin of the principle of the political neutrality of NGOs, which is widely accepted in democratic countries. This principle states that the programmes of organisations can (should) have a specific ideological profile (this is how the ideological pluralism of civil society is realised), but at the same time organisations should not support specific political parties; parties themselves are not counted as NGOs. Adherence to this principle is intended to preserve the ability of organisations to interact with the public administration in carrying out activities for citizens (for the general good), without losing their own subjectivity and identity.

Political and social polarisation is imprinting itself on the structure of the Polish civic sector, triggering processes of the creation of “two third sectors” around well-established lines of social division, and manifested in the directly expressed attitude towards the government and the political coalitions that comprise it. The misconception is that such a situation is some kind of functional *modus vivendi*. Two civic sectors cannot function side by side in one

⁵ M. Rymśza, *Polskie wzory samoorganizacji społecznej: jakim społeczeństwem obywatelskim jesteśmy?*, in: *Dla Niepodległej. Obywatele i ich organizacje 1918–2018*, ed. E. Leś, KPRP, Warszawa 2020, p. 235–252.

society. Society as a whole may (or may not) meet the criteria of civic virtue. Two competing, mutually antagonistic “sectors” are, it is true, a confirmation of pluralism, but also of a structural incapacity to orient social activity towards the common good, which in essence means failing to meet the criterion of civic virtue.

The effect of the coronavirus pandemic

There is a developmental paradox for the third sector associated with the coronavirus pandemic. The declared state of an epidemic and the associated restrictions on social distancing, particularly periods of hard lockdown, brought with them both a reduction in opportunities for social action and an increase in the demand for this activity, particularly those providing aid.

Confirmation of this ambivalence can be found in the results of a survey of the operation of NGOs during the pandemic conducted in late 2020 and early 2021 by the Klon/Jawor Association⁶. Respondents from 65% of the surveyed organisations declared that the pandemic had led to a deterioration in the situation their organisation was in, but at the same time 52% of them saw positive consequences for their organisation⁷. The main manifestations of the worsening situation were difficulties in maintaining the continuity of statutory activities, as well as a reduction in the scale of volunteer involvement and (to a lesser extent) a reduction in permanent staff, and difficulties in maintaining financial support from sponsors and donors. The factors supporting growth were, according to the respondents, the potential of online activities (to be used, it should be noted, also in the post-pandemic era), the establishment of cooperation with new entities and taking up new forms of statutory activities.

⁶ B. Charycka, M. Gumkowska, *Rok w pandemii. Raport z badań organizacji pozarządowych*, Stowarzyszenie Klon/Jawor, Warszawa 2021.

⁷ The contradictory indications do not add up to 100% here, which is in fact the key confirmation of a situation of ambivalence – seeing different sides of the same state of affairs.

How then did Polish organisations fare under lockdown? One would like to say, given the scale of the difficulties associated with the pandemic, that they did unexpectedly well. But this would not be an accurate description, as the ability to adapt to changing conditions and respond to new challenges is one of the main qualities of civil sector organisations recognised and described in the literature. I believe that the results of the cited study allow us to see in the ambivalence during the pandemic more opportunities for development in the non-governmental sector and civil society in Poland than problems to be solved.

What seems to me to be crucial here is a peculiar renewal of the mandate for social action. The pandemic highlighted the large and tangible social benefits of community-based aid, i.e. using direct social involvement to the greatest extent possible, both in formal and informal social action. The pandemic also demonstrated the added value of a socialised model of providing assistance compared to an institutional model based on so-called “institutional solutions”, particularly long-term, 24-hour institutions. The social isolation of nursing home residents during the lockdown, which had enormous negative side effects, is the most glaring, but by no means the only, illustration of the weakness of organising help in a bureaucratic way with little involvement of the social factor.

The experience of assisting war refugees from Ukraine

The assistance to war refugees from Ukraine provided in the first months after the aggression of the Russian Federation against that country began in February 2022 revealed the enormous potential of Polish society for self-organisation. As I tried to show in another work⁸, the resources of solidarity mobilisation capital were activated here. The scale of the grassroots-driven aid campaign and the strength of the social absorption of the newcomers from across the

⁸ M. Rymśza, *Solidarnościowy kapitał mobilizacyjny. Polacy wobec ukraińskich uchodźców*, “Więź” 2022, no. 2 (special edition), p. 65–74.

eastern border made it possible to relocate them efficiently without the need to create camps as separate closed transition zones. Refugees have been given real residential support in Poland while maintaining their right to free movement within the territory of Poland, with the option to return to Ukraine or leave for third countries. Assistance to war refugees from across the eastern border is also characterised by locally organised cross-sectoral cooperation throughout the country. Both the reception points opened in border towns and the relocation centres in urban agglomerations were run by local government with the cooperation of the state administration, but the effectiveness of their assistance was largely based on the social commitment of volunteers, both local and from abroad.

The basis for launching the system for the social absorption of refugees and undertaking mass-scale actions to support Ukrainians was social mobilisation. The action of providing aid is thus proof that polarisation, although it has left its mark on the shape of social life and the functioning of the non-governmental sector, has not destroyed the key civic resource of Polish society, namely the ability to mobilise en masse and work together across divisions (or perhaps more accurately, despite divisions) in an emergency.

The support provided to Ukrainian refugees is clearly not only in the form of aid, but also assistance. Polish society, as the host society, proved to be supportive by providing support in a way that did not limit refugees' sense of subjectivity and ability to decide their own fate (no camps for Ukrainian refugees, freedom of movement, etc.). In turn, administrative structures at all levels proved to be supportive towards grassroots initiatives of citizens. It can be said that the support provided turned out to be an opportunity to realise the constitutional principle of state subsidiarity rather than subsidiarity to the state, which is inclined toward the system of intersectoral cooperation based on administrative units at various levels. commissioning public services to organisations for payment.

The aid campaign demonstrated the strength of the solidarity mobilisation capital, relying on the complementarity of different actors and the complementarity of different forms of this activity. This movement was not only the involvement of volunteers

mentioned above, but also the collection of money and in-kind donations, carried out both through charitable organisations and by using modern technological solutions⁹. Community work encouraged financial support and participation in collecting donations encouraged active volunteering. This not only involved structured voluntary work, but also private voluntary work, done on a person's own initiative and involving, among other things, people opening their own homes or private spaces to refugees for a time.

What will happen with the armed conflict in Ukraine remains, six months after the aggression of the Russian Federation began, difficult to predict. It is also unclear whether, in the event of a negative scenario and the rise of more mass waves of refugees, we will be able to sustain the current aid and assistance model of action. The energy of ad hoc social mobilisation is as easily activated as it is quickly consumed and methodical measures are needed to build the ability to convert, at the interface between the state and the third sector, social mobilisation capital into "solidarity capital" as a more permanent resource of a social-institutional nature.

It is also noteworthy that just as the processes of polarisation did not annihilate the patterns of mass self-organisation in an emergency, the activation of solidarity mobilisation capital did not blunt the sharpness of divisions within society.

Conclusions and recommendations

Taking into account the peculiarities of all four situations described above, several conclusions and recommendations can be formulated for use in the programming of public actions and intra-sectoral strategies aimed at the development of the non-governmental sector and civil society:

1. Project activities financed from external sources have become a permanent element of the culture of the activities of civic sector

⁹ Cf. M. Duszczyk, *Ukraina napędza falę zbiórek w sieci nad Wisłą*, "Rzeczpospolita", 7.09.2022, p. A17.

organisations, not only in Poland. It is important that grant funding, which is inherently insecure, does not become the dominant way of covering the costs of structured civic activities. Striving for the diversification of funding sources is a basic principle of good NGO management. The need to adhere to this standard is a key recommendation to leaders of civic organisations. The principle of diversification not only promotes stability in the operation of organisations but is also a guarantee for maintaining their independence.

2. Grantosis is the condition of NGOs applying for grants whenever possible to get anything from anywhere. This results in an overload of individual grant competitions with applications to be considered. However, the low ratio of grant making organisations to applicants is not only a burden for grant-makers, but above all a waste of work (paid or voluntary) devoted to preparing unsuccessful applications and, at the same time, risks organisations losing their programme (bending to various priorities) with a high risk of not securing the budget. This is a straightforward route to the “sterilisation” of the civic sector and staff burnout. Therefore, public actions regulating the contracting of public tasks for payment and other forms of subsidising the project activities of non-governmental organisations should be directed at: (a) standardisation of grant procedures so that the budgets of financed or subsidised projects take into account the real (not underestimated!)¹⁰ administrative costs of operating the organisations, costs connected with their institutional development and increasing the qualifications of the staff and costs connected with current management, and (b) limiting the phenomenon of excessive competition between organisations. The latter is achieved by targeted programmes leading to the situation in which organisations with specific statutory activity profiles focus on submitting applications in selected grant competitions which are closely related to their programmes.

It should be noted that both of these postulates are already taken into account in the programme activities carried out by the National

¹⁰ Cf. L. Kuczmierowska, *Jak wypaść z cyklu głodowania – trzy mity o kosztach działania organizacji pozarządowych*, “Trzeci Sektor” 2015, no. 36, p. 32–40.

Freedom Institute – Centre for Civil Society Development. This is supported by the framework rules applicable to grant competitions organised by the NFI-CCSD, which provide for the co-financing of administrative and development costs to a reasonable extent, as well as the guiding principle adopted by the Institute to organise grant competitions within the framework of multi-year programmes addressed to separate categories of organisations. Noteworthy in this respect are the programme supporting the scout movement, the programme addressed to folk universities and the grant programme for counselling organisations launched in the autumn of 2022 (in cooperation with the offices of the president).

3. Polish society shows a high level of ad hoc mass mobilisation capital, embedded in the form of cultural patterns of social self-organisation in emergencies. On the other hand, our ability to convert mobilisation capital into social-institutional capital allowing civic activities to be conducted over a period of years are much less developed. This was confirmed by the course of relief action for war refugees in the first months after the aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine. The consistent continuation of aid activities addressed to refugees, based on operational interaction between public administration and civil sector actors, while maintaining the (maximally socialised) community profile of the involvement in these activities, can change this state of affairs. This is an opportunity to practise cooperation based on complementarity of actions and co-responsibility rather than on contracting and competition. For the environmental model is about creating a stable network of actors who have been working together for a long time, rather than selecting contractors for ongoing tasks. Such a partnership network is an important part of governance rather than the NPM school of public management.

It should be noted that the development of community activities based on sustainable cooperation within local partnership networks reduces the phenomenon of grantosis. This is because it allows individual projects to be included in long-term action programmes based on multi-year contracts, and to treat funding from

grant competitions as one source of many rather than the primary source of funding.

4. In a community model based on co-governance practices, social capital as a resource of the civic sector is associated with institutional capital as a resource of public administration. This association can and should enable the conversion of both of these kinds of capital into shared socio-institutional capital, which I propose to refer to as “solidarity capital”. This resource can become the basic “fuel” of environmental civic action and can be used as moral capital. Moral capital is an intangible resource that is not exhausted when it is used and, when used skilfully, even grows; it disappears when it is left unused or used inappropriately. For this to happen, an appropriate approach is needed from both the social and the administrative sides.

In order for social capital, a resource held by civic sector actors, to become moral capital, the organisation’s actions, while maintaining a plurality of forms and ideological profiles, need to be directed towards the production of the common good. Actions described in laudable terms as “civic”, “democratic”, “patriotic” or “national”, but consisting in mobilising one community against another, activate social energy but do not produce moral capital. As Robert Putnam has noted¹¹, social capital accumulated in the form of bonding capital of similarity-based communities without a gradual transformation into bridging capital, a resource that builds bridges between such communities, gradually changes its “vector” and ceases to be a resource that builds the infrastructure of civil society; sometimes it can become, to use Putnam’s term, “dirty social capital”.

For institutional capital – a resource at the disposal of public administration in the form of patterns of organised action, formal procedures and informal pragmatic actions – to become moral capital, the actions of the administration must not be aimed at subjugating organisations, but at working in partnership. Cooperating organisations must be able to maintain their social nature, including their independence. Only then does the institutional capital within

¹¹ R. Putnam, *Bowling Alone. The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. Simon and Schuster, New York 2000.

a system of intersectoral cooperation not “kill” social capital, but instead formats it as the aforementioned socio-institutional “solidarity capital” – the key resource of organised civil society.

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The transformation of the third sector in the light of statistical studies

The third sector (or the non-profit sector)¹ is made up of voluntary, self-governing, formally registered organisations, separate from the public administration, which operate not for profit². The statistical approach presented in this chapter allows changes in the resources available to the Polish third sector between 2010 and 2020 to be shown. The wide range of data collected by the Central Statistical Office (GUS)³ allows description of the changes in the sector from a number of perspectives, including the activity of the organisation, the economic potential and the social potential.

Structure of the third sector

Between 2010 and 2020, there was a 44.0% increase in the number of foundations, associations and similar social organisations

¹ For the purposes of this work, the third sector collectively includes foundations, associations and similar social organisations, rural women's associations, self-governing economic and professional bodies, and faith-based social entities.

² Satellite Account on Non-profit and Related Institutions and Volunteer Work [online] https://unstats.un.org/unsd/nationalaccount/docs/UN_TSE_HB_FNL_web.pdf [accessed: 03.07.2020 r.].

³ The full range of GUS study results on the third sector can be found at: <https://stat.gov.pl/obszary-tematyczne/gospodarka-spoeczna-wolontariat/>

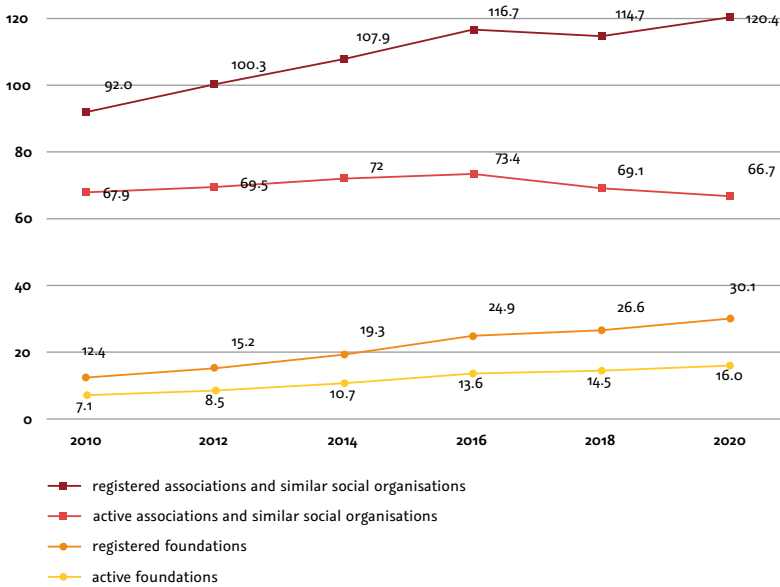
registered⁴ in REGON (the National Business Register) (from 104,500 in 2010 to 150,500 in 2020). However, the dynamics of the registered number of organisations were lower than in previous years, e.g. in the 1990s the increase was more than sixfold.

Foundations showed significantly higher growth rates than associations and similar social organisations. In 2020, there were more than twice as many registered foundations as in 2010. (213.5%). In contrast, the number of registered associations and similar social organisations in REGON increased by 30.4% (from 92,000 in 2010 to 120,400 in 2020).

Data on registered entities do not reflect the actual number of actively operating entities due to the fact that many organisations that cease their activities do not fulfil the obligation to deregister. Therefore, the Central Statistical Office, as part of its statistical surveys, precisely determines the number of entities actively carrying out statutory activities in a given year. Between 2010 and 2020, the number of active foundations increased by 8,900 (125.5%), while the number of active associations and similar social organisations decreased by 1,100 (1.7%).

⁴ All passages relating to the number of registered entities refer to the number of foundations, associations and similar social organisations. The discussion of changes in the number of faith-based social entities and self-governing professional and economic bodies has been omitted due to the small share of these entities in the total number. In addition, an analysis of rural women's associations was not included, as they could only be registered as separate legal entities only after introduction of the Act of 9 November 2018 on rural women's associations.

Figure 1. Number of foundations, associations and similar social organisations, 2010–2020 (in thousands)⁵

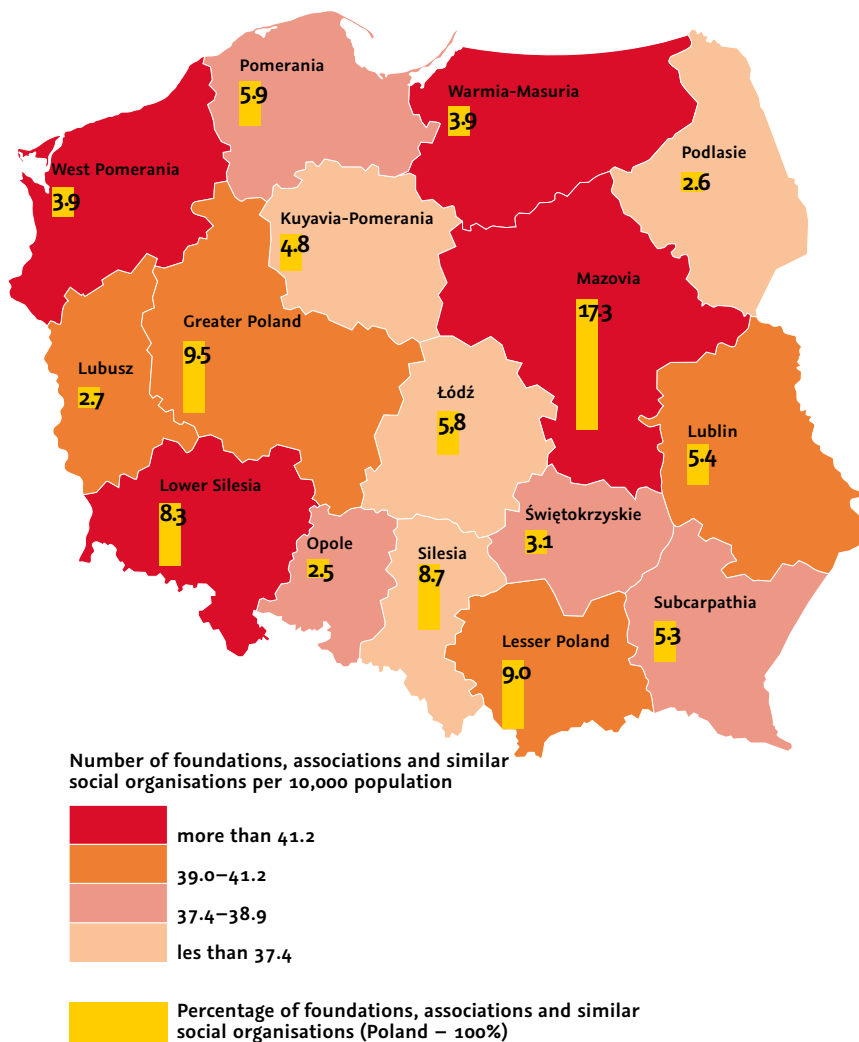


Source: GUS (REGON registry, search terms: associations, foundations, self-governing economic and professional bodies and faith-based social entities).

Also noted was a decrease in self-governing economic and professional bodies (from 3,300 to 2,100), which was linked to the systematic closure of agricultural cooperatives, particularly evident between 2018 and 2020. Some of them, engaged in socio-cultural activities, re-registered under a new legal form, rural women’s associations. The total number of rural women’s associations established after 2018 was significantly greater (8,500 in 2020). The group of faith-based social entities showed the greatest stability in the number of active entities (1,800 in 2010 vs. 1,900 in 2020). In the entire group of non-profit organisations studied, there was an increase in the number of active entities by 18.8% (from 80,100 in 2010 to 95,100 in 2020).

⁵ The data on active associations shown does not include ordinary associations.

Map 1. Registered foundations, associations and similar organisations by voivodeship, 2020



Źródło: GUS (rejestr REGON).

The largest number of registered entities in 2020 was in Mazovia Voivodeship (17.3%), followed by Greater Poland Voivodeship (9.5%), Lesser Poland Voivodeship (9.0%) and Silesia Voivodeship (8.7%). The smallest number of foundations, associations and similar

social organisations operated in Opole Voivodeship (2.5%). The inclusion of the number of residents in the indicator illustrates the availability of organisations in a given area. The lowest ratio of the number of organisations per 10,000 inhabitants was recorded in Silesia Voivodeship (29.3), which was due to the high urbanisation of that voivodeship. There was low level of availability of non-profit organisations was also in the Kuyavia-Pomerania and Łódź Voivodeships (35 and 36 organisations respectively). On the other hand, the highest level of availability corresponded to the highest number of organisations found in Mazovia Voivodeship (47.9 organisations per 10,000 population).

Comparing the structure of entities by voivodeship between 2010 and 2020, one can see that the largest decrease in the share of organisations occurred in Łódź Voivodeship (by 0.6 p.p.), and the largest increase in Mazovia Voivodeship (by 0.7 p.p.). Taking into account the type of organisation, the greatest changes in territorial distribution in 2010–2020 took place among foundations. The share of foundations located in Mazovia Voivodeship decreased by 7.7 p.p., while the share of foundations in other voivodships increased, to the greatest extent in the Lower Silesia Voivodeship (by 1.5 p.p.).

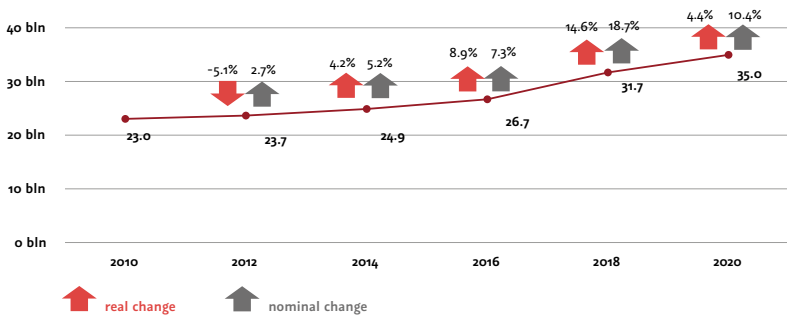
Crucial for describing the third sector is the substantive scope of the activities of organisations. During the period in question, the largest proportion of active organisations continuously indicated sport, tourism, recreation and hobbies as the main area of their statutory activity (26.9% in 2020), followed by rescue (15.3%), arts and culture (12.4%), education, scientific research (10.5%) and social and humanitarian aid (8.3%). However, between 2010 and 2020, it was the two most popular areas that saw the greatest decrease in their share: rescue (down by 3.4 p.p.) and sport, tourism, recreation and hobbies (down by 3.1 p.p.). In contrast, the share of organisations primarily involved in local development (3.8% to 6.5%), education (from 8.4% to 10.5%) and environmental protection (from 1.7% to 3.0%) increased at the highest rate over the decade in question. The group of organisations involved in local development increased suddenly between 2018 and 2020 due to the inclusion of

rural women's associations in the group, while the other changes were gradual.

Changes in the economic potential of the third sector

The overall economic potential of the third sector makes it possible to present a satellite account, which Polish public statistics developed as one of the first in Europe. In 2018, the total value of the output (market and non-market) of non-profit organisations in Poland amounted to nearly PLN 37 billion, which accounted for 1.7 per cent in relation to GDP⁶. The costs associated with employment in the third sector amounted to PLN 11.9 billion, and the monetary value of voluntary work provided within these organisations amounted to PLN 5.8 billion⁷.

Figure 2. Change in the value of third sector revenue



Source: GUS (search terms: associations, foundations, self-governing economic and professional bodies, and faith-based social entities).

⁶ In addition to the organisations discussed in this chapter, the satellite account includes trade unions, employer organisations, political parties and churches and religious associations in the non-profit sector.

⁷ For more, see: *Rachunek satelitarny gospodarki społecznej dla Polski za 2018 r.*, GUS, Warsaw 2021 [online] <https://stat.gov.pl/statystykieksperymentalne/gospodarka-spoeczna/rachuneksatelitarnygospodarkispoecznejdlapolskiza2018r,5,1.html> [accessed: 12.08.2022].

Visible throughout the period 2010–2020 is a systematic increase in the value of revenues of third sector organisations. The amount of total revenue increased nominally by 51.9% (from PLN 23.0 billion in 2010 to PLN 35.0 billion in 2020), and in real terms⁸ by 28.9%. And although the continuously largest proportion of organisations indicated difficulties in raising funds as a barrier to their activities, the percentage doing so decreased from 50.2% to 34.5% between 2010 and 2020.

The increase in the total amount of resources available to non-profit organisations, however, was not distributed proportionally among the entities in the sector. Between 2010 and 2018, around 90 per cent of active organisations generated revenue. In 2020, there was a decline in this percentage to 86.9%, linked to the COVID-19 pandemic, during which some organisations suspended or reduced their statutory activities.

A deepening financial stratification in the third sector can be observed between 2010 and 2020. In 2010, the average income was PLN 287.6k, with half of the organisations raising less than PLN 19.0k. In 2020, while the average increased significantly (PLN 367.7k), the median decreased to PLN 16.4k, and this was only partly due to the inclusion in the collective of rural women's associations, the vast majority of which did not generate revenue.

Significant transformations in the period under analysis took place in terms of the sources of organisations' funding. The largest part of third sector revenue invariably came from non-market sources, and their share increased by 13.7 p.p. (from 49.2% in 2010 to 62.9% in 2020). Among non-market sources, public funds were crucial. Their share increased by 6.9 p.p. (from 38.1% in 2010 to 45.0% in 2020). Non-state sources were less important among non-market sources. However, a steady increase in their share has been evident since 2014, mainly from donations, which accounted for 9.7% in 2012 and 16.6% in 2020.

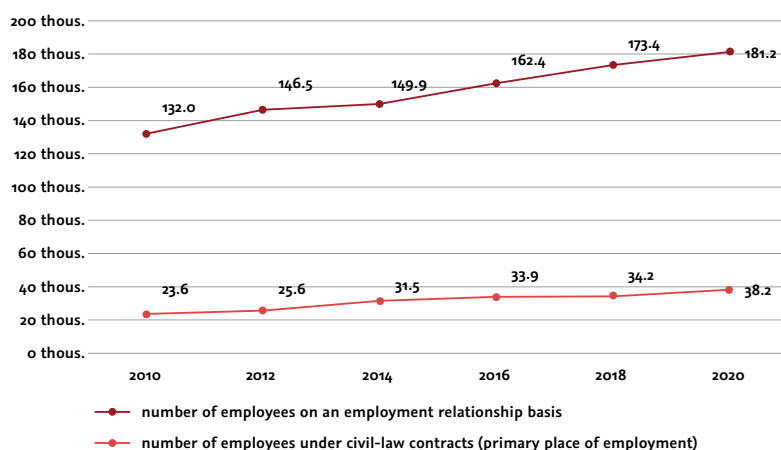
⁸ In constant price terms, i.e. after accounting for the impact of inflation between particular years.

Between 2010 and 2020, the share of market revenues in the sector's overall revenue structure decreased by 13.9 p.p. The largest decrease included the share of revenue from business activities (from 19.0% in 2010 to 11.4% in 2020), while the decrease was smaller for paid statutory activities (from 18.2% in 2010 to 14.8% in 2020).

A clear change occurred between 2010 and 2020 in terms of employment potential. The number of full-time employees employed in the third sector increased by 37.3% over this period (from 132,000 in 2010 to 181,200), which also translated into an increase in the sector's share of employment in the national economy from 1.1% to 1.3%.

However, the employment potential was concentrated in a smaller proportion of organisations. In 2020, as many as 61.6% of entities did not use paid labour at all, a proportion similar to that in 2010. Between 2010 and 2020, the proportion of organisations that employed from one to five people decreased (from 10.9% to 8.6%), while those with twenty or more employees increased (from 1.8% to 2.3%).

Figure 3. Employment in third sector entities



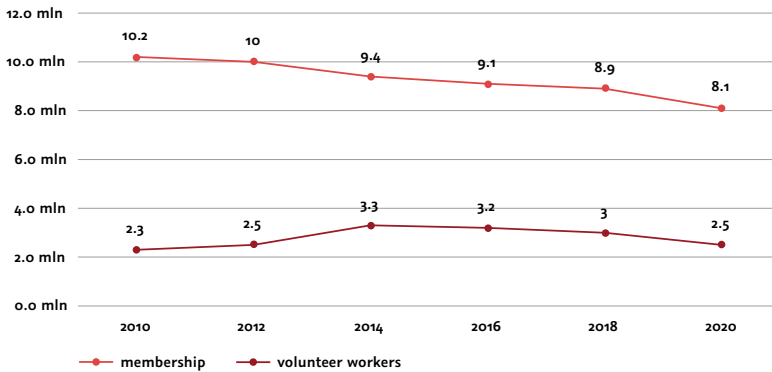
Source: GUS (search terms: Associations, foundations self-governing economic and professional bodies, faith-based social entities).

Between 2010 and 2020, there was a 62.0% increase in the number of people employed under civil law contracts for whom organisations were their primary place of work (from 23,600 to 38,200). This was also associated with an increase in the percentage of organisations that employed workers exclusively under civil law contracts (from 22.2% in 2010 to 24.1% in 2020).

Changes in the social capacity of the third sector

The social potential of the third sector is classically described by the level of commitment of members and the work of volunteers, but in recent years, the reintegrative dimension of employment in non-profit organisations has also gained importance.

Figure 4. Membership and volunteer workers in third sector entities



GUS (search terms: Associations, foundations self-governing economic and professional bodies, faith-based social entities).

In 2018, 28.3% of Poland's population aged 16 or over were members of third sector organisations, 4.9 p.p. less than in 2015⁹

⁹ K. Goś-Wójcicka, T. Sekuła, *Obraz statystyczny organizacji społeczeństwa obywatelskiego*, in: *Dla Niepodległej. Obywatele i ich organizacje 1918–2020*, ed. E. Leś, Kancelaria Prezydenta RP, Warsaw 2020 [online] <https://www.prezydent.pl/aktualnosci/inicjatywy/>

The organisations' own declarations, in turn, indicate that in 2020 they had a membership of 8.1 million¹⁰, 20.7% (2.1 million) less than in 2010. As membership decreased, so did the mean number (from 130 to 85) and the median (from 29 to 21). On the other hand, membership commitment, as defined by the percentage of dues-paying members (up 10 p.p., to 73.2%), and the provision of community service (up 22.5 p.p., to 64.7%), increased.

Volunteering, also referred to as community service, like membership, is a specific resource in comparison to other sectors that is characteristic of the potential of third sector organisations. In 2018, 13.2% of the Polish population aged 16 or over worked as volunteers for non-profit organisations¹¹. The number of volunteer workers declared by organisations between 2010 and 2020 increased from 2.3 million to 2.5 million, but the highest number was reached in 2014 (3.3 million). The proportion of organisations using volunteer work also increased in the decade under review, from 84.7 per cent in 2010 to 92.6 per cent in 2020. In addition, the proportion of organisations citing insufficient numbers of volunteers for community service as a hindrance to their activities also decreased (from 32.5% to 22.4%). Admittedly, the largest decrease took place between 2018 and 2020 (by 6.6 pp.), which may be linked to a change in the expectations of organisations due to the restrictions in place in 2020 in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Third sector organisations were actively involved in the achievement of social economy objectives and carried out activities for the social and professional integration of people at risk of social

nagroda-dla-dobra-wspolnego/publikacja-dla-niepodleglej-obywatele--i-ich-organizacje [dostęp: 12.08.2022 r.]

¹⁰ The term 'membership' refers to the total number of entries on the membership lists in each organisation, so an individual may be taken into account more than once, whereas the term 'members' refers to the number of residents of Poland who are members of at least one organisation. If an organisation does not include individuals (e.g. a foundation), the number of memberships includes members of collegiate bodies.

¹¹ *Jakość życia i kapitał społeczny w Polsce. Wyniki badania spójności społecznej*, GUS, Warsaw 2020 [online] <https://stat.gov.pl/obszary-tematyczne/warunki-zycia/dochody-wydatki-i-warunki-zycia-ludnosci/jakosc-zycia-i-kapital-spoeczny-w-polsce-wyniki-badania-spojnosci-spoecznej-2018,4,3.html> [accessed: 12.08.2022].

exclusion. In 2020, 18.4% of third-sector employers employed people at risk of social exclusion. The non-profit sector had a higher share of people with disabilities (6.9% vs. 3.5%) and people of retirement age (8.3% vs. 3.0%) among those employed than the national economy. Moreover, between 2010 and 2020, both indicators in the sector increased (by 1.4 p.p. and 3.5 p.p. respectively), while they decreased in the national economy as a whole (by 0.3 p.p. and 0.7 p.p. respectively).

Summary

The last decade has seen a transformation of the third sector in all the areas analysed here. The years 2010–2020 showed a slowdown in the dynamics of the formation of new member organisations in favour of the growth of foundations, which translated into a doubling of the share of foundations in the analysed groups of organisations. In addition, the sector expanded with an additional legal form – rural women’s associations – following the adoption of an act dedicated to them.

The overall economic potential of the sector has clearly increased, both in terms of paid employment and the financial resources available to organisations. However, this did not contribute to reducing the high economic stratification between organisations. The group of organisations with no paid staff remained at the same level as ten years earlier, while the group of entities with no income increased. On the other hand, there has been an increase in the proportion of the group of organisations with twenty or more employees, and average revenues have clearly increased. In addition, the pandemic slowed the growth of small and medium-sized organisations in 2020.

Complementing the changes in economic potential are transformations in the income structure of the third sector. The share of non-market resources, especially those from public sources, increased, which was associated with the increased involvement of organisations in the delivery of public services (e.g. more organisations ran schools), and more commissioning of public tasks and access to

grants from European Funds. At the same time, the share of funds coming from philanthropy, i.e. donations and public collections, also increased. This may indicate an improvement in the image of the third sector in society, especially as the proportion of organisations that perceived inadequate social support as a barrier to their activities fell by half. The opposite change in the share of funds in the budgets of organisations concerned market-based sources. In the period under study, the share of funds from economic activities and from paid statutory activities decreased, which indicates the unwillingness or inability of most organisations to operate profitably and may result in less independence and flexibility in their activities.

The social potential of the third sector also showed a variety of dynamics. Changes in membership led to a realisation of its potential. There has been a clear reduction in the number of formal memberships, which has been associated with the removal of inactive members from rosters and has resulted in an increase in the share of those engaging in activities of the total membership. In terms of volunteering, a stabilisation and even a reduction in stratification can be observed, although the number of volunteers increased slightly, the share of organisations using volunteer work increased.

A positive transformation in the social potential of the third sector is a more inclusive nature of employment. Over the decade under review, the participation rates among employed people from groups at risk of social exclusion (the disabled, the elderly) have increased, illustrating the effectiveness of measures to develop the social economy.

The role of the third sector is particularly important in suddenly occurring and unexpected social circumstances. The Polish social sector confirmed this by engaging in additional activities in 2020 in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, with one in ten organisations declaring that had undertaken such additional activities. Organisations helped five million individuals by providing in-kind and financial support worth nearly PLN 850 million, as well as providing social services, while often reorganising the way they worked and developing remote online services.

The changes in the potential of the third sector, as well as the increasingly rapid changing general economic and social conditions, point to the need for continued statistical research on non-profit organisations. Statistical data can be used to evaluate public policies and plan future instruments aimed at the development of the social sector and become even more central to the socio-economic changes taking place. For example, the current year, 2022, is a time of intensive work for many organisations to provide assistance related to the war in Ukraine. Current research by the Central Statistical Office will measure and demonstrate the multi-faceted importance of the third sector in this unusual situation.



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Photo 9. Professor Piotr Gliński – Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Culture and National Heritage, Chairman of the Committee for Public Benefit



Photo 10. Wojciech Kaczmarczyk – Director of NFI-CCSD



Photo 11. Daniel Prędkopowicz (Chairman of the Europe and Us Association, organiser of CIF–Mazovia Locally) during the discussion at the conference ‘The Civic Initiatives Fund: 15 years of experience, prospects to the year 2030’ (12 October 2021)



Photo 12. Professor Leslie Lenkowsky of Indiana University / USA during the debate ‘The European spiritual community as an axiological basis for shaping organised civil society’ (30 November 2018)



Photo 13. Jakub Wygnański (Chairman of the Shipyard Foundation) during the debate 'Concern for the common good in a divided society' (29 November 2019)



Photo 14. Piotr Krygiel (Deputy Director of NFI-CCSD 2017-2020) during the panel discussion 'Polish humanitarian aid – today and tomorrow' (30 November 2018)



Photo 15. Dariusz Pietrowski (Head of the Solidarity Corps Programme Office) during the NFI–CCSD conference ‘Civil society: the direction of the community’ (16 November 2020)



Photo 16. Maciej Zarębski (Świętokrzyskie Regional Society), Wojciech Żukowski (Association of Local Governments of the Roztocze Euroregion) and Wojciech Jachimowicz (NFI–CCSD Council) participating in the debate ‘Development of local communities through the CIF: identity, regionalism and civil society’ (26 November 2021)



Photo 17. NFI-CCSD staff during the conference 'Folk high schools and the challenges of today' co-organised by NFI-CCSD, Sejm of the Republic of Poland (10 June 2022)



Photo 18. Participants in the 4th Solidarity Corps Volunteer Forum (24 June 2022)

II.

**Potential
of the civic
sector – people
and institutions**

Christian values in the activities of a youth NGO

Introduction

Are young people self-serving, or are they united by higher values on their way to achieving their goals? Do values get in the way of the functioning of the youth NGOs? The answer to the above questions might only seem easy at the first glance. Young people are confronted with the challenges of a pandemic reality, a war behind Poland's eastern border, a time of crisis not only of an economic nature. The mere confrontation with these realities arouses anxiety and is paralysing. To overcome oneself, get involved and act, and on top of that to include Christianity, seems impossible. And what does this look like in practice?

Egoists, materialists, hedonists, atheists or Christocentrists – what are young people like?

It is often said that today's young people have no values. This is a truly bold claim, but is it true? "Young people are so bad" – many older people may say observing the behaviour of a randomly encountered teenager. It is easy to generalise and label, but it is far more difficult to try to understand what drives young people and what determines their attitudes.

In Poland, there is no doubt that for many believers and non-believers alike, the Catholic Church is a carrier of values they either

share or reject. Therefore young people adopt different attitudes towards it. Some fight against the institution of the Church, trying to remove it from the public space – they want to diminish the values it proclaims and in their place introduce their own, based on unspecified drives or unnamed needs. So long as they liberate themselves from the power of the “medieval” regime. Others, on the other hand, are indifferent to what the Church proclaims. They keep a safe distance. They are afraid that these values will interfere too much with their autonomy. There are also young people who engage in religious practices and identify with the values proclaimed by the Church. Although globalisation, ideologies, various kinds of trends or the current situation related to the coronavirus pandemic, the war in Ukraine or the economic crisis faces them with a dissonance between the attitude Jesus asks for and their inner fear of giving up on themselves.

The Catholic Church invites us to build a relationship between man and God, so that it is from this bond that man can draw, among other things, the values on the basis of which he will build relationships with others, but also with himself. As a sort of paradox, the virtual world – which, for a great many young people, is an equivalent and equal place of daily life – instead of shortening the path in building a bond by providing a simpler form of communication and easier access to the other person, actually distorts said path.

An anonymous young person in front of their phone screen feels much more safe than in a face-to-face situation with another person. There they can hide their emotions, release their brakes and – forgetting the words “do unto others as you would have them do unto you” – emotionally touch another human being. Indeed, technology, which has developed rapidly during the pandemic and is an inseparable companion for young people, if used badly, causes them to lose their values in the world of social messaging. It traps the young person in an airtight space and limits their activity to the click of a mouse. Young people don’t want to get involved – they much prefer a life of convenience that they can manage from their armchair, holding a phone in their hand.

The examples given here certainly do not exhaust the list of many situations in which young people abandon or clash with Catholic values. However, this image shows that values are an inseparable element of everyday life of every human being. Anxiety, a desire for freedom and a lack of desire to take action are the main determinants that block young people from building relationships with others and thus from associating and acting for others. Where in all this is Jesus's: "Be courageous, do not be afraid...?"

Ready to serve your God and Homeland? Ready!

Of course, it is not that all young people don't feel like doing anything. For there are many who promote universal values in an organised way, and alongside them there are those who dedicate their lives to the service of God and their Homeland by saying *ready!* We are referring to the people associated with the Catholic Youth Association (hereafter: CYA). It is a church organisation that has been operating in Poland for more than 30 years, in many dioceses, bringing together some 10,000 young people between the ages of 14 and 30.

It is worth quoting here the words of the late Monsignor Antoni Soltysik, the first Church Assistant of the Association, who contributed to its reactivation in 1990:

My great dream is to bring up an elite – mature, conscious and enlightened Catholics and Poles, responsible for the Church and the Homeland, capable of organising all areas of life in accordance with the values of our fathers and, at the same time, open to the culture and homeland values of other nations, especially Christian Europe. After all, according to the founding fathers, [...] who were inspired by the Gospel, the European Union should be based on Christian culture and spirituality,

and John Paul II added that it should be a community of homelands built on the foundation of Christian values¹.

The words of Rev. Soltysik correspond perfectly with those of Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki, who, in a letter delivered on the occasion of the 30th anniversary of the reactivation of *CVY*, writes as follows:

The community you create is the best place to take responsibility for your life. I know that your ideal is to serve others, to shape the attitude of a patriotic Pole, caring for the common good, for a small homeland, and for common Poland. You are embodying the demands of modern conservatism, which now, at this time, our Homeland so badly needs. Thank you for your attitude, for not wanting to remain indifferent to the problems of the world around you.

These words are a very good illustrative background for an organisation that, immersed in timeless Christian values, does not reek of obsolescence, but, on the contrary, presents itself as an institution that is valuable and needed in Poland.

The fundamental mission of the Association is presented in its statutes, where we can read that the organisation is to form mature Christians and actively participate in the community and mission of the Church. All this is to be done by spreading and disseminating Catholic principles and values in every area of life. Members are to focus their activity particularly on the social and cultural space.

The values that *CVY* members serve are evident in the elements of organisational unity. Looking at the emblem, we see a combination of the Cross and the Eagle, the two most important symbols for the organisation. In addition, the colours on it are not coincidental, as white and red – the national colours, yellow – symbolising the

¹ T.A. Janusz, *Po co wskrzeszać trupa? Tadeusz A. Janusz spoke with Rev. Antoni Soltysik about the Catholic Youth Association*, Wydawnictwo "Gotów", Warszawa 2021, p. 179.

bond with the Catholic Church, and blue – referring to the relationship with Mary. Alongside the emblem, the Association’s anthem calls for service to “top-of-the-range” values. And here are a few of its lines: “Young people, create a new Poland, powerful, pleasing to God”, “The free Homeland calls us to work with our hands, with our heads”, “Our banner will be the cross, which led our fathers to glory, and will also lead us upwards, where the White Eagle soars”.

The origins of the CYA can be traced as far back as the Partitions of Poland, but it was not until 1934 that the Catholic Association of Female Youth and the Catholic Association of Male Youth were founded, to which the present-day Association traces its origins. CYA members were people involved in defending the homeland during the Second World War or in the fight against communism. On more than one occasion they were interrogated, tortured and sentenced to death in connection with their activities.

There are also great figures associated with the CYA. The Ecclesiastical Assistant of the CYA in the parish of Niegowici and St. Florian in Kraków was Rev. Karol Wojtyła, later to become Pope John Paul II. It should be added that the recently elevated Blessed Rev. Jan Macha was part of CYA.

To this day, the organisation continues to draw on this incredible legacy of earlier generations, forming the spiritual as well as social sphere of young people. The organisation takes a holistic approach to the human being, with complimentary development. This is happening on a religious, patriotic, social, charitable, cultural/entertainment, and sporting level. A young person who experiences the acts of Jesus in the Association is invited to share this experience with others. Although the formation is demanding and the ideals lofty, every year many young people make a solemn pledge to work on themselves, to do good for people and to be a good member of the CYA. In 2021, more than 500 young people took the oath, declaring their readiness to serve God and Poland.

Youth 4.0 – Incubator of Youth Organisations

For even the most beautiful ideas and values to function in the world and, above all, to remain alive in people, they must be promoted and implemented. The CYA has been trying to do this for many years – through its national and diocesan structures, as well as at parish and community level, it has been encouraging young people not to spend their lives asleep but to live them in a beautiful way.

The response to our organisation's needs was the Civic Organisation Development Programme (hereafter: CODP) of the National Freedom Institute – Centre for Civil Society Development. Thanks to this, we were able to put into practice the words of the father of the reactivation of the Association, Rev. Soltysik: "The Catholic Youth Association is supposed to be an organised structure of good, against the existing structures of evil"². It is this programme (in its priority 1a, i.e. aimed at organisational sustainability – support for missionary activities and institutional development) that has made it possible to strengthen the activity and make a very significant difference to the functioning of the Association in Poland. Undoubtedly, a beautiful new chapter has begun for the CYA in Poland in 2019.

Formation in action

Implemented with the support of the NFI-CCSD (National Freedom Institute – Centre for Civil Society Development), the project's primary emphasis was on equipping the Association's members with the necessary media knowledge, fundraising or team-building and management skills. In addition, a seminar and workshops were held, with guests including Łukasz Rzepecki, Presidential Advisor for Youth Affairs, and Piotr Mazurek, Government Plenipotentiary for Youth Policy. The bishops responsible for youth affairs and the lay apostolate on behalf of the Polish Bishops' Conference – the Most Rev. Bishop Marek Solarczyk and the Most Rev. Bishop

² Ibidem, p. 146.

Adrian Galbas – also took part in the meetings. National Institute of Freedom staff also participated in these events as experts in the field of the functioning of non-governmental organisations. The invited guests are key figures both in the area of youth policy in our country, the Catholic Church's concern for young lay people, as well as experts in the field of NGOs. These three areas represented by the guests outline the specificity of the CYA as an organisation. Their experience, perception of reality and suggestions have been an invaluable support for the development of the entire association in Poland.

As part of the project described above, the Communication Platform of the Catholic Youth Association was created. It serves primarily for efficient communication between members of the Association; it is also a useful record of all people belonging to it.

To develop the media space, specialised equipment for the production of audiovisual material was purchased as part of the activities, around which the CYA National Communication Office was created. Thanks to the specialists employed in the project, it was possible to set up working teams to develop concrete solutions and publications in the areas of media, fundraising, actions and formation in the Association.

It is worth noting that formation materials have been developed as part of the project: *Czas na gotów* [Time to be Ready] and *Czas na gotów 2.0.* [Time to be Ready 2.0.] These are outlines that help the Association's branches and circles in their work. In addition, spiritual journals entitled *Grow with the Word* have been published. They are of help to the Association's members in recalling the word of God on a daily basis.

In addition, a team for projects and legal affairs was established. Diocesan associations work together to create new concepts for implementation, thereby learning to diagnose social problems and respond to them with specific actions. In addition, the legal affairs team has developed new regulations for all levels of the organisational structure. In addition to the ordinances indicated, documents were also produced to regulate ministries in the Association. Leadership and specialist training courses were held as part of the project.

They have served young people so that they are able to manage associations in their communities in legal, financial, organisational or educational and formation matters.

Mass, the sacrament of penance, adoration or priestly conferences were integral elements of the above-mentioned activities. On more than one occasion during these prayer meetings, the words of St. John Paul II addressed to young people were brought up:

Don't be ashamed of your ideals – on the contrary, preach them and defend them! Christ is counting on you, Our Lady of Jasna Góra is counting on you, the Church is counting on you. Poland is counting on you and it needs you! Just as the *СҮА*³.

Undoubtedly, the implementation of the described project has contributed to the development of the organisation and strengthened its potential. More so: the project laid the foundations for the creation of an efficient nationwide office and helped to develop a concept for the development of the Association nationwide. The Catholic Youth Association has become a brand of sorts and is currently being invited to actively participate in the processes of creating youth policy in Poland. The project has also made it possible to inject modernity and freshness into previously beaten paths for formation. This has had an impact on the entire structure of the Association, which comprises some 500 branches and circles throughout Poland. The Civic Organisation Development Programme has thus given a strong impetus to activation and change both inside and outside the Association.

Total reset – from anonymity to community engagement

The plan of actions described in detail in the competitive bid submitted to the *КОДР*, the several tens of thousands of zloty in support granted by the *НФИ-СССД*, the fervent heart in the young to serve

³ Ibidem, p. 151.

God and the Homeland – this was enough for an institutional change to take place in the CYA.

Reflecting on the history of this project, it must be said that it all started with the work of the specialists employed by the project, who, after some time, became employees of the CYA national office. Their activities resulted in the media showing great interest in our organisation. Requests began to come in to provide commentary for newspapers, radio or television. Finally, the time had come when the Association could articulate its values to the wider public. There has been a revival of social media, which someone has cared for and thoughtfully started to run.

It is important to note that the Association has initiated cooperation with a number of entities with which it has begun to carry out projects on various charitable, film, economic, socio-patriotic, environmental themes, or with the aim of protecting conceived life. Cooperation with the Senate of the Republic of Poland, parliamentarians, the Chancellery of the Prime Minister, ministries and the Chancellery of the President of the Republic of Poland has begun.

Such a good time for the organisation also benefited the Foundation for Youth – set up by the Association – and the CYA’s “Gotów” (“Ready”) Publishing House, which was henceforth able to benefit from the potential of the volunteers and staff of the CYA national office. The vertical permeability of the Association’s structure began to be apparent. However, the transformation did not stop at the top of the organisational structure. It emanated to the diocese, where diocesan boards began to strengthen communities in the directions set out by the *Youth 4.0 – Incubator of Youth Organisations* project. Evangelisation activities and the promotion of Christian values have become even more intense and measurable thanks to the hard work and actions taken within the Association.

The change and activity in the organisation described above was appreciated by the Chairman of the Committee for Public Benefit, Deputy Prime Minister Prof. Piotr Gliński, when appointing former Chairman of the Presidium of the National Council to the Council for Dialogue with the Young Generation of the first term (hereafter: PCD), member Patryk Czech, and for the second term of the

council, member Anna Błazinska, former deputy chair of the PCD. In addition, the Deputy Prime Minister also appointed member Patryk Czech to the Public Benefit Council of the seventh term, while the President of the Republic of Poland appointed him to the National Development Council for Youth Affairs.

Promoting organisational potential

The accumulated potential of the Association, which was brought out with CORD's support, has started to pay off. It has transformed into- energy to continue existing activities and to undertake completely new ones at the CYA. A few examples of such initiatives are worth mentioning:

1. The *Polak z sercem* [*Pole with a heart*] campaign is the Association's flagship charity. It aims to provide humanitarian aid, but also to build relationships with Poles living across the eastern border – in Belarus, Lithuania and Ukraine. Four editions of the campaign have been held to date. Currently, due to the war in Ukraine, it has taken the form of aid called *Polak z sercem dla pokoju*.
2. *Po co wskrzeszać trupa?* [*Why resurrect a corpse?*] This is an interview with Rev. Monsignor Antoni Sołtysik, the first general church assistant of the Association. It was published nine years after its completion. It is not only a publication aimed at members of the Association, but also a compendium of knowledge about youth ministry in Poland. It is on Rev. Sołtysik where St. John Paul II put his faith when, as the metropolitan of Kraków, he entrusted him with the mission of youth minister.
3. The film entitled *Wyszyński. Zemsta czy przebaczenie* directed by Tadeusz Syka. This is the official footage of the beatification of the Most Rev. Primate Stefan

Wyszyński and Mother Róża Czacka, which tells the story of Rev. Wyszyński in the Warsaw Uprising. In addition to the film stars, CYA members were able to star in it, playing characters of the era and helping with the technical organisation of this great event.

It should be emphasised that formation materials (as mentioned earlier) and work on organisational documents (such as regulations, among others) are also the result of CORD funds. The mere fact of publishing and compiling professional publications is gratifying, but far more valuable is the fact that it was possible to involve many willing and professionally trained members to realise this idea, who undoubtedly strengthened the personnel potential of the Association.

Conclusion

The Christian values present in the Catholic Youth Association do not deprive our organisation of its modern characteristics; they do not pigeonhole it into parochialism; on the contrary, they boost the morale of the team and are a motivation for its members to become even more committed to the Association's mission.

By example of the CYA, one can see how young people engaged in civic activities in its ranks and supported financially by the National Institute of Freedom enthusiastically serve their Homeland, bringing so much good into their own lives. By putting Christian values into practice, it is definitely easier to be a Pole with a heart, every day "resurrecting the corpse" of everyday life that requires more and more effort from young people.

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Patryk Czech – graduate of law and artistic education in the field of music art at the University of Rzeszów. He has served as President of the Presidium of the National Council of the Catholic Youth Association (2018–2022) and as Director of the CYA “Gotów” Publishing House (2020–2022). He was a member of the Young Generation Dialogue Council from 2019 to 2021. Currently a member of the Youth Council of the National Development Council to the President of the Republic of Poland and of the Public Benefit Council of the seventh term.

Civic activity of seniors – how to effectively support and develop it?

Introduction

First of all, I would like to recall the definition of *civic activity*, which is understood as the participation of citizens in the political, economic, cultural and social life, both of the state and the local community. This activity is conscious and voluntary. It manifests itself, among other things, in participating in elections, in controlling or exercising power, in belonging to social organisations or associations, in caring for public order, in reacting to violations of accepted rules, in getting involved in helping the needy and in citizens' self-organisation in matters concerning the common good¹.

At the end of 2019, the number of people aged 60 and over in Poland will exceed 9.7 million, increasing by 2.1% compared to the previous year. The percentage of elderly people in the Polish population reached the level of 25.3%. According to estimates, in 2050 the number of people aged 60+ is to amount to 13.7 million (i.e. 44.7% of the population)². This data indicates the need to point out that an important motive for laying the right foundations of a democratic

¹ P. Krygiel, *Aktywność obywatelska w Polsce – co możemy zrobić?*, Sobieski Institute, Warsaw 2015.

² *Sytuacja osób starszych w Polsce w 2020 r.*, ed. E. Kamińska-Gawryluk i in., Główny Urząd Statystyczny, Warsaw, Białystok 2021 [online] https://stat.gov.pl/files/gfx/portalinformacyjny/pl/defaultaktualnosci/6002/2/3/1/sytuacja_osob_starszych_w_polsce_w_2020_r.pdf [accessed: 31.07.2022].

state should be to support the formation of a civic society, in which senior citizens have a very important function to play.

According to the survey entitled *Situation and Needs of Seniors during the COVID-19 pandemic*, carried out by the International Institute for Social Development, 90% of seniors have free time and more than half of respondents would like to be involved in community life, in the functioning of local, neighbourhood local government structures, as well as to animate and become active in the cultural and social life of their community, or to actively cooperate with third sector organisations³. The results of this survey also indicated that more than 55% of seniors do not take advantage of the activities offered to them in their local area (if they do, they most often participate in Universities of the Third Age, Senior Citizens' Clubs and Rural Women's Associations. In addition, 70% of seniors feel that they have no influence on their community and decision-makers, and 30% would like to help create citizen media. It seems, therefore, that the most important aspect of promoting social and civic initiatives among seniors is to show them how and with what methods they can effectively undertake and execute civic and social initiatives, including how they can adequately communicate, signal and execute them. However, the survey shows that seniors are not aware of the role and power of citizen media. They are afraid or do not believe in the effectiveness of using this type of communication channel to inform the authorities about their needs and improve their situation.

Another perceived problem is the passivity and civic passivity of the senior group over 60. According to the report entitled *Survey of social activity and Civic Participation of Seniors*, the elderly declare a significant interest in what is happening around them in the public sphere, which, however, does not translate into civic and participatory activity⁴. Interest in local and global affairs is often cursory. 36%

³ Międzynarodowy Instytut Rozwoju Społecznego, *Sytuacja i potrzeby Seniorów w czasie pandemii COVID-19*, Kraków 2022 [online] instytutmirs.pl/badania [accessed: 07.11.2022].

⁴ E. Miszczak, *Badanie aktywności społecznej i partycypacji obywatelskiej seniorów – mieszkańców miasta Lublin. Raport z badań terenowych*, Związek Stowarzyszeń Forum Lubelskich Organizacji Pozarządowych, Lublin 2016.

of the respondents were interested only in local and Polish affairs without taking foreign events into account, while 9% were interested only in local (neighbourhood, city) events. More than 60% of seniors want to know more about the activities of local authorities, but the majority of them rate their performance as “average”. Respondents get their information on events from a variety of sources. They mainly learn about local issues from neighbours and friends, from neighbourhood administration announcements, posters and information on notice boards at shops, churches, kindergartens, from leaflets delivered by distributors, from officials. Active people (including those who are professionally active), mainly those who have a secondary or higher education, draw their knowledge from the Internet.

Despite extensive pro-senior activities, we can still notice increasing generational differences resulting from technological and economic progress, changes in values or lifestyle. Statistics consistently record low levels of participation by the elderly in social and cultural life. Their activity is often limited to participation in local community initiatives, spending time in a closed circle of people, fearing active participation in cultural life. This phenomenon is due, among other things, to the constant changes in the market and information chaos, or to the reproduction of habits resulting from the self-assigned role of a “person incapable of creative action”. Locked inside their houses, seniors during the covid-19 pandemic lockdown most often felt lonely. Deprived of physical contact with other human beings, they were more likely to suffer from malaise and depression. This situation was exacerbated by the irresponsible attitude of the news media, whose coverage was dominated by tragic statistics scaring seniors, further aggravating their already poor mental state.

Another problem in the area of effective civic participation is the lack of access to goods and low public awareness in this regard. This issue gained prominence in July 2018, when the Ministry of Funds and Regional Policy announced the introduction of the Dostępność+

[Accessibility+] programme⁵. Accessibility is a prerequisite for many people to lead independent lives and participate in the social and economic life of their country, community, school or workplace. The problem of accessibility gained importance during the pandemic, when mobility was significantly hindered and limited. Consequently, there was a need for functional accessibility in terms of using market, social, public offerings – while staying at home. The importance of this issue is illustrated by the results of a study by the International Institute for Social Development, which found that 40% of seniors recognise the problem of architectural barriers in their neighbourhood, and that the vast majority is unaware that they can have an impact on increasing accessibility in their neighbourhood (for themselves and the local community – e.g. by complaining about lack of accessibility)⁶. That is why civic education in this area is so important⁷.

There is a great need to shape a civic society with the active participation of seniors and taking into account the issues that affect them. Undoubtedly, the biggest challenge is to incentivise society in the context of intra- and intergenerational solidarity, neighbourly assistance and civic empathy. This solidarity towards seniors is crucial in the post-pandemic period, when some seniors continue to be isolated or limit their participation in social and civic life.

Civic Voice of Seniors – react, intervene, make demands – have your say

In response to the need to create space for civic activation of the elderly and the development of the silver economy, the MANKO Association runs nationwide and international programs as well

⁵ Ministry of Funds and Regional Policy, *Accessibility Plus Programme* [online] <https://www.gov.pl/web/fundusze-regiony/program-dostepnosc-plus> [accessed: 31.07.2022].

⁶ Międzynarodowy Instytut Rozwoju Społecznego, *Sytuacja i potrzeby Seniorów w czasie pandemii COVID-19*, Kraków 2022 [online] instytutmirs.pl/badania [dostęp: 07.11.2022].

⁷ *Dostępność możemy sobie wywalczyć*, “Głos Seniora” 2021, No. 53, p. 14.

as civic media. These include: Civic Voice of Seniors, the National Senior Citizen Card and the Senior Friendly Commune.

Citizen media can be a very effective tool for creating awareness of socio-economic life. In the English-language terminology, we will find two proposals to define this type of activity of citizens in the media sphere: *citizen journalism* and *civic journalism*. The term *civic journalism* has been defined as involving ordinary citizens in the process of publishing a newspaper by involving them in the process of creating information. *Citizen journalism*, on the other hand, should be understood as “situations in which readers engage, together with professionals, in the production of *journalism*”. Such cooperation between amateurs and professionals in the area of information production and distribution is becoming more and more popular and is taking an increasing variety of forms⁸.

Over the 20 years it has been active, the MANKO Association – The Voice of Seniors has developed a model of civic action based on mission, striving for social change, representativeness of the audience, professionalisation of the editorial structure, and intergenerationalism⁹. To a large extent, civic media is used by the Association as an educational tool for social campaigns.

The campaign “Civic Voice of Seniors – React – Intervene – Have your say”, and the magazine published as part of it, “Civic Voice of Seniors”, not only function as a medium for the transmission of knowledge and information, but also provide a platform for integration and exchange of experiences and views between senior citizens’ councils, local authorities, Universities of the Third Age, senior citizens’ clubs and other organisations working on behalf of seniors. The civic intervention section included in each issue of the Civic Voice of Seniors magazine gives seniors the opportunity to speak out on issues that are important to them, to report accurately on cases of unfair or unjust treatment in the areas of consumer law, social, administrative, or health matters. The department highlights

⁸ M. Łosiewicz, *Rozwój mediów obywatelskich w Polsce*, in: *Zawód: dziennikarz. Między misją a profesją*, ed. B. Brodzińska, M. Jeziński, M. Mateja, UMK Publishing House, Toruń 2015, p. 234.

⁹ Sources: manko.co.uk and glosseniora.co.uk [accessed: 31/07/2022].

the difficult situations of older people, but also intervenes in these cases with the appropriate authorities. It also provides advice on legal, economic and administrative matters.

The main objective of this campaign is achieved through specific objectives such as:

1. shaping a positive image and potential of old age and the prospects for older people to be active participants in public social life;
2. creating the active attitude of a senior citizen who “takes matters into their own hands”;
3. promoting positive and effective patterns of participation in public and community life ;
4. promoting social and public activities of senior citizens (municipal senior citizens’ councils, senior citizens’ clubs, UTAs, senior citizens’ organisations);
5. promoting the idea of senior volunteering;
6. educating in the area of broad economic, legal, security issues;
7. promoting a healthy lifestyle.

The civic activation of seniors carried out by the campaign focuses on their involvement in society, particularly in the post-pandemic period. This will include interactive contests to incentivise seniors in the media, social and civic areas. The usefulness and diversity of the contests are well reflected in their names: “Stylish Seniors”, “Active Seniors”, “Frugal Seniors”, “Pet Cure for Loneliness”, “Safe Seniors”, “Entrepreneurial Seniors”, “Think Healthy”, “Senior Gardener”, “Love after 60” or “Senior Music Lover”. What’s more: the campaign assumes the involvement of seniors in being ambassadors and co-creators of civic pro-senior social campaigns.

Social campaigns as tools for civic activation of seniors

According to Urszula Gołaszewska-Kaczan, a social campaign is a form of action for socially engaged organisations, alongside a social

action or programme¹⁰. It is a media campaign carried out most often with the cooperation of different entities, aiming to solve a social problem, promote values or change attitudes; it enables different types of support: financial, material, and service. Typically, a social campaign involves multiple stakeholders and should be intensively promoted. From a practical point of view, a social campaign is:

a set of different activities planned over a specific period of time and aimed at a specific target group, the objective of which is to bring about an increase in knowledge, a change in thinking or behaviour towards a specific social problem or to solve a social problem blocking the achievement of the common good defined as a marketing objective¹¹.

The MANKO Association has developed its own methodology for conducting social campaigns and linking civic media to them. Below are some of these initiatives.

Solidarity with Seniors – together we can do it

The campaign “Solidarity with Seniors – together we can do it” promotes intergenerational solidarity and the promotion of neighbourhood volunteering. It raises public awareness of the situation of senior citizens, whose main problem is loneliness, which affects more than 40% of them. As part of it, the following was organised: the mailing of activation and education support packages to 20,000 seniors living alone, meetings with seniors in 100 communes and the Voice of Seniors tv channel. From March to November 2020, 60 programmes (200,000 views) were produced and posted

¹⁰ U. Gołaszewska-Kaczan, *Zaangażowanie społeczne przedsiębiorstwa*, University of Białystok Publishing House, Białystok 2009, p. 108-109.

¹¹ B. Tarczydło, *Kampania społeczna w teorii i praktyce*, “Studia Ekonomiczne. Zeszyty Naukowe Uniwersytetu Ekonomicznego w Katowicach” 2013, no. 157, p. 226.

there. All campaign activities during this time reached as many as 500,000 viewers.

Meet Your Senior Neighbour

The most acute problem for older people is loneliness and a lack of interest from those around them. But even a very lonely person has a neighbour; each of us is also someone's neighbour. Often seniors don't want to ask for help or they don't want to bother us, seeing that we are in a hurry every day to go to work or do the shopping, busy with our own affairs. Their isolation was exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, which lasted over a year. Meanwhile, even the smallest gesture of neighbourly kindness can prove far more valuable than any form of institutional assistance. Why? Because it stems from a genuine interest in another human being – a senior citizen, a neighbour.

Responding to the current social situation, the MANKO Association has initiated a nationwide campaign called "Meet Your Senior Neighbour". In this way, we are promoting neighbourly help for seniors in need and are calling on everyone to get involved. To join the campaign, print out the ready-made poster found on the website, fill in the contact number and hang it on your staircase or put it in the letterbox of a lonely person. The next step is to wait for a senior citizen in need to come forward and then help them: do the shopping, walk the dog or simply talk to the elderly person on the phone.

Stop manipulation, don't be fooled!

The campaign "Stop Manipulation – don't be fooled!" aims to raise consumer awareness. Its main aim is to educate seniors in the areas of savings, economics, consumer rights, recognition of manipulative sales techniques and security. Since March 2020, criminals have been doing their best to take advantage of the fear, panic and isolation of seniors in Poland caused by the pandemic. They operate online, but also face-to-face. To date, scammers have come up with

at least 45 different manipulation techniques. Seniors living alone, without family, are most often exposed to scams and are fooled by the various and ever newer methods of deception and manipulation. According to official data, criminals extract over PLN 85 million from seniors' bank accounts every year using various types of fraud. Therefore, civic education of the elderly in the area of security is very much needed. As part of the campaign, the MANKO Association develops educational and informational tools, i.e. leaflets, brochures, posters, ad-spots, workshops, and then reaches the target group – senior citizens and their families – with the message through the media and partner local authorities and senior citizens' organisations. In addition, the campaign encourages seniors and younger people to become campaign ambassadors – that is, local educators who, using the message tools produced, educate their families, friends and neighbours about safety and fraud prevention.

Senior-Friendly Commune Programme

The “Senior Friendly Commune” programme is aimed at supporting local government in the development of local senior citizen policy. This is done through the transfer of knowledge and appropriate tools to support local senior policy. These are: The National Senior Citizen Card, the national magazine “Głos Seniora” (Senior Citizen's Voice), Senioralia, materials of many educational and activation campaigns, e.g. “Don't be fooled”, “Stylish Seniors”, etc. Another important aspect is the introduction of the National Senior Citizen Card to the employees of offices responsible for contact with senior citizens and support during the introduction of the Card to the local community. The programme also involves introducing local entrepreneurs to the National Senior Citizen Card programme, as well as educating business owners in the area of the silver economy. An important element is greater cooperation at events for senior citizens and the issuing of a local (municipal or district) version of the National Senior Citizen Card. More than 200 local authorities are already members of the Senior Friendly Commune programme.

National Senior Citizen Card

As indicated above, in order to be certified as a Senior Friendly Commune, the local authority, in cooperation with the Association and other senior citizens' organisations in its area, should issue a local (commune or district) version of the National Senior Citizen Card. It entitles the holder to discounts at over 3,000 locations throughout Poland. These are mostly health and leisure-related institutions, i.e. clinics, spas, sanatoriums, rehabilitation centres, swimming pools, fitness clubs, cafés, cinemas and theatres. Seniors with the Card are more active, more mobile and more likely to use leisure services, which clearly has an impact on their health. Importantly, the National Senior Citizen Card is also an activation tool. It is co-created by seniors themselves, who seek out companies willing to honour the Card and, in addition, distribute it themselves to other seniors, who are often inactive and lonely. It can therefore be seen as another method of activating and "attracting" older people to senior policy and the pro-seniority offer proposed by local authorities. More than 500,000 people already hold the National Senior Citizen Card.

International Senioralia in Kraków

The International Senioralia in Kraków is an event that takes place annually and gathers a large number of participants (in 2021 it was 3,000 people from 100 locations). The Senioralia aims to shape and consolidate the attitude of active citizenship among seniors, as well as to integrate people of 60+ by building economic, legal, safety and health awareness. Members of senior citizens' councils, universities of the third age, senior citizens' organisations, public, social and private institutions as well as representatives of partner cities and local authorities from all over Poland are invited to the event. The Senioralia is inaugurated by the celebration of Holy Mass in St. Mary's Basilica, followed by a huge parade to Jordan Park, where lectures, free examinations and consultations take place.

In addition to the lecture section, the schedule of events also includes a sports and entertainment section with a social event hosted by DJ Wika and Alexander Martinez. There is also a Fashion Show of Stylish Seniors – winners of the Voice of Seniors competition.

Senior Friendly School

This project involves the development of intergenerational education and civic activation. As part of the programme, teachers from partner schools are trained on how to educate and incentivise students in terms of the needs of older people so that young people can use this knowledge to support their grandparents and older neighbours in being more active. On the other hand, the project encourages and educates local seniors to be able to enter the school and support the teacher in passing on practical knowledge in the areas of ecology, patriotism, history, folklore, local identity and citizenship to the younger generation.

Conclusion

The MANKO Association is an example of an organisation that successfully combines civic activism, education and entrepreneurship activities for senior citizens. The initiatives implemented by the Association confirm that it is possible for an NGO to support the civic mobilisation of people 60+, whether in the area of local community, 60+ entrepreneurship or pro-senior politics. The platforms launched by the Association for pro-senior inter-institutional and cross-sectoral cooperation are key in this respect. The non-governmental sector certainly has significant potential in enhancing the quality of socio-economic life and in creating space to solve social and civic problems. This potential must be exploited.

In the years to come, the MANKO Association plans to further expand the projects described and digital education through an e-learning platform, training courses in partner communes and

the ongoing development of Voice of Seniors TV (www.youtube.com/GlosSenioratv). The internationalisation of the Association's activities will also continue through the dynamisation of the current programmes, i.e. the European Senior Citizen Card, the European Voice of Seniors and the Senior Friendly City/Commune abroad. The association will also develop the Civic Voice of Seniors project, which has been set up with the support and funding of the National Freedom Institute – CIF. As part of this concept, further development of the Civic Voice of Seniors section and the React – Intervene – Make a Demand and have a say is planned. The aim is to increase the awareness and active citizenship of Seniors to ultimately improve their quality of life.

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Change – an impulse for development or a threat to NGOs?

The Odra-Niemen Association is based in all its activities on change – in terms of including more communities, members, volunteers in its activities, in terms of still new activities related to the emerging needs of our beneficiaries, in terms of vigilant response to new threats, challenges, perspectives.

I represent an organisation that I founded 14 years ago with my husband and a group of friends. The association responded to an appeal by veterans of the Home Army, imprisoned labourers, who could not return to Poland after the war and stayed in Grodno (now in Belarus). No Wrocław-based organisation, grounded in its specific activities, wanted to accept the new challenge, the task we were proposing. Therefore, from the very beginning, we faced the need to undertake our own activity and marked our work as open to wide cooperation. The initial problem with the project became our strength, inscribing us with the need to be sensitive to everything that the world and the reality around us bring.

The Odra-Niemen Association is an open organisation, focused on the changing world, on new tools and on all issues that concern the entire NGO community. We are not afraid of change, and what's more, despite many difficult twists and turns, each new direction gives us the impetus to take on new challenges.

In this text, I pose questions that have arisen in my many years of social activism, questions that resonate in many discussions and

observations of the changing NGO community. Let the answers to them be an inspiration for other social circles and a small personal summary of the activities that have led to the success of the Odra-Niemen Association, for this is how I judge the results of our work, given the starting position and the state of affairs today.

Is community collaboration an opportunity, an obligation or a burden in developing social activity?

The first years of the Odra-Niemen Association saw the implementation of the good task “Compatriots to Heroes”, which could continue unchanged for years. The experience of working with veterans of the First and Second Conspiracy from the former Borderlands of the Second Republic, and later from all over Poland, has given us strength and humility, and the young people gathered in large numbers around the project have strengthened the Odra-Niemen Association with their vitality, openness to change and willingness to build branches in different regions of Poland. If we had stopped our development in Wrocław, we would not be in as good a place on the NGO map as we are now.

Collaborating on a joint, active project provided an opportunity to build volunteering, for people and communities to get to know each other. This was, and still is, the time for debate about the scarce resources of many organisations, their relevant problems, their ideas for development. It took a lot of effort to help other organisations, informal groups, operating in Poland and abroad. We ourselves were not in the best financial shape. It is also not easy to run eight branches in Poland and one abroad. However, we had potential in the form of supportive veterans’ communities, the huge commitment of young people and we could not turn our backs on others in need. This gave birth to ongoing friendship, respect and wide cooperation. On these relations, we built the Patriotic Federation (“Federacja Patriotyczna”) and a network of various groups around us, as well as a strong voluntary service. So the effort has not only benefited others, but also us.

Everywhere we promote the principle of acting above divisions and borders. It is difficult, but building a broad community around common goals gives us great satisfaction.

Are new technologies an opportunity or a barrier to committed action?

As a community, we are immersed in Polish history, we spend time with witnesses to history, and we are perceived as a modern patriotic organisation because we try to show the past through a modern message, through social media, by creating a quarterly magazine, podcasts, a blog, and by constantly looking for new solutions. At one of the panels I attended on the challenges facing organisations dealing with history and patriotism, I heard the question: are we not afraid to communicate such important social, educational, patriotic content through rather “entertaining” social media? I have always believed and continue to believe that opening up to new technologies, to a changing community, is actually an obligation for NGOs, regardless of the specifics of their activities. Any medium can serve a good cause, it is a window to the world, a promotion of activities and I always encourage the use of any new medium.

We are not new media specialists, but we are constantly learning and expanding our online community. We have gained a large group of friends on Facebook not by hiring specialists or spending a lot of money on advertising campaigns (although these do happen), but by honestly, systematically and transparently showing what we do, how we work and who we work with. We build our message ourselves, sometimes better, sometimes worse, but it is our content, our emotions, our campaigns.

It is certainly not wrong to use third-party companies, but in social initiatives we rely on our own team, on the communities around us, gaining new experience and having the chance to develop ourselves and our surroundings. We share these activities with other organisations, encouraging them to allocate the funds gained

rather to their own teams, to their own development, because who can describe us better than ourselves.

Will we not lose the social nature of the organisation by being open to changes and new tools?

Recently, the non-governmental community has often been bombarded with new solutions. You need to build endowments, fundraising strategies, diversify funds for development. You have to manage your team in a modern way, train your employees, go online, do social media. All this has to be done. As I wrote above, we in community organisations must not be afraid of modernity, of change. However, based on my own experience, my own mistakes and by closely observing other third sector entities, I believe that we often get too close in these changes to the systems of action operating in the corporation. I am concerned about the corporate language used more and more in our social sector, the focus on circle competition, the pursuit of self-success, media splendour.

Odra-Niemen as a community is very active in the countryside. We work with small and medium-sized organisations that so often work efficiently from the bottom up. They need simple rules, reliable help, good cooperation, practical advice. The same thing we were also looking for in our early days of activity. These meetings with various NGOs – as part of our own tasks, the competitions we run (re-granting) – very quickly bring us down to earth as soon as we get caught up in too specialised a message, because we also happened to use corporate services. We hired specialists, spent funds on the targets they indicated, only to find out that this was not what we wanted.

As in the area of media, in the area of finance we have also focused on self-development, on strengthening our own teams. We direct funds and knowledge at us. It is not as easy, but we can already see results. We create our own authentic campaigns, we no longer have fundraisers, just a group of friends who want to look for solutions to empower our community financially. We meet in small and large

teams, discuss, argue, learn and certainly become stronger. We will not get millions right away, but we are building programmes for years to come. And we have the satisfaction that these are our own ideas.

We encourage you to be brave, to brainstorm, to ask yourself questions, to work together in your own team. After all, we won't catch up with corporations, and if we try we will lose the heart of social activism along the way. My community stopped using these business tools and methods in time, changing their vector to social specificity, needs and social language of communication.

Is social activism credible in such a politically divided Poland?

Politics in NGOs, NGOs in politics, clashing ideologies affecting organisations, views of NGO community members hindering dialogue. How can you not lose your authenticity, your credibility in all of this, and at the same time want to work with different stakeholders?

From the beginning of its activity, the Odra-Niemen Association has met with very strong criticism due to its patriotic activities. For the first few years we were boycotted by many. Nevertheless, having lost none of our beliefs, values and principles, we are still there, growing, expanding our structures, getting stronger financially speaking. We only sparingly receive the coverage of the national mass media, public and private (through no fault of our own). We don't have big sponsors behind us, and those who are with us had to be strongly persuaded to our ideas.

It seems to me that our strength is a real grassroots and community involvement, modesty and a welcoming atmosphere that attracts many. Our leaders do not act politically, they do not antagonise parties, and yet we talk about difficult Polish issues in our activities. Having taken part in many panels conducted for the NGO community, having had my own experience of working with other organisations, I know that many of us have the same problems,

the same expectations and are looking for similar solutions. I am convinced that more and more organisations understand that it is worthwhile to systemically change the non-governmental community for the better together, using multiple meeting platforms, working groups, environmental conferences. It is also worth convincing decision-makers of the experience developed over the years, the ideas of the NGO community. Our community, on the other hand, must be constantly encouraged to have substantive, attentive discussions, so much needed today, and always.

The Odra-Niemen Association does everything it can to build, not to divide, to talk, not to yell at each other, to cooperate, not to antagonise. It doesn't always work out, it's not always easy, but it's always worth trying. Wherever I or our delegations are, we encourage cooperation across divisions, substantive debates on the directions and forms of joint community activities related to the development of the entire non-governmental sector. Organisations should always be challenged to strive wisely for our common cause, because these are the issues that will always unite us.

Do non-governmental organisations need cooperation with the NFI-CCSD?

The background to this article is five years of the work of the National Freedom Institute. Therefore, let me dedicate this paragraph to the ever difficult cooperation between a government institution and a NGO. How to use funds, resources of a state institution, not wanting to be accused by other NGOs of collaborating with politicians, which our community is so wary of. So, let me start from the beginning.

I don't know where or even if Odra-Niemen would be today if we hadn't been invited five years ago to a working meeting at the National Freedom Institute that was being created. I myself and several of my friends from different communities had the opportunity for the first time to speak in a broad forum about how difficult it is to operate in the third sector, how many underlying problems there

are. We had the chance to listen to other organisations, compare our own experiences and showcase our capabilities. And I talk about this constantly in many open meetings. What was needed was an institution focused on our issues, empowered significantly so that NGOs could be heard. This is not a laurel to NFI, but a statement of fact. We are always entitled as a non-governmental community to substantive criticism of the actions of any institution, especially NFI, but it is hard not to notice how much our sector has changed in these five years.

I am convinced that a pro-development program for non-governmental organisations emerged from those first working meetings. We have all talked about how poor we are, with no tools to work with, no funds to develop, no methods to anchor our own organisations in our local, national, transnational communities. Somehow, this has translated into a good programme of support for NGOs, which can and should be evaluated, but which helps a lot of organisations.

The Odra-Niemen Association also submitted its proposal to the Civic Organisations Development Programme (CODP) programme of direct support for the development of Polish civic organisations. We had this dream action plan for our own development long before the NFI-CCSD came into being. We were already a large structure, with several branches, with many important projects. We had established partnerships with excellent veteran communities, we had a multitude of volunteers and we were barely surviving. Old, borrowed computers, a dingy office and a lack of basic advertising tools did not build a good image and more confidence in the development of the organisation and the retention of young staff.

Our bid, although written with heart, barely qualified, but we got the grant. This three-year support did not solve all the problems, but it gave us a huge opportunity. In addition to gaining real tools, we got something else – an increase in importance in our communities. The purchase of simple tools, a change of image, a bit of training, the hiring of staff – these are the main team reinforcements we wanted. However, we felt the empowerment to fight harder for other programmes that were not available before, for new offices in Wrocław (community headquarters). Thanks to the

new headquarters, we have achieved a significant increase in credibility, which has allowed us to open up to many new activities.

I am not writing this to boast, but to show that this experience is the experience of many other organisations and, if only for this programme, I will always say that it is good that an institution like NFI has been established. It does not matter which political community builds a good place for NGOs. It is up to us whether we succumb to the influence of politicians or not, whether the grant gives us the chance to develop ourselves or to promote some political or ideological force.

I don't know if five years ago we would have survived this most difficult time for my community. I am pleased that we have made the most of this development support and wish other organisations such empowerment. There are many hardships ahead, things can still go wrong. However, I am totally rooting for the NFI to grow, build new programmes, and change the attitude of officials towards NGOs. This must always be based on a discussion with the third sector, sometimes very difficult, but who, if not community leaders, knows what is most needed in their communities.

Conclusion

As the Odra-Niemen Association we operate across divisions, we come from different communities, we are apolitical, but we respond to invitations from state institutions and from other ideologically distant organisations. We only discuss substantive topics related to necessary changes in the area of civic society. We build strong in-house teams and strong relationships with the community. Behind us are many years of difficult experiences, twists and turns, changes that have given us our own strong community, but also a vision of community organisation.

For us, the ideal NGO is an important actor in the local, national and transnational community. It is not a corporation, but a social organisation, working through a strong, motivated and committed team, which is not afraid of change and knows how to use modern

tools and technology. It remembers that its main objective is to work for the common good, not its own interests. It is a community not entangled in political wars and divisions. Finally, the ideal social organisation is one that continuously builds community. Being stronger it shares its experience with others, instead of competing, forms coalitions with partners, seeks solutions that are important and needed for the entire NGO community.

In our little world of the Odra-Niemen community, nine entities, the Patriotic Federation of more than 30 organisations, many other friendly circles, we try to put these ideals into practice, in many areas with great success, because there is no better place for idealists than social, non-governmental activity.



Ilona Gosiewska – head of the Odra-Niemen Association, co-founder of this organisation and of the Patriotic Federation. Pedagogue. In her university years, she was a member of the Independent Students' Association. Since the late 1990s, she has been organising, leading and supervising social projects. Moreover, she organises trainings and conferences for public institutions and business. She was awarded the Silver Cross of Merit (2016) and the Pro Patria Medal (2019). She was put forward for both decorations by the veteran communities. First-term member of the NFI-CCSD Council, as a representative of the non-governmental community.

How to effectively encourage community engagement— lessons learned during the pandemic

“You are an inseparable element” is our slogan from a mural in Pabianice, realised as part of one of the many grassroots projects of the “AGRAFKA” (Safety Pin) Volunteer Group. We created it together with the residents of the surrounding houses. Each hand filling in the outline of a puzzle that is part of the globe, filled the author with a sense of impact and community. Yes! Everyone is important! Everyone is valuable! Everyone has good in their heart...! Even though sometimes our thoughts and actions are not consistent with this.

Everyone is a GOOD Gardener!

I have been volunteering and engaging others in civic activities for 17 years. I meet different people every day, each of them is a beautiful Flower to me. This Flower has its roots and its life-giving source. It develops and grows in strength, after time it bears fruit and shares its beauty and fragrance with others. It also happens that if its needs are not “watered”, it slowly withers away. There are plenty of factors beyond human (Flower’s) control. However, there is a space where one can be a Gardener for oneself. Each of us needs a sense of purpose in life, some vitality independent of what we have on the outside, some fertiliser to feed us from the inside and give us strength when things are difficult. It is possible to live life by focusing on

completing tasks that serve only us, and achieving only our goals. However, the race to tick off the to-do list and the run “for something” and not “for the cause” are effective and bring short-term effects. For years, people have been looking for the most valuable activity booster – preferably one that works immediately! There are many suggestions that the world offers, the question is whether, and to what extent, they serve us.

Chasing after the advertisement of happiness, we may not notice that there are somewhat wilted, perhaps even a little dried-up flowers all around us. Suddenly, we find that a sense of influence limited to our individual being is not enough. Somewhere in our hearts there is then a desire, a power, a need... The need to do something Good! I firmly believe that every human being is inherently good, they just choose maladroit ways to fulfil their needs. I believe that everyone is made to live in a sort of a relationship, in a group, made to help. People need other people, and this brings them together with a thread that encourages them to support and to help each other. One can call it helping our species to survive. Some may feel this need more than others. Some may help on a one-off basis, others on a daily basis. There is still a perception that volunteering is selfless, that it is a one-sided giving without any personal interest. This belief, although it slowly being challenged, is still firmly in place. We feel ashamed when we hear that helping is also taking. After all, we don't want anything for ourselves. A selfless volunteer should therefore not fertilise the flowers – after all, we are the ones giving and we don't want anything in return. And what is it like in reality? I often say that this is why we have two hands, to give with one and take with the other. This balance is essential in order to maintain the good quality of the aid provided.

Are you reading this? Great! I will now try to take you to a wonderful Garden. A garden full of plants that connect and bind together all that is good. But how to create such a Garden? Let's start with the Gardener. Maybe you will become one too? Or maybe you already are one...?

Your land is a part of the great Garden

You have an influence! You are an Action, not a Reaction! Your small gesture means a lot! These are some of the many slogans of AGRAFKA, which I set up in 2006. Individual responsibility, self-esteem, building and nurturing intrinsic motivation, empathy and responding wisely to human injustice are all issues that we address in our group. This is where young people learn that they are important and have an impact in the world. By changing themselves, they change the whole world. Big statements? What if it wasn't just the words that confirmed it? What if there are enthusiasts who, according to the domino principle, move, incentivise, and truly change their community?

If you give a person the space to do something (land), prepare it properly (irrigation), provide tools and knowledge, but above all make them aware of the need they have (having a garden), then miracles start to happen. Our group works within eight departments (work with children, seniors, people with disabilities, projects, actions and animations, artistic department). Everyone has a smaller or larger piece of land here. Each piece is important and affects the whole Garden. It's just like a jigsaw puzzle. When one is missing, the puzzle is not complete.

Full of energy, with heads filled with crazy ideas, we were bringing people together and joining a variety of initiatives when suddenly the pandemic started. Most organisations had to re-brand, some suspended their activities. It was a very difficult time for the whole world. What do you do when hail falls on your garden or there is a gale that wants to uproot a plant? For the group, it was a culminating moment. However, it turned out that the time of crisis was a burst of great potential. Volunteers discovered a wealth of their new competences, which naturally revealed themselves while serving humanity. We kicked off with the #DbamOsiebie-Iseniorea (#ICareForMyselfAndASenior) campaign, consisting of an offer to do some shopping for the elderly. We consulted the purchasing procedure with the police and public health authorities and started acting. In addition to a bag with the shopping, each

senior received a card with a kind word. Once we felt the power and the need for this campaign, no one could stop us anymore. Day by day, more ideas were coming to life as part of our pandemic #COVIDaĆPomożemy (#COVIDHelp) campaign. The #4HandsTo-Help initiative was launched, where we walked dogs for people who were under quarantine. We also started helping kids learn remotely as part of the #ZdalniePomocni (#RemoteHelpers) initiative. We started a Facebook group called #NiewidzialnaRękaPabianice (#InvisibleHandPabianice), which was a space for sharing offers to help during this difficult time.

Our mission is to share positive energy with people, so as part of the #AgrafkaZaraża (#AgrafkaSpreads) initiative, we hung banners with positive thoughts in public spaces. We firmly believed that they would evoke smiles, give hope and reflection. People reacted to them in a truly wonderful way. We were getting messages that the initiative was a success. Local residents would come to us and thank us for our efforts. In the course of implementing our ideas, we received a lot of feedback related to the help we were providing. We received poems, pictures of children putting together a safety pin out of blocks, or happy dogs. This brought even more sunshine into our Garden and a sense that, no matter the circumstances, we want to be there to help.

Day by day, more and more residents of our city were joining us. We encouraged neighbourly help and support in the implementation of our initiatives. We found that more and more people wanted to help walk the dogs or do the shopping. When tasks were carried out on an ongoing basis, we prepared a reserve list of residents who waited on call, ready for a greater need for assistance. It was something amazing! In addition, the city guards pledged to help by delivering shopping and handing seniors cards with our contact details. Companies rushed in to help, donating protective equipment. It was with great surprise that we accepted disinfection fluids and masks from residents who had organised fundraisers to buy them. It was a touching surprise.

There were many initiatives similar to ours across the country. Lots of activists worked fruitfully on their piece of Land, creating

something amazing and extremely needed. This sense of influence is one of the most driving motivations for action. It gives the feeling that each of us can add something of value to the common Garden. “I won’t make all the seniors happy, but for this one lady, my help will mean the world”, said the volunteer who did the shopping for Danusia once a week. And this is the moment when we get additional fertiliser for our Land. This is when the desire to enlarge one’s piece of the Garden often arises.

During a storm it is the rain that waters the ground!

A crisis is a storm. If you don’t prepare for it well, it can do a lot of damage. Sometimes you see it coming beforehand. Sometimes it comes as a surprise. Our organisation brings together people who share a similar goal, but do not necessarily have similar ways of achieving it. The assemblage of diversity will become beneficial if we consciously manage it. Can the Gardener effectively prepare the Garden for the storm? Plant roots are key here. If they are strong and run deep, it is more likely that the plant will cope with the wind. The pandemic crisis in our case paradoxically brought a lot of fertiliser. This tremendous desire to help created space for creative initiatives. We have gone for close to 1,500 dog walks – regardless of freezing temperatures or snow. I remember that one of the Agrafka members rode her bicycle from another village in a snowstorm to walk a dog owned by a family under quarantine. This, to me, is proof of dedication and great inner motivation to change the world of this one particular family. We have also done the shopping hundreds of times, and are now reaping the fruits of this – relationships established with seniors are still nurtured today. For example, our volunteer baked angel wings with one of our “shopping” seniors, which they donated together for an auction for a sick girl. We still visit this lady to this day. The interpersonal relationship survived and this is also the added value of helping in a crisis.

We also encountered a lot of difficulties participating in our initiatives. Anxiety and fear of the unknown caused some volunteers

to give up helping “in the real world” altogether. Every member of the group had a choice – for the sake of their peace and comfort. Every decision of the volunteer was respected. When we couldn’t meet each other, support each other and recharge each other’s batteries, the “Agrafka Threads”, i.e. our relationships, weakened a lot. Group energy levels shifted. More individual help has begun. Logistics and organisation of initiatives have moved to the computer screen. People who joined us in the annual recruitment had few opportunities to feel the spirit of the group, so double the level of commitment was needed to bring the team together. At the time, we were strengthened by online meetings and members sharing their experiences of live initiatives. We knew we had a new mission, or rather a new way of doing it. All our previous initiatives were put on hold – we took up new ones, which for us were a small gesture, but for people in need of help – something incredibly important and necessary. Volunteers, according to their competences, decided to launch various initiatives. In the course of their implementation, new potentials were revealed. For example, a volunteer who loves animals could prove herself as a coordinator of a campaign to help dogs. For the first time in the group, she used her expertise as an animal behaviourist.

The effects of home confinement left a mark on the emotional life of children and young people. Social workers were strengthening their psyche through volunteering, it was the best mental health prevention at the time. We felt strongly that we were even closer to people. We learnt about their stories and experienced a sense of humanity. This pandemic greatly united us, awakened creativity and – despite the generally prevailing fear and sadness – gave us a sense of impact on the whole world (and certainly on the people of our city). What’s more: it has greatly energised our Land, adding fresh energy necessary for the growth of our plants. However, this process had to be managed well. First, the helpers themselves had to be taken care of. Empathy, trust and choice are key first steps in this. Volunteers had access to psychological support. We also talked a lot about the difficulties they encountered. I personally checked their anxiety and motivation levels. The second step is to organise

initiatives and delegate them well. The coordinators of the various initiatives knew how to carry them out step by step. Despite various difficulties, communication on an ongoing basis provided a sense of security. We also celebrated small successes and shared feedback from people. We fertilised the Land on an ongoing basis and although some plants could not flower at the time, we knew they would revive once the storm had passed. It was also the case that some volunteers were not able to be active this way at all. They badly needed live contact and did not do well under shutdown. Then the Flowers on some pieces of Land became so dry that they could not be saved. However, if the crisis experienced in the organisation is managed consciously and wisely, there is a great chance that it will strengthen us as a group and make us a space for growth and mutual enrichment.

What makes the Garden continue to be fragrant?

Finding a volunteer is not difficult. Nor is it to light a spark in a person. The greatest art is to keep the Fire burning. Every year we launch a recruitment drive to our group. In secondary schools, we organise a meeting for all first or second grades. Together with the older Agrafka members, we light a spark in young hearts. When I tell them what helping gives me, I see a spark in their eyes. We refer to the deepest human needs. Not everyone will be willing to rekindle that flame. It may be that it will simply smoulder for life. One-off or regular assistance is also valuable. After all, the most important thing is a daily pro-social attitude. However, I have had the experience that a real Fire is kindled in some of these people. How to sustain it? What can be done to keep volunteers motivated? This is a broad topic, but if one were to narrow it down to social initiatives, two key aspects would emerge for me.

Firstly: the *need*. It is the foundation and source of action. It is the mother of feelings. We live to fulfil our needs (sounds rather selfish, doesn't it?). Everything you do in life is an answer to your need. Since you are helping, there is an inner intention behind

it. For me – always good. By giving something to others, you feed yourself. There is nothing wrong with that! On the contrary, this beautiful relationship provides a sense of balance and reciprocity. If social initiatives continue to meet the needs of the community, the Fire will keep burning! Of course, it needs to be looked after by all parties. It is worth prioritising this effort not only in attracting but, above all, in retaining volunteers. I would like to refer here to the fragment about the Good Gardener. Volunteering is not selfless. The Gardener loves to nurture his Garden. He loves to watch plants grow. He rejoices when everything flourishes. His need for beauty, aesthetics and impact is completely satisfied. This satiation is a source of incredible feelings and emotions, and this energises and fuels motivation. Consequently, this translates into further fruitful initiatives.

What needs do social initiatives fulfil? It turns out that helping fulfils most of them. Now, if you think of one situation where someone has received your help, what comes up? Certainly very pleasant feelings that testify to fulfilled needs. I will mention just a few, dividing them into three groups, inspired by Marshall Rosenberg¹:

1. The need to be in touch with oneself, i.e. the need for self-expression, authenticity, creativity, development, self-acceptance, integrity, a sense of agency, meaning, learning, etc.
2. The need to connect with other people the need for acceptance, empathy, contact, connection, companionship, support, reciprocity, being noticed, being appreciated, etc.
3. Needs for the joy of life, i.e. group volunteering in its purest form: laughter, joy, lightness, fun, adventures, inspirations. In addition, there is a strong need for community, belonging, trust, understanding and being understood, and group strength.

The need for meaning, impact and sharing also comes to the fore here. These are the key intentions that keep the Fire burning. At *AGRAFKA*, but also in my recommendations for the Pabianice

¹ M. Rosenberg, *Nonviolent Communication. On the language of the heart*, translated. M. Kłobukowski, Czarna Owca, Warsaw 2022.

Volunteer Network, which I coordinate in our city, a diagnosis of needs will be a big help. There are various tools that can help with this (tests, quizzes, interviews, social surveys). Often, social workers are aware of their intentions. It is not uncommon, however, for social initiatives to meet far more needs than initially assumed. This is the wonderful adventure of volunteering.

Secondly: *successful volunteer management*. If I already know what need a volunteer is coming to me with (and I expect what needs will come out later), I can start a cycle of management focused in parallel on the development of the volunteer and the professionalism of the help they will provide. At AGRAFKA, we recruit once a year. After an initial interview examining the volunteer's needs, competences and expectations, they are issued with a so-called Agrafka Passport and begin a three-month trial period. During this time, the eager 'helper' takes part in a series of training courses on volunteer organisation and empathetic communication and begins an internship in the eight departments already mentioned. The senior volunteers who coordinate these departments make sure that the new volunteers feel safe and secure in the group, but above all that they try out all the initiatives so that, after the trial period, we adapt them together to the volunteers' interests and skills. Successful management also means delegating and effectively assigning tasks appropriate to the volunteer's competence. Ongoing attention to their motivation is also important. We have got a mentoring programme in our group. At the beginning, all volunteers were grouped into three-person groups with volunteers of various seniority. Newcomers are now being invited to coordinate tasks, with the older members assisting and supporting them in their undertakings.

Here's what Agata – one of our Golden Agrafka members, i.e. most committed volunteers – writes about motivation:

One of the Agrafka slogans reads: “the closer to the fire, the warmer it is”. I understand it as: the greater the commitment, the greater the motivation. This may seem to be in contrast to the common belief that engagement is secondary to motivation, that you first have to be motivated

to get involved in something. In my opinion, motivation and commitment drive each other. The more I am involved in an initiative, the more time, attention and heart I devote to it, the more this initiative is MINE. If, on the other hand, an initiative feels like MY initiative, it is created by me with commitment, then I am automatically more motivated to do it. I know from experience that it is worth starting to take action even when motivation is lacking, because it is very possible that this motivation will appear and grow in proportion to my commitment.

Crucial to me in encouraging social initiatives is to spread the mission. The slogan: “To light a fire, you have to burn yourself” for me is a reference to natural and authentic action, not a populist quote. The power of this phrase is revealed when you want to encourage people to help. Show them how it’s done – show it with your own actions and your energy, your passion.

Volunteer management is not only about knowing the group process, exploring individual competences, delegating tasks, managing conflict and crisis, working with emotions (these are very important but somewhat technical activities that the Gardener does). The most important thing for me is the continued belief that the Garden will be beautiful and bear fruit. Faith in the person – not only in the person we help, but also in the volunteer. It’s a huge amount of empathy, but also work done with passion. It’s seeing the potential in each person that they can share with others.

How to effectively encourage the creation of a shared Garden?

Gardening is a social initiative – here, everyone can become a Gardener, regardless of the size of the land they own. Here, every patch, every flowerbed, every pathway is important. Depending on how each piece of land is looked after, this is how the whole Garden looks and fulfils its purpose. Poles help willingly. I am not writing about

this because I have read many articles about grassroots pandemic aid. Nor am I writing about it in relation to the fact that I have watched many documentaries on TV about the abundance of aid for Ukrainians. I write because it is with an excited heart that I see this every day and am part of it. Together with volunteers and organisations, I create the space for this aid to happen. People want their Land! What's important here is the need to have an impact on the surrounding world. It is also important that each person has a choice about what they want to do with it. When we have it, the commitment and sense of responsibility grow. If you encourage others to take action, i.e. show the value of your Garden (social action, grassroots initiatives, projects, etc.) and offer them a seed (inspiration, inspiration and opportunities for action), you will start a beautiful process of creation. The Common (nationwide) Garden can be created in two ways.

1. WHEN YOU ARE A GARDENER TO YOURSELF, THAT IS, YOU HAVE YOUR OWN LITTLE FLOWER BED

I am tempted to say that every person has done a good deed at least once in their life, in a more or less conscious way. This one small step can be compared to a small flower bed. Of course, with each subsequent initiative for the benefit of another person, the Land grows in size. The Gardener involved in such a process can be motivated to take action by, for example, promoting civic initiatives. The citizen is told that there is a need for help and is put in a position to choose whether and how to respond to that need. It is worth adding that people are more willing to help those they know or are in some way connected to, if only geographically. This is why promotional initiatives of local NGOs are so important and can encourage people to become socially active more quickly. If there is already a desire to help, this can be undertaken in two ways. Some prefer to provide financial assistance for the sake of speed and convenience, while some are willing to get more involved and help in person. Both ways are valuable and effective.

AGRAFKA works very actively for the benefit of the inhabitants of Pabianice. It is not just about projects for people facing multiple disadvantages, but also about actions animating the local community. By this I mean direct contact with residents through initiatives dedicated to children, walks with people with disabilities, talks with senior citizens, flashmobs and social provocations that go directly to the individual and there may germinate some reflection or even a change in attitudes. Such a change may entail another change. Our mentees become volunteers. We believe – and we have had this experience in practice – that through our campaigns we are activating individuals to take part in a useful initiative, i.e. providing real help. The help of a single, committed grassroots person is an additional beautiful piece of Land that makes up a shared Garden.

2. WHEN YOU ARE OPERATING IN A LARGER GARDEN THAT CONSISTS OF MORE LANDS

If a person has the motivation and the time to work as part of a group, their piece of Land can be part of a larger Garden. It then joins more formalised organisations that provide assistance on a wider scale. Half of my life has been devoted to social initiatives. For many years, in doing so, I found help in dividing the people who come to me into two categories.

The first are the “buds” – people who are not yet confident in their skills and whose value is just being built. “Buds” do not yet see this value, they are looking for acceptance and reinforcement. They need a trusted and safe space to grow. The second category is “flowers”. They have already discovered their potential and want to share it. These individuals are confident and are open to more challenging tasks. Which of these flower forms are more valuable? There is a place in the Garden for both and each is the greatest value in itself. The buds will bloom beautifully by getting fertile soil, while the flowers will come to fruition and share their fragrance.

The transformation of the “bud” into a “flower” is beautifully told by a volunteer who has worked with our group for more than 10 years:

There are probably many sources of motivation to help, but in retrospect I can safely say that in my case, by helping others I wanted to help myself. It was a moment when I thought my life had little meaning, and helping others was supposed to give it that meaning. Over time, I found that being needed bore fruit not only in helping others, but also gave me the energy to take care of myself. Today, I get involved in initiatives that can change people’s perceptions about themselves, bring about change or provide an opportunity for change among people who, like me in the past, do not see the point or do not believe in their abilities. I believe that every positive emotion, smile, good gesture brings a change in ourselves and we become better for others too. Beauty begets beauty, goodness multiplies goodness, someone’s care gives hope.

When considering the transformation described above, it is important to bear in mind some generational differences. Young people are more and more often looking for a quick fix in satisfying their needs, they have difficulties with greater involvement and, with other attractive leisure activities, they have – paradoxically – less and less time to help. Of course, this is only part of a young community, but it has been growing rapidly over the course of several years. I think more work needs to be done nowadays to promote social initiatives, to prepare volunteers to help professionally, to gain more trust from people, but above all to support people more strongly in their self-acceptance and building a bond with themselves.

Conclusion

Social initiatives strengthen bonds, give confidence that we are all part of something great, and breed individual and social responsibility (both of which are motivators for change). A sense of meaning, impact, genuine joy and enthusiasm are all factors that effectively draw you into helping. The point of helping is to make a valuable contribution to one's own life and that of others. If we feel this strongly, we can encourage others.

How do you effectively encourage people to take up social initiatives?

1. It is worth showing the value of the help provided. The beauty of a garden that produces tangible fruit and flowers will motivate you to be part of it.
2. It is worth giving people the land and the choice of what to grow on it. When a person has the opportunity to help, they may or may not use the land. Giving space for social initiatives can already be motivating in itself.
3. It is worth raising awareness that every gesture, even a small one, is important and creates something great.
4. It is worth organising initiatives that directly involve individuals, social groups and the local community. Each group requires different forms of cooperation.
5. It is worth finding a way to retain volunteers. A good diagnosis of their needs, relationships and choice of tasks will significantly support them in maintaining their inner fire.
6. It is worth building a sense of social responsibility in people. They are then more likely to get involved.

Over the last few years, the face of social initiatives has changed. Thanks to the initiatives of the National Freedom Institute, volunteering in Poland is more recognised and appreciated. This is very important in terms of a systematic and long-term commitment to help. It is important to shape the idea of volunteering as something prestigious, regardless of age, education and function in society.

In order for social initiatives to flourish, there needs to be a balance in addressing the needs of donors (volunteer organisers,

coordinators and volunteers) and recipients. In this symbiosis, everyone will feel a sense of meaning and hope that together people can create beautiful and valuable things.

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Agnieszka Jaksza – pedagogue, sociotherapist, mentor, social worker, mediator in the spirit of “Nonviolent Communication”. Founder and president of the “AGRAFKA” Volunteer Group in Pabianice, which took first place in Poland in the Volunteer of the Year Competition and Solidarity Corps Coordinator of the Year. Deputy chairperson of the Forum for Organisations and Non-Governmental Initiatives, coordinator of the Pabianice Volunteer Network. Professionally, a manager of the Occupational Therapy Workshop of the Municipal Social Welfare Centre in Pabianice. Winner of 1st place in the Solidarity Corps Coordinator of the Year category in the Łódź Voivodeship.

The role of NGOs in creating civic diplomacy

The shaping of relations in international sphere by the public, through **civic diplomacy**, is a subject that eludes intuitive understanding. Each of us grasps an indefinable understanding of the word “**diplomacy**”. It is an art that has been practised in relations between states for centuries, encased in etiquette and symbolism. The public is informed every now and then about the interactions of heads of state or ministers. So how does civic diplomacy differ from traditional diplomacy? Are there any other kinds of diplomacy?

To arrive at an answer to this question, I feel obliged to discuss the concept of **public diplomacy**. It first appeared in 1965 in the work of Edmund Gullion, a professor at the Fletcher School of Law & Diplomacy of Tufts University. According to the information on the website of the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, public diplomacy “[...] encompasses activities [...] which, by shaping public attitudes and public opinion abroad, aim to gain understanding and support for Polish *raison d'état* and the foreign policy of the Republic of Poland. The use of soft power mechanisms in public diplomacy, such as the promotion of Polish culture, history, science and innovation, the Polish language, education, sport, tourism and the economy, helps to build a positive image of Poland abroad and good international relations.”

The emergence in the 20th century of societies governed by democratic means, the development of mass media and, consequently,

methods of influencing entire societies through them, must inevitably have led to a desire to use such means in the inter-state game. Indeed, the concept of public diplomacy refers to issues pursued by traditional governmental diplomatic structures, but through non-traditional methods. The task is to arouse public emotions in order to shape public opinion for diplomatic, i.e. political, gain. It is today one of the basic elements of the international game, an instrument used by the governments of all countries in the world. The essence of public diplomacy is to attach great importance to the favourable image of a country in the eyes of the democratic society of another country. The image impact can be visualised with a simple example. Any military intervention by an ally of a democratic state becomes part of public debate in that state. This is when public emotions start to influence decision-makers. It is easier to convince the public to support a state that has a widespread good reputation in society. In the world after 24 February 2022, when Russia's invasion of Ukraine began, the issues serving as examples take on significant importance.

We should consider the above conclusions in the context of Poland. Clearly, the opinion others in the world have of our country is the subject of a political game. We have seen this particularly vividly over the last few years. Positive signals related to the assistance provided to refugees from Ukraine or the fact that military equipment is being sent there strengthen Poland's image in the world and provide a substrate for gains in traditional diplomacy. The opposite tendency is marked, for example, by information disseminated in Western scholarship regarding Polish complicity in the Holocaust, aimed at linking the occurrence of such situations among the Polish population to the systemic and Nazi ideology-fuelled crimes committed by the Germans during the Second World War. Image issues may seem irrelevant on a day-to-day basis, but they can easily be combined with topics of vital importance to Poland's security, the economic development of our country and the fate of future generations. There is therefore no doubt that caring for Poland's good name abroad is one of the most important tasks facing us today – particularly in the context of the current geopolitical situation.

Citizen diplomacy is directly linked to the space outlined above. The key difference is that civic diplomacy is not carried out by diplomatic services within government structures, but by NGOs or individual citizens. For this reason, these initiatives are not often steered and coordinated by diplomatic authorities. Grants and subsidies remain possible steering tools. In contrast, a common field with public diplomacy is image work and grassroots networking. The polarisation of societies along world-view lines logically divides entities in the civic diplomacy market according to the political division that exists in a country. The degree to which the activities of these organisations coincide with the apolitical *raison d'être* of the state from which they originate is a function of the maturity of the political culture of the home state. When this culture sets goals in international politics that are unquestionable at the level of domestic political dispute, then the risk of conflicts of interest between the practitioners of civic diplomacy and those in power decreases.

In the above argument, the division of the discussed entities into two groups has already been outlined. In the first case, civic diplomacy is an extension of the area of influence of public diplomacy and supports government action. In the second one, it acts as a counter to traditional diplomacy. Both groups are ideologically motivated, as the source of contradiction and synergy flows from a worldview.

There is another context to consider in the civic diplomacy-public authority relationship. In developed countries, there is a consensus between the opposition and the authorities on the most important directions of state policy (e.g. the strengthening of the eastern flank by the US). In Poland, a change of government means a strong re-evaluation of policy directions. This trend is causing both sides of the political argument to build civic communities practising civic diplomacy. In the absence of a common strategy at the state level, we are involved in emotional twists and turns in decision-making depending on the views of the groups in power. In my opinion, this element is a high risk factor and I believe that if it is impossible to reach a consensus on the most important issues at the political level, then this consensus should be developed at other levels, for

example at the civic level, which may lead to the use of democratic mechanisms to influence policy makers. However, this requires a highly developed political culture among citizens.

Civic diplomacy strengthening the actions of the home state

Obviously, the most vivid example of such activity today are the activities of Ukrainian non-governmental organisations, celebrities and thousands of ordinary citizens in the countries of the broadly understood West, who are putting pressure on governments and organising the Ukrainian community in order to support Ukraine in the war with Russia. In this case, the synergy of government and civic forces was uniquely powerful – to the benefit of Ukraine.

Another example of the correlation of state policy and civic diplomacy is Germany. The German government and non-governmental organisations in central and eastern European countries have set up a network of third sector organisations to support the policies of the government in Berlin and German business concerns.

There are many non-governmental organisations and individuals practising civic diplomacy in Poland. Some of them function according to the logic of the Polish *raison d'état*, some against it. Without attempting to assess these attitudes, I would like to give an example of three projects that provide a perspective on the issues of supporting the Polish *raison d'état* developed at the Janusz Kurtyka Foundation that I run.

Our most important project is the Janusz Kurtyka Award. We have created a multifunctional design tool to promote the best books by Polish historians in the world. Our goal is to expand their linguistic availability and promote unique historical items published on the domestic market. Having knowledge of our own past, we intuitively believe that other people also have it, that they know us. Perhaps it is for this reason that there are people in Poland who claim that Polish history is known in the world. The reality, however, is different. Our past is known only episodically, and this episodic knowledge is

not common knowledge. Unfortunately, the problem also affects the academic community. The reason for this is the insufficient number of publications by Polish historians available internationally. There is a particular lack of books on recent history. And yet it is precisely with this historical period that Poland's greatest problems in terms of the lack of knowledge of our past among our international partners are associated. Is it any wonder, however, that we hear many opinions about the history of the Republic of Poland that outrage us, since for so many years we have not taken care to ensure the availability of Polish research in international scholarly circulation?

Janusz Kurtyka was aware of this state of affairs. As President of the Institute of National Remembrance, he initiated the translation of important books published by the Institute into English and organised international conferences with the participation of Polish researchers. We go one step further. Not only do we translate, but also publish books by Polish authors in publishing houses in other countries. We care about the scale. We collaborate with publishing houses with an established track record and global reach. We organise the marketing of books published by us in the United States, Great Britain, Germany, Austria and Switzerland. In each of these countries, we are in contact with universities and scientific organisations. We are building a network of contacts and exchanging views. We believe that only the truth is interesting and that there are many people in the world who are interested in it. It is my deep conviction that this project fulfils the assumptions of the Polish *raison d'état*, as it is difficult to reject the argument that Polish history should be recognisable in the world and be based on scholarly foundations.

On 24 February 2022, the Russian Federation launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine, leading to the outbreak of the largest armed conflict in this part of Europe since the end of the Second World War. On the same day the Janusz Kurtyka Foundation issued a statement declaring its solidarity with the heroically fighting Ukrainian people and condemning Russian aggression. However, our initiatives were not limited to this declaration. The war triggered an unprecedented solidarity between Poles and Ukrainians,

independent of colour or political persuasion. It was a special manifestation of what *raison d'état* is for us – at its democratic and popular best. The timing made history and the course of events accelerate. Things that happened would have been considered unexpected just a few weeks earlier. One of these was when I received a proposal from Frederick Zoll, Honorary Professor of the Faculty of Law at the University of Ternopil, to participate in a coordinated action to assist the Ukrainian Territorial Defence and the civilian population of Ukraine. It was the Faculty of Law at this university, whose staff had started active military and community service, that became a key point of contact for us. Since 3 March 2022, we have been co-organising a large-scale action to support Ukraine in the fight against the Russian invaders, which consists in collecting money and necessary items. The collected donations are used to finance the purchase of the most necessary items for the civilian population and the Ukrainian Territorial Defence.

One of the first major projects such as this one was the purchase of a van, which was delivered to representatives of the Ukrainian Territorial Defence on 12 April 2022. This vehicle is being used to transport humanitarian aid throughout Ukraine, including the Donbas region, which is where the heaviest fighting is taking place. In addition, thanks to the donation from the PKO BP BANK Foundation, at the end of July 2022, the Foundation managed to acquire another four vehicles, which were immediately handed over to Ukrainian activists. To date, this has been the biggest achievement of the entire campaign. These vehicles, like the van delivered in April, will be used to transport humanitarian aid and provide all kinds of support to the people of Ukraine, especially in the Ternopil and Donbass regions. In turn, the funds were used to purchase various equipment, in particular, as requested by partners from Ukraine, civilian reconnaissance drones and observation devices.

The campaign to support Ukraine is ongoing and will continue. We believe that it is the duty of the Polish state and the non-governmental sector to help our neighbour, if only for the geopolitical aspects that make us view Russian aggression with fear. In addition, the bestial crimes of the invaders trigger the impulse to help people

in need. We have achieved another extremely valuable result – we are acting in this action across political divides, in a real way providing support to neighbours terrorised by Russian gunfire. This is a classic example of civic diplomacy in practice – citizens of two countries through a non-governmental channel acting in a space of synergy with government policies.

The Janusz Kurtyka Foundation also undertook the implementation of the “Seeds of History” project. Its aim is to create a network of Polish diaspora organisations that will work together to systematically build a positive image of the Republic abroad by increasing knowledge of its history. We are creating a network of Polish organisations in the USA, Canada, the United Kingdom, Germany, Austria and Switzerland in order to work together in the long term to strengthen a positive image of Poland. The recipients of the project are Poles raised and living outside Poland, who do not speak Polish but still identify, at least on a general level, with Polishness. By providing them with knowledge of their native history through books and lectures on Polish history, we wish to bind them closer to the Republic of Poland and make them ambassadors of its good name in the foreign environments where they live every day. The second target group is people from outside the Polish community who, in the opinion of the network’s member organisations, should be supplied with reliable information on our national history. In this respect, Polish organisations are natural intermediaries for the diffusion of knowledge. This is the practical involvement of Polish national minority communities in carrying out activities in the space of civic diplomacy.

Civic diplomacy versus home state action

However, getting a complete picture of civic diplomacy will not be possible without considering the other pole. When the interests or views of activists conflict with the policies of a country, a paradoxical conflict arises. This is because a situation arises where actions are taken in the international arena that are incompatible with the

actions of the government, and yet this is called diplomacy. To better illustrate this paradox to the reader, let me quote an excerpt from the description of the *Civic Diplomacy in Central and Eastern Europe* panel organised by the Batory Foundation as part of the International Forum entitled *Europe with a View to the Future 2021*:

[...] They [populist politicians] consolidate their electorates around nationalist slogans and fuel distrust of their neighbours. The consolidation of these trends threatens the interests of societies for which, over the last three decades, cooperation and mutual contacts have become a matter of course and an important part of everyday life. It is also a challenge to the peaceful coexistence of both the nations of Central, and Eastern Europe and the minorities living there. It is therefore necessary to strengthen all forms of civic diplomacy, which will create bonds stronger than current politics. Relations between nations are too important to be left to diplomats alone.

The description contains a clear criticism of government policy, conducted from the position of ideological disagreement with the official line. Traditional channels of diplomacy are also criticised. The authors point out that we need to take matters into our own hands. In particular, the tendency to appeal to a wider international community representing a common view, often backed by the authority of an international institution, is common among those with a left-wing and liberal worldview. An example is referenced by these communities, on various domestic policy issues, to the European Union after the elections were won by the right wing in Poland. This appeal takes various forms – one of which is precisely the civic diplomacy carried out by NGOs directing their message to the societies of other countries.

In the group of cases of inconsistency between the government and organisations conducting activities within the framework of citizen diplomacy, there is also a subset of organisations created by political dissidents in the developed countries of the broadly

understood West. These are organisations formed by refugees from countries ruled by dictatorships, such as Russia, North Korea, Belarus or China. These groups act against the governments of their home countries, but unlike the examples related to ideological disputes, this concerns elementary issues – violations of fundamental rights in the classical sense, intimidation of a society functioning in an atmosphere of permanent surveillance with prison and physical violence. Political dissidents, often at the risk of their own lives, take action in foreign countries in the interests of their own nation in order to build extra-regional contacts with the outside world.

Can civil diplomacy, in opposition to the actions of one's own state, be unequivocally assessed? I am deeply convinced that this is impossible. The left-wing activists seem to think that their fight against the right-wing in the USA is the most important thing. Just like Belarusian dissidents feel about fighting a dictator. Objectively speaking, however, this first person is in no danger. The other person's family may be in danger and they risk the destruction of all life as they have known it. The actions of dissidents are also aimed at answering the question: what comes after the dictator? They seek to provide this answer using mechanisms developed in democratic countries.

Citizen diplomacy can be used to pursue policies in line with or against the *raison d'être* of the state. It can support or oppose government policy. We have not yet developed mechanisms for debating borders. The definition of a common *raison d'état* has also not been debated in Poland. The current situation in many places is slipping out of the framework of a dispute over views, and actions in the space of civic diplomacy are starting to really damage Poland in the long term. Every democratic government is controlled by the vote of the people. It is then that an assessment of the harmfulness of its policy is made. NGOs with human and financial resources are beyond such control. It is impossible to assess the harmfulness of their actions. On the one hand, it is a great treasure – being able to proclaim your views without being dependent on politics. On the other hand, however, history teaches us that there are limits to self-restraint. Indeed, violation of this will be detrimental to Polish

society. It is therefore necessary to talk about creating a code of good practice, boundaries and goals in the space of civic diplomacy for the entire Polish NGO community. It is important to talk about what constitutes the *raison d'être* for the political community of the Republic of Poland. The time of war will be conducive to this debate. Images from Ukraine remind us of the original meaning of concepts and make us realise what patriotism is.



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The viability of the idea of the Folk High School in contemporary Poland

As is usually the case in life, ideas survive as long as there are people who share them, understand them and want to live for them [K. Czyżewski]

The five-year anniversary of the NFI-CCSD makes it possible to return to the values and assumptions expressed in the preamble to the Act establishing the Institute. It states that “Civic society is a common space that serves the practice of civic virtues [...]” and that “The Polish State strives for the balanced development of civic society both territorially and thematically, giving special protection to small organisations that propagate civic ethos and nurture local heritage”. It seems that these two statements are central to understanding the idea and meaning of Folk High Schools, and the values behind the Institute’s mid-2020 Programme to Support the Development of Folk High Schools.

I will therefore try to describe the idea of the Folk High School in this context, its relevance here and now for the “common space for practising civic virtues”. All this – from my/our point of view and place. The Kashubian Folk High School (KFHS), to whose practices I refer, is an example of a Grundtvig boarding school situated in the forest, “in the middle of nowhere”. For 40 years we have been operating in rural areas of Central Kashubia, which have undergone and are undergoing rapid modernisation. Today, it is a challenge to find a traditional farm. Communal villages are more like small hybrids of a village and a city. There is a growing “new settlement” from the Tri-City metropolitan area. This is accompanied by a change in

the position, activity and awareness of rural women for whom the Kashubian Folk High School operates.

The evident improvement in quality of life has its downside: it is the breakdown of ties already at the grassroots community level. For years, we have been observing the deteriorating state of neighbourhood communities (losing touch, decline in activity) and the “atomisation” of neighbourhoods – neighbours locked away in their “mansions”, in front of big TVs. The expanding modern settlement is creating new divisions between “locals” and “visitors”. Progressive polarisation (exacerbated by COVID-19 and the war in Ukraine) is also fostered by the rural model of communal local policies. The participatory model, i.e. based on dialogue and consensus, is quite widely recognised as an inefficient waste of time and energy. The tool for meeting social needs becomes a competition to gain “access to the ear of the Mayor”. There is a mechanism at work that strengthens the processes of polarisation and atomisation of communities at the lowest level. Residents stop believing in their agency and the sense of engaging in collective action.

Grundtvig University

What is a Folk High School? Few are brave enough to willingly answer this question. This is because the Folk High School has taken so many different forms that it is difficult to fit them into a single formula¹.

The very concept of a “Folk High School” (an out-of-school adult education institution) ceased to function in the education system after the transformation of the 1990s, and the ones that survived became part of the NGO sector. After 1990, Folk High Schools, like all NGOs in Poland, compete in competitions for public funds to fulfil their mission. As of June 2020, they have been operating mainly on

¹ T. Pilch, *Czym jest uniwersytet ludowy?*, in: *Uniwersytety ludowe w Polsce do roku 1989. Antologia tekstów źródłowych*, ed. T. Maliszewski, Ogólnopolska Sieć Uniwersytetów Ludowych, Adamów–Grzybów–Mierzyn 2021, p. 229.

the basis of the “Government Support Programme for the Development of Folk High Schools 2020–2030”. The programme refers to “Grundtvig” Folk High Schools and the Grundtvig method, directly and without doubt indicates the source of inspiration contained in Grundtvig’s thought and developed by successive generations of educators.

An advantage of the Support Programme for the Development of Folk High Schools is that it leaves it up to the Folk High Schools to decide on the areas and directions of their activities. In its current form, the Programme pursues horizontal, universal values, leaving each school with a freedom of programme and a choice of resources in search of a response to the needs of its audience.

The Grundtvig Folk High School, as we understand it, does not exist to provide ready-made answers. It exists to accompany participants at one brief moment in their journey towards a better understanding of themselves and their place in the world. And this is only possible in a relationship with others. So we ask, we listen, we talk to potential students about their needs, looking at them through the prism of values that we consider our own at KFHS (democracy, freedom, equality, subsidiarity, solidarity, dialogue, partnership, respect for the heritage and memory of the place we live in).

Not all course participants have to share these values, and in fact not all of them do. And yet they become our students. They work together, despite the differences in beliefs that divide them. This is a reward for us and a measure of success.

The Folk High School is and is intended to be a home for the students. Not just a place of education. In practice, this means that the shorter or longer courses we offer always involve being “under the same roof”. We are working towards the creation of a learning community. Our goal is for students to build and develop mutual relationships by living together, learning, eating meals, talking. The Folk High School is education in a place where you are welcomed like an expected, good friend. We are very keen for our students to feel at home when they cross the door of KFHS in Wieżyca. We try to show how and why their presence and participation in activities is important – to show that we are interested in who they are and

what they need, and that they can have a say in how our educational programme is delivered. This “feeling of being together at home” of the participants is a key element for us. The foundation for the success of the entire educational process.

Active civic virtue at a Folk High School [FHS]

We can get the best idea of the nature of education and education for life by asking ourselves what is needed for the members of the People’s Assembly to grow into their tasks and functions [N.F.S. Grundtvig 1834]².

Growing up to the “functions and tasks” that Grundtvig wrote about, we understand and try to realise at KFHS, as education for building and developing relationships in communities – starting from the lowest level, which is the village/neighbourhood. Active civic virtue in contemporary forms of the “people’s assembly” is the horizontal goal of the educational process at the Kashubian Folk High School. This means that in our classes we aim, on the one hand, to build a sense of community among the participants (community of learners) and, through the competences acquired, knowledge, skills, awareness and relationships built, to encourage learners to take up/continue local activities. In short: at the beginning, you learn to be an active “citizen” of a community of students and lecturers. Later on, you learn to share it with others.

The starting point and basis of our courses, e.g. the Folk High School for Active Women (FHSAW), is always the residential nature of the education and, further, the work on awareness and the development of one’s own resources. We strive to enable participants to gain practical experience (planning and executing community micro-projects), we give them the right to make mistakes and, more importantly, to change their beliefs and aspirations, with which

² P. Kowzan, *Światopogląd Grundtviiga w świetle polskich tłumaczeń jego pism – implikacje dla ruchu uniwersytetów ludowych*, in: *Uniwersytety ludowe – pomiędzy starymi a nowymi wyzwaniem*, ed. T. Maliszewski, M. Rosalska, Adam Marszałek Publishing House, Toruń 2016, p. 183.

participants come to class. In the long term, this means changes in thinking about oneself and one's role, and creating an opportunity to "actively shape" the local community (village, commune, district), e.g. by animating local groups or associations or performing public functions.

Our 40 years of experience in running this type of activity shows that references to the memory of place (the "Rural Forges of Memory" programme) are extremely important in the educational process of a Folk High School. Not only as a good "anchor" for work among the local community, but - in the longer term - as an effective "tool" for local community integration. In today's era of polarisation, appealing to the memory of places that have positively distinguished a village, exploring handicraft talents or artistic passions around cultural heritage and language, serves well to build relationships.

The integrating/networking role of the Folk High School is also important, as it can be a "non-obvious" place to pursue artistic passions or share knowledge. Referring to the example of our own backyard, we can show that we draw on the competence and knowledge of our lecturers from various worlds, offering them work in the implementation of individual courses. There is no shortage of such enthusiasts in rural areas, and their ideas very often do not fit into the focus and formats of local educational establishments or cultural institutions. This should be used as part of the Grundtvig Folk High School advantage.

What's next for the development of Poland's Folk High Schools?

[...] in the process of creating and formulating ideas, conflicting opinions and viewpoints will arise and solutions must be found. A wise man once said: "Democracy teaches us to respect and endure the freedom of others to hold opinions different from our own!"³

Certainly, the curricular freedom and autonomy of Folk High Schools today is the key and the basis for the "viability" of this form of adult education, regardless of where and for whom the school works. In this context, an undoubted plus of the NFI-CCSD Government Programme for Supporting the Development of Folk High Schools is the possibility of implementing long-term projects and supporting activities related to their mission, as well as enabling institutional development of the institutions. However, the hopes about the functioning of Grundtvig Folk High Schools in a non-competitive community that accompanied the creation of the Programme are problematic and still remain a dream.

The root of the problem, in my opinion, is the carelessness with which the Programme's definition of a Folk High School is treated. Of course, talking about "Folk High Schools" is difficult because they are unique and are largely treated as original projects. So there are as many opinions as there are schools. However, this difficulty is further exacerbated by the absence of the very concept of a Folk High School in the legal system of public education.

When embarking on the Programme, however, it was decided not to bring this issue into the discussion. In the following competitions, access to funds is open to all entities declaring to function as an FHS and/or to carry out educational activities in the Grundtvig school formula, or declaring their intention to do so. Verification of the truthfulness of declarations of entities applying for support takes

³ K.Ch. Aegidius, *Democracy and Folk High Schools* [text based on the content of a speech at a conference to mark the 100th anniversary of Folk High Schools in Poland, Thyregod 18.09.2021].

place at the level at which applications are evaluated and is left to the discretion of the evaluators.

The logic of the Programme's financial support mechanism leads to a "snowball" effect. A single financial allocation supports both the development programmes of so-called "operating schools" and the creation of new schools, as well as networks and local initiatives. As a result, an increasing number of organisations will apply for funding for the "operation and activities" of schools in future competitions. Without increasing the Programme's financial resources, the amount of grants will decrease significantly. Therefore, additional criteria will have to be written into the regulations of the next competition to differentiate the amount of support for "old" and "new" schools. In the absence of other mechanisms to subsidise Folk High Schools, the Programme will be another version of a "technology incubator". However, the assumption that schools that have received support will achieve a degree of institutional development that guarantees their sustainability and survival beyond the end of the Programme is, in my view, even less likely than for start-ups (nine out of ten start-ups fail)⁴.

It also appears that the mechanism for supporting small, local initiatives (Priority 4) does not serve the Programme's objectives well, as it overlooks the role of operating Folk High Schools. It is not a question of funding going exclusively to the schools, but of these local ventures influencing and stimulating the development of the social impact of the Folk High Schools, realising the potential of the synergy of activities. Meanwhile, grants go to organisations declaring the completion of planned activities "using the Grundtvig method", with no systemic connection to the activities of the institutions themselves. For this reason, the funds, which are small in total, are further dispersed. As a result, bearing in mind the structural problem of the scarcity of funds for the activities of the third sector in Poland, we are faced with the effect of "grantosis", i.e. reaching for funds from the Programme only because they are available, and

⁴ *Startup Failure Rates* [online] <https://www.embroker.com/blog/startup-statistics/> [accessed: 25.08.2022].

their acquisition is not necessarily related to the idea of the Folk High School.

The words of Ignacy Solarz in 1937 become more topical in this context:

The name “Folk High School” has become very popular in our country in recent years, becoming all too common a title for different types and values of courses. It can be seen [that] this is influenced on the one hand by the news of the importance of Grundtvig schools in Denmark and even already in Poland, and on the other hand it acts [as] an appealing title, just like the various “academies”, celebrations and “conferences”. [...] Hundreds of them have already tried out life as folk, country, Sunday, evening, winter, agricultural, radio [schools], etc., but they are hardly any different, apart from the name, from the traditional popularisation courses, which teach, give general, professional, instructor or “leader” news. The name alone cannot work magic and only creates harmful confusion. A rural school – if it is not a Grundtvig school – is not a rural school⁵.

As if the problems highlighted above were not enough, slogans such as “a Folk High School in every commune” have begun to appear in the public sphere. These are not new slogans. It is worth recalling the words of T. Pilch from 1982: “If we wanted to have as many Folk High Schools as any Scandinavian country, there would have to be exactly 600 (say: six hundred) of them in proportion to the population of Poland. We have 10”⁶.

I don’t think we need a thousand or six hundred ‘Folk High Schools. We need a consensus across the divide on the value, role and importance of the institution, Peter Mogensen, a teacher at

⁵ I. Solarz, *Wiejski Uniwersytet Orkanowy*, Drukarnia Oświatowa, Warszawa 1937, p. 9–10.

⁶ T. Pilch, op. cit., p. 234.

Brenderup Folk High School, said, referring to the rationale behind the Danish law on Folk High Schools:

Students and teachers live together for so long that everyone has to show themselves as a person; it is impossible to hide behind an assumed role. People have time to discover that a quick assessment at a first glance is not always correct/appropriate, that people from other social classes, different age groups, and often from other geographical areas have resources and values that pre-conceived notions did not even allow people to imagine. A person also discovers that “others” can be annoying, thinking only of fun, terribly passive – or active, or unbearably serious. And a person also discovers some part of I in everything. A person discovers that their world and actions matter – to others and to themselves⁷.

Without dialogue, or more precisely without the ability to listen and to be aware of the differences in people’s values, the most important step in the development of schools is not possible, namely the recognition that we can carry out actions together for the benefit of our community. I think this is the reason why today, in a situation of general uncertainty and polarisation of opinion, the value of the education provided in Grundtvi Folk High Schools is recognised – realised by listeners and communities of people seeking a friendly and safe place for themselves.

Conclusion

Grundtvi Folk High Schools today are a small part “of the “[...] common space for practising civic virtues” mentioned in the introduction.

⁷ P. Mogensen, *Duńskie Folkehøjskole*, in: *Uniwersytet Ludowy XXI wieku. Poradnik metodyczny. Publishing series: Metoda uniwersytetów ludowych*, vol. 3, ed. T. Maliszewski, zespół OSUL, Adamów–Grzybów–Mierzyn–Radawnica–Wieżyca–Wola Sękowa 2022, p. 28.

They should be local centres building what K. Czyżewski called “connective tissue”. Characterised by autonomy, with the freedom to shape their programme and public support, they can become an important component in supporting civic participation in peripheral (disadvantaged) areas. Universities of this type respond to needs that are not (cannot be) addressed in municipal or district policies. Thus, they fill a gap in the system of public facilities and cultural and educational institutions. Moreover, with their freedom and autonomy, they can respond quickly and flexibly to the challenges and effects of successive crises.

Realising the potential inherent in this form of adult learning is a challenge that takes time and therefore long-term thinking. Today, there is an opportunity to do so for the first time since 1990, thanks primarily to public support for schools from the Government’s dedicated Support Programme for the Development of Folk High Schools. However, let us not look for innovation at all costs in this aspect. Particularly in the dissemination of new ways of working, tools and techniques, without first answering the questions of whether and how they will actually serve the sustainability of the change. The new is often the enemy of the good.

I think that if it is possible to ‘root’ the Folk High Schools in their socio-cultural community and make them capable of independent development, this would be a truly innovative dimension of the social change envisaged in the Programme. Rather than chasing innovation, let us focus on creating mechanisms to ensure the sustainability of schools of this type in Poland. Let’s start talking about a model for how to operate and how to finance their activities in a stable way. The very idea – to refer to the motto of this text – will certainly survive. But it’s not just about survival.

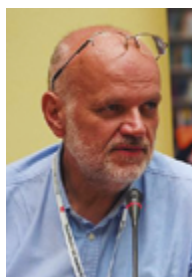
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Scouting traditions and values as a response to the challenges of the modern world – the challenges of scouting in today's world

Do you know how many people have set foot on the moon?

Twelve.

How many of them were scouts?

Eleven!

For more than a hundred years, the Scout Movement has been shaping successive generations of young people. Times have changed, the geopolitical situation has changed, trends have changed. The Scout Educational System has worked well despite the changing environment. It still remains relevant in shaping young people's attitudes, including through the example set by the instructor, growing in a peer group while creating individual paths for development, challenging themselves, living according to values and principles chosen forever. We are educating for the future. We are educating for a courageous and considerate adulthood. I think the best way to show how scouting is coping in the modern world is to describe the challenges it faces.

Understanding what scouting is

When asked if they know what scouting is, almost every person's answer is affirmative. But are they sure they know? We usually think of scouting in stereotypical terms – as helping an old lady across

the street, children walking with a map and asking for directions or honour guards at monuments.

Meanwhile, people who have gone through a scouting upbringing set ambitious goals for themselves in adult life and find ways to achieve them without difficulty, accomplishing great things in the process. They are also very good at dealing with day-to-day challenges, thanks to their ability to work with people, also remotely. They are not afraid to interact with other people, they are able to make quick decisions based on facts, draw conclusions and see the cause and effect sequence. It's a group of people who are goal-oriented, but who don't lose the values they were brought up with on the way. Self-development is important in scouting – this translates into a desire for continuous learning. Scouting emphasises seeing others and helping when needed. This enables a scout (and one is a lifelong scout) to share everything they have, including selflessly giving up their time for others, such as younger people. This, however, has the effect of looking at scouts as 'naïve' in today's consumerist world. Hence the question is often asked: "What's in it for you?" But is it a coincidence that of the twelve astronauts who have walked on the moon, eleven of them were scouts?

How do we show the world what scouting is?

This is very difficult. As difficult as it is to talk about the smell of a campfire, the excitement of reaching the first summit. Scouting takes place in scouting troops at gatherings, at scout leaders' meetings, at courses, at camps, in everyday life. It consists of acquired skills and knowledge useful for life thanks to skills and degrees. It is made up of small, seemingly unrelated elements that nevertheless form a great whole. It is this daily, systematic work of scouting that makes scouting act as a bandage, as medicine in emergency events.

Between the extraordinary and the admirable – such as helping refugees from Ukraine, flood victims, those in need in a pandemic or service after 10 April 2010 – there is a time when we are not treated as partners.

Few people see that the mobility and strength of scouting comes from the ordinary, everyday work of scout leaders, who, during the gatherings or camps, by their personal example, shape the attitudes of young people – openness to the world, openness to other people, readiness to serve.

When do people notice the value of scouting organisations? At spectacular emergencies, when committed, selfless hands are needed, one notices a service that arises from an emergency. And then one gives thanks for great deeds, and these, after all, are, quite simply, the consequence of daily leadership work. And it is this work that needs the most admiration, support and appreciation.

Scouting is made up of people – the members of the organisation – and they should decide what is best and most important for them. However, the decisions of organisations are judged by people who do not belong to these organisations but regard scouting as a common good. This looks like undermining the scout organisations' right to self-determination. Interestingly, this approach does not apply to other NGOs or even educational organisations.

Partnership

I once tried to arrange a meeting at the Ministry of Finance to find the best possible solution to a problem that affected ZHP [Polish Scouting and Guiding Association]. Nobody had time for us there. Finally, I said: "We have 6,000 scout groups, each scout leader works about 1,000 hours a year. Let's price each hour at PLN 10. Who should I invoice for this work – the Minister of Finance or the Minister of Education?" It worked, the problem was solved.

Yes, the external environment does not treat us as partners. And yet scout organisations are made up of people, 99.99% of whom are volunteers. In their private lives, they are students, teachers, doctors, engineers... you could go on for a long time naming different professions and specialities. I am convinced that if the scout community was taken to a deserted island, they would be able to

organise themselves and form a full state structure within a day. And yet, when we put on a uniform, we are looked at in a very stereotypical way.

Partnership is a great challenge that we have been facing for years. We are partners for school principals, teachers, parents. We are partners in the education of children and young people. We see that in many areas scout instructors and teachers could support each other – methodologically, program-wise, repertoire-wise, pedagogically. The only thing (definitely) different about our work is the voluntary nature and the idea.

More often than not, however, this cooperation simply does not exist. Because why should yesterday's pupil, who is today's scout leader, partner with his former teacher? Meanwhile, this former pupil, a scout leader, knows a lot more about the school than you might think. He had a chance to get to know the children from a completely different side, he knows what they are struggling with, what barriers they have, he is aware of what is going on in the school both thanks to other scouts and their parents.

We cannot always benefit from the support of the school – if only – by using its facilities. In the age of alarm systems replacing janitors, we stand no chance – alarms cannot be argued with. Parental attitudes also vary. If parents do not cooperate with the scout leader and treat scouting as one of their child's extracurricular activities, they doom many activities to failure in advance. For example, in order to punish the child, they forbid them from attending gatherings (the so-called ban on scouting), failing to see that scouting is about education and that systematic scout group work is as important as an English course or homework. For these reasons, a saying was created: “Niech moc będzie z wami i radźcie sobie sami!” [“May the power be with you and manage on your own!”].

The challenge – education

The purpose of scouting is to educate. Upbringing is a long-term process influenced by many people, events and situations, and the

final outcome of this process is most often known by the parents. Education cannot be crammed into a term of authority, so such a process by definition has no chance of becoming popular in the world around us. It is difficult to boast about the effects of work that is so spread out over time. The success of parenting is determined by three aspects: the educator (teaching staff), the children and the process between them.

Preparation of instructors/leaders

The strength of an organisation lies in its people. The strength of scout organisations is the teaching staff. Today's young people graduating from secondary school, despite having very wide access to knowledge, have much lower ability to get information. We live in a fast pace, what is important above all is today, the present moment. A teacher friend allowed students to use smartphones during a test. However, the questions were formulated in such a way that no simple answer could be found on the Internet. It turned out that access to the Internet had no effect on the test results. Young people have a problem with the correlation of cause and effect. The time spent at school has also been limited, today's children learn about two years less than the generation of their parents and grandparents - the number of days off from school has simply increased.

This is also one of the reasons why it is becoming more and more difficult every year to train teaching staff. Today, a scout leader's training is not only supposed to provide knowledge or skills for working in the scout method, but should also compensate for shortcomings of schools. It is also becoming more difficult to be a scout leader every year.

Good staff preparation is our constant and important need. Staff who will be willing to commit to the organisation for the long term. Staff that will consciously take responsibility for being the role models and shaping attitudes of the next generation. Good staff are the capital of any organisation, especially a scouting organisation.

Proper and systematic training and support for staff is a big task. It is also a challenge for the teaching staff (i.e. internal and external trainers), recruitment, finance or time. Scout coaches are volunteers. Most instructor training cannot take be conducted online because it requires a relationship with another human being and hands-on learning. In addition, the requirements we place on our own staff are increasing (this is due to legislation, among other things), so courses and training are getting longer. Staff turnover adds to this process.

Experience for a lifetime

There is a lot of talk today about non-formal, parallel education. How do you demonstrate the experience gained through the parallel education process? Young people, in choosing to be instructors and to serve, are at the same time making the decision that they will have to give up some things. While their peers earn money during the summer holidays, they go to camps as volunteers. When their colleagues go on holiday to warm countries, they go to a scout camp. When their peers start making money for themselves, they contribute to the activities of their scout group. Yes, it is their personal choice. However, if we put the competences of two school graduates on the table, one of whom is a scout instructor and the other is not, it turns out that the experience gained in scouting can be compared to a very rich professional experience in various areas. There are countries and companies where putting scouting on your cv is quite admired and a basis for, for example, being hired for a job.

The big challenge that scouting organisations still face is to showcase their work. And yet a scout camp is nothing less than a multifaceted project. A project lasting approximately 9–10 months, divided into phases and task groups. It requires signing contracts, negotiating terms and conditions, planning, managing budgets, identifying risks, settling on agreed terms and within a documented timeframe. It requires the ability to adopt external control, the ability to act in crisis situations, to implement corrective actions or recovery plans. It is the systematic year-round work with the

staff recruited to implement the project, it is their training, it is the recruitment of project participants. It is, after all, a project divided into many parallel ongoing tasks. So who is the camp commandant?

Support for parents and family

Today, the scout leader has to be an educator, a logistician, a psychologist, an educator, a methodologist, a financier, a lawyer, a mediator... We expect the scout leader, on the one hand, to be a big brother to the other scouts and, on the other hand, to work with their parents. Parents want to know everything that goes on in the scout group, while children want to keep certain things to themselves. More and more children are growing up in patchwork families, part of the time living with mum, part with dad, and it happens (quite often) that the parents have different visions of raising their child. You have to talk to the children – cubs, scouts – about everything: home, relationships with other people, pandemics, war, intercultural differences... The scout leader must know how to do it and be ready for it. During the pandemic, scout groups did not suspend their activities. They provided support for children deprived of working with a tutor. When war broke out in Ukraine and people over the age of 16 went to serve refugees at the border, at reception points, at railway stations (together with all the organisations, more than 24,000 people were involved in helping), the scout groups did not stop working either.

Long-term volunteering is a minimum of two years

Some time ago it was estimated that long-term volunteering is a systematic commitment of 6–9 months. This calculation does not apply to scout volunteering! It takes a minimum of two to three years to volunteer in a scout organisation as a scout leader (it can be as long as eight years), and undertaking such a role requires many years of thorough preparation and training beforehand.

This focus on upbringing and long-term scouting activities means that, for example, summer camps are not holidays, but a very important element of year-round work, attended by a scout group working together during the school year. Unfortunately, the leisure regulations do not take this into account. What's more – they are internally contradictory to us. Here is a simple example: a scout leader can go on a camping trip with their troop during the school year (i.e. from 1 September to a certain day in June – the end of the school year – excluding holidays) without any formalities, while the same camping trip, with the same programme and staff, under the same conditions, organised during the statutory time off from school, is already subject to the leisure time regulations! It requires many applications, approvals, documents with appropriate deadlines. And this is no isolated exception. Many laws do not take into account the specificities of the scout educational system. It is a great challenge for us not to lose anything from a system whose educational effect cannot be judged, while at the same time acting in accordance with the law.

Operating conditions

Scout organisations cannot live from competition to competition, they cannot depend on political will, nor can they be funded solely by the resources of their members and their parents. Education in scouting is a process for which continuity is very important. Whether the scout organisation receives a grant or not, the scout group continues its work. If there is no premises for gatherings, the following are available: the city park, the courtyard, the forest and private homes (for instance, what if the weather is extremely unfavourable and there has been a strong cold spell, wind or heavy rainfall for several weeks; who will let twenty lively children under their roof for free?). If there is no money for class materials, the scout leader buys paint or paper with their own personal funds, without looking at whether someone will reimburse them for the expenses. Remuneration for the work is not an issue – it is a voluntary service to children and young people.

Who benefits from the scout groups' work? Society as a whole, so it should feel the need to provide decent working conditions for instructors. It is estimated that there are approximately 145,000 people being active in scout organisations in Poland. System support amounts to just over **PLN 100 per child per year** (ROHIS). This is why I believe that the great challenge before us is to increase the diversification of the livelihoods of scouting organisations, and even more broadly of NGOs in general.

Laws and the scouting educational system

The more we try to describe and secure everything by law, the more difficult it becomes to work with the scouting educational system. This system has worked well for more than 120 years of scouting. It teaches resourcefulness, responsibility, communing with nature and focuses on individual development. Meanwhile, in the eyes of the law, a 15- or 17-year-old scout leader cannot conduct a scout group gathering on their own, as an adult guardian must be present. Today, during the summer campaign, instead of keeping traditional troop records, we fill in the camp tutor's diaries, although for us this is only a part of the year's work. In many places – due to sanitary requirements – we have had to give up kitchen duty, even though we live in an era where young people have never peeled potatoes, etc. Many more examples could be given. We live in a world of absurdities. When parents are asked what they want for their children, they will all say that they want their child to be resourceful, to be able to cope with difficult situations, to cope with life. However, we are not giving children the chance to shape and develop independence and resourcefulness. The scouting educational system shapes these and many other skills in young people, but scouting must not operate on the edge of the law, as it is an organisation whose aim is to raise responsible and upright members of society. The challenge (bordering on a miracle) is to keep up to date with all changes in the law and try to present the scout point of view during legislative work. Since the value of the scouting educational system is unquestionable,

it is worth thinking and working on a solution in the style of the scouting educational system's counter-narrative.

Balance between attractiveness and values

In order to keep up with today's world, in fact, to be half a step ahead of children, we have to be attractive in our own way. In scouting, the packaging is not the most important thing, yet what sells best is what is nicely packaged and easy. In order for scouting not to lose its role, values, that is, what is the essence of scouting, must be included in every form, even the best and most attractive. It is a value for the moment, like helping with the holidays, it is educational values in every action.

I was reminded of a story: "A parent comes to the scout leader and says that this year his son will go to a survival camp, not a scout camp. That he will live in a tent, he will have many challenges and tasks on the move, in the forest, and besides, survival is becoming trendy. Hmm. At a scout camp your child will also have an adventure, be in the woods, on the move, in tents, experiencing the same things as at a survival camp (and even much more!). Only the scout leader, when talking about the camp, usually emphasises the educational aspects and does not emphasise the pretty packaging. They show the camp from the perspective of the scout group and the continuity of the year-round work. Survival at a scout camp is just a tool to achieve an educational goal, while at a survival camp it is an end in itself. The great art is to strike a balance and not to succumb to trends.

Conclusion

If 1,000 scouts do something useful, nobody in the media will notice it. However, if one of these 1,000 scouts, while in uniform, were to light a cigarette or throw stones at a car, all the media would gather and the whole story would be covered for weeks.

Promoting the scouting movement is a challenge. I am thinking here of the promotion of positive actions, attitudes and behavioural patterns. In today's world, the media chase sensationalism, seemingly stigmatising it, but subconsciously promoting negative role models. And you rarely hear or read about the positives. Because it's not trendy, no one will be interested in it... Who of us, seeing headlines that begin with: "It's a dramatic situation", "He didn't expect it", "Disturbing reports", doesn't start to read such articles, just out of curiosity?

If we want more and more children to benefit from the educational experience offered by scouting, marketing is needed. Parents need to know and understand what scouting is. They determine the upbringing of their children, but it is the scouts who can be its ambassadors.

We live in a polarised world, the media in Poland are also divided. Against this background, scouting - by its very nature apolitical - stands out. This does not make it easy to work with the media, but we do not want to and cannot be pigeonholed. No one on the staff is interested in the political views of the parents, because we want to reach everyone. It is estimated that one person has an indirect impact on 10-15 people. If there are about 145,000 scouts in Poland, together they reach a group of more than 2 million people, so it might be worth showing this.

When, after many years, I stopped being the chief of ZHP (Polish Scouting and Guiding Association), I was wondering how to put on paper the experience I gained during this function. Another question arose: "How do you explain what the chief of the largest educational organisation in Poland does?". To this day I still have trouble answering it.

The Polish Scouting and Guiding Association in my time was an organisation of more than 110,000 people (cubs and scouts) and more than 12,000 volunteer instructors (aged 16+). The Polish Scouting and Guiding Association is an educational organisation with a dual legal personality, with 17 field branches (chorągwie), it is the founder of three foundations and the sole shareholder in two commercial law companies (companies and foundations are

intended to financially support ZHP), and it is the entity that runs the Scouting Museum.

If we take into account the number of committed adult members (volunteers), ZHP is in the top 20 companies in Poland in terms of the number of employees, and in the top 500 in terms of revenue. Impressive if we recognise that we are talking about a social organisation!

And so, as can be seen from this brief description, although in a scouting organisation we need to know management, fundraising, legislation, promotion, accountability, psychology, mediation, staff acquisition and education, our overriding aim has always been and will continue to be education. This applies to all instructors at all levels of the organisation.

Glossary

Scouts often use terms that are only understood within their organisations, hence the brief explanations of some of the terms used in the article.

camping trip – an excursion lasting at least two to six days and involving at least one – up to five – overnight stays, not necessarily (but often) in field conditions, schools, hostels.

troop (scout troop, explorer troop, cub scout group) – a unit within the structure of a scout organisation which brings together scouts. A team consists of several squads (sixes, patrols) and has from about 10 to about 35 members (depending on the organisation and method group). The team is led by an adult scout leader with the rank of instructor (in some organisations, if the scout leader is under 18, they lead the team under the supervision of an adult guardian).

scout leader – an adult scout leader (in some organisations, if the scout leader is under 18, they lead the team under the supervision of an adult guardian).

Instructor – a person with one of the three instructor degrees, giving them the right to perform educational functions in scouting. Pursuant to the regulation of the Ministry of National Education, an adult scout instructor has the qualifications of a camp tutor.

group (hufiec) – an organisational unit grouping together troops and/or squads, forming a local community in a city district, commune or administrative district. The tasks of the group are to coordinate the work of scouting in its area, support the troop and represent them to the local authorities.

gathering – a meeting of a troop, squad, gathering or another scout unit. The gathering lasts about 2–4 hours and can take the form of a meeting in the scout hut, a field game, a joint excursion. The gathering has a specific plan created by the leader. The gatherings usually take place on a regular basis, on a designated day and time.

ROHiS – the “Government Programme of Support for the Development of Scouting and Scouting Organisations for 2018–2030” (known by the acronym ROHiS), adopted by Resolution No. 138/2018 of the Council of Ministers of 2 October 2018, defines the forms and scope of state support for scouting organisations.

scouting organisation – an association of children, young people and adults carrying out scouting activities based on the social service of educational staff. Scouting activities aim to educate and inspire self-development in children and young people. It is conducted according to the scout system of upbringing – referring to the achievements of the world scouting and the Polish scout movement – a complete set of aims, principles and means of influence, creating conditions for the comprehensive and harmonious physical, intellectual, emotional, social, volitional and spiritual development of children and young people.

scouting educational ideal – a set of specific goals for education and self-development defined by the scouting organisation, aimed at shaping character traits and attitudes characterising a conscious and

active citizen of the Polish state, manifested in brotherhood, service and work on oneself, and expressed in the form of the Scout Law (or otherwise named code of conduct), applicable to all members of the organisation.

scouting educational method – a method characteristic of the scout and scouting movements for achieving the intended educational and self-developmental effects. The scouting method is characterised by six principles/goals of influence: positive, individual, reciprocal, voluntary and conscious goal-setting, natural and indirect. The educational impact of the scouting method is achieved mainly through the personal example of the educational staff, the gradation of difficulties, competition and cooperation, the teaching of independence and responsibility (among other things by giving the pupils tasks and trust) and work in small peer groups led also by minors. It is based on the Laws and Pledge, action learning, a small group system, a stimulating programme for development.

The principles of scouting education – these are service, comradeship and self-development.

scouting education – is based on pointing out values, supporting all-round development and shaping character through challenge.

age groups in scouting – depending on the organisation these are:

- beaver scouts, cub scouts – children from about 6 to 12 years of age,
- scouts – youth up to the age of approx. 12-17,
- explorer scouts – youth up to approximately 19 years of age and older,
- scout networks – adult scout leaders.



Małgorzata Sinica – Scoutmaster, Chief of the Polish Scouting and Guiding Association from 2007 to 2017. Coordinator of the Government Support Programme for the Development of Scouting and Scouting Organisations 2018–2030. Member of the Public Benefit Council from 2009 to 2018, former member of the Team for Financial and Legal Solutions for Social and Civic Activity of the President of the Republic of Poland. She deals with issues of the development of the third sector in Poland, projects in the field of non-formal education of children, young people and adults, building cooperation between NGOs and public administration and the business world. In 2015, she was awarded the Officer's Cross of the Order of Polonia Restituta.

Women as leaders of change and bearers of tradition in local communities

Women and social change at the local level

The report – The Condition of NGOs 2021, prepared by the Klon/Jawor Association, indicates that women’s involvement is largely at the core of the activities of the NGOs surveyed¹. In general, women are more likely to be members of staff teams in organisations, and in selected areas they are taking matters into their own hands and creating these organisations themselves. This situation may be the result of a worse situation for women in the labour market, but it may also be due to a better knowledge of local needs and, at the same time, a greater flexibility of their organisation as an employer. These arguments are supported by the figures. Women dominate the boards of the following organisations: health (they make up an average of 71% of staff), social welfare (69%), education (63%), arts and culture (59%), and local development (56%). Above-average participation of women on boards is also seen in organisations working for the benefit of the immediate neighbourhood, as well as in those with the shortest period of operation (up to five years).

Similar observations can be made after analysing the involvement of women in projects implemented as part of the “Małopolska Lokalnie” (Lesser Poland Locally) grant competition, which was co-financed by the National FreedomInstitute – Centre for Civic

¹ *Kondycja organizacji pozarządowych 2021* [online] <https://fakty.ngo.pl/raporty/kondycja-organizacji-pozarządowych-2021> [accessed: 21.10.2022].

Development as part of the Government's New CIF (NOWEFIO) Programme. The research, which covered the period 2019–2022, found that women make up about 2/3 of applicants². Observations from the local grant competition operator level show that women are most likely to be involved in making changes in their community, as they are the ones who feel more strongly about existing gaps, see the needs of the community, and feel the need to change the current situation. Thanks to their commitment, they are becoming local leaders with different strands of social initiative. Sometimes they act individually, sometimes collectively, sometimes they do so systematically or in various initiatives. The type of activity chosen depends on various factors, including the person's living and working situation. The fact is that women are more likely to become village leaders, councillors, belong to and form NGOs.

Increasingly, rural women are also tackling issues of social exclusion, fostering social activism and taking local initiatives. They are keen to carry out their own projects, travel to congresses, conferences, enrol in various courses and training courses³. What fosters this attitude? Women are great at building relationships, initiating contacts and communicating (a feminine communication style is understanding-oriented). The networks they create contribute to the integration of the local community. Women are most often involved in raising children and often include them in their activities. This ensures the natural, continuous transmission of values to the next generation. Bringing up children is also often a period of being less active in the workplace and more focused on one's own development, the family and its surroundings, the local community. Typically, women run their households and are thus able to effectively transfer inclusive activities, development activities, and ways of solving problems to the wider community – to the community in which they live. Many of the initiatives of women's organisations

² Agnieszka Węgrzyn's research carried out as part of the grant competition "Małopolska Lokalnie" co-financed by the National Institute of Freedom under the New CIF Governmental Programme, 2022

³ K. Suska, *Liderka na wsi, czyli o ważnej roli kobiet* [online] <https://epale.ec.europa.eu/pl/blog/liderka-na-wsi-czyli-o-waznej-rol-i-kobiet> [accessed: 21.10.2022].

and their leaders are related to food. Addressing such a basic human need provides the widest contact with the community (because, after all, everyone needs to eat). You can say that it is an activity that transcends divisions, and what is more, it is always relevant. Women feed and unite at a common table. As a result, they know their neighbours' needs well. They naturally become local leaders, i.e. people who make a significant difference in the community by integrating people around a common vision.

As we observe the growth of women's interest in developing themselves and their communities, we should not forget the great potential of Farmer's Wives Associations and Circles, which are not only leaders of change, but also care for the preservation of local traditions and identity. The strength of rural women activists is evidenced, among other things, by the number of Farmer's Wives Circles (FWCs) registered with the Agency for the Development and Modernisation of Agriculture since December 2018. As of 15 July 2022, there were as many as 11,256 organisations of this type in Poland. An example of an institution that supports women in action and makes a difference in its local community while respecting local history and traditions is the Rural Women's Association in Głogoczów.

Rural Women's Association in Głogoczów and the preservation of local identity – needs, activities, support tools

The Głogoczów Rural Women's Association (RWA) was registered more than 10 years ago – on 19 December 2011. The organisation was created in response to the need to formalise the activities of the Głogoczów Rural Women's Association, which at the time was operating as an informal group and was having trouble maintaining continuity in its activities. The RWA in Głogoczów previously had a very long and interesting history – it had been operating since the 1960s.

The Association was the first in the Myślenice Commune to become a legal entity and be entered in the National Court Register.

Other organisations followed its example. Since December 2011, thanks to raising external funds, the Association has been carrying out activities to support the local community (e.g. the thematic village “Głogoczków wieś jak Dzwon” – Głogoczków, a village like a Bell) and other Rural Women’s Associations from the Małopolska region (Dom Małopolskich Gospodyń), and since 2020 it has been running the Głogoczków Village Community Archive⁴ in the nationwide and Polish Community Archives network⁵ run by the Centre for Community Archiving (CCA).

The members of the Association, who are active in the area of local identity, are observing a slow erosion of the identity of the residents of Głogoczków, understood as the identification with the local community and its culture⁶. Indeed, Głogoczków is becoming a Kraków bedroom community. The pace of life is constantly speeding up, and the social bonds among neighbours are also becoming weaker.

The identity of Głogoczków in sociological terms is defined by “we” (the old inhabitants) and “they” (people from Kraków), as well as the sense of separateness that accompanies this division. Due to the increasing number of residents arriving from other villages, there is a great need to reduce the barriers between “old” and “new” residents, to make the “new” aware of the historical and socio-cultural attractiveness of the village, and to remind the “old” how life was lived in Głogoczków years ago, how strong the ties were then and how much community involvement there was. Reminding is an ongoing process that needs the right tools. In the case of Głogoczków, such a tool is the

⁴ *Archiwum Społeczne wsi Głogoczków* [online] https://zbioryspoleczne.pl/archiwa/PL_1072 [accessed: 21.10.2022].

⁵ The website zbioryspoleczne.pl is a free tool designed to describe, share and search archival collections, created for community archives. The programme is tailored to those without archival knowledge, while enabling professional processing of collections, based on International Council of Archives standards.

⁶ Głogoczków is a village in the commune of Myślenice, Myślenice district, Małopolskie Voivodeship. The number of residents as of December 31, 2020 was 3069 people. Głogoczków is the biggest village in the commune in terms of area (16 km²), additionally cut into three parts by two national roads – the Zakopianka and the Bielsko route. Due to its proximity to Kraków (16 km), it is very popular with the city’s residents, who buy land and build houses here.

Community Archive of the village of Głogoczów and activities that build a sense of influence on the village among the residents.

The Community Archive is the result of purposeful and grassroots civic activity. Its main mission is to work proactively to save and preserve cultural heritage, with the aim of acquiring, preserving, compiling and making available the materials comprising the non-state archival resource. “CAS gather their collections through collaboration with a specific collective, such as the local community, but also the recipient of the archives’ activities is the community, group or community”⁷. Therefore, the Community Archive of the village of Głogoczów, because of the need to involve the local community in its creation and to make it more attractive (after all, it shows people we know, with whom we have something in common), is a very good tool for working on preserving local identity, building a sense of community among the villagers.

In order to initially discern and explore issues related to local identity, an online survey was carried out with 100 Głogoczów residents⁸. As many as 59 people confirmed that Głogoczów is slowly losing its local identity (due to becoming a “bedroom community” for Kraków). In turn, 76 of the people interviewed have people among their neighbours who have moved to Głogoczów from another village. Only 14 people had no neighbours from outside Głogoczów. These results show how challenging it is for our locality to maintain local identity and build community.

The open question “What do you think has changed in the relations between the inhabitants of Głogoczów over the last few years?” was answered by respondents indicating, for example, a lack of time, weakening neighbourly relations, divisions, e.g. political, jealousy, quarrels on social media, the disappearance of traditions, large numbers of visitors (in the context of a blurring of identity). Of course, there were also positive responses, but negative comments or lack of interest predominated. Significantly, 83 people

⁷ *Archiwa Społeczne w Polsce stan obecny i perspektywy*, ed. K. Ziętał, Fundacja Ośrodka KARTA, Warsaw 2016.

⁸ The survey was conducted between 28.12-31.12.2020. on www.facebook.com/gospodynieglogoczow [accessed: 21.10.2022].

felt that the Community Archive of the village of Głogoczów has the potential to become an activity that unites the inhabitants of the village with different views, ages and lifestyles (only thirteen people felt that this was not possible because we are too different). Most of the people in the research group felt that the village was losing its local identity – they pointed to the problem of a lack of a sense of community in the village, to which the Community Archive could be the solution. The majority of respondents had a cursory knowledge of village history, while knowledge of family history was much better. As many as 43 of those surveyed were unaware that although they were connected to Głogoczów, their history and that of their families made up the identity of this place!

The change that the Głogoczów Rural Women's Association is aiming for is to make residents realise that the history of each person associated with the village affects the identity of the place. By implementing various projects and planning their activities, the association's members show that it is possible to work together for the benefit of the countryside despite individual differences. They remind the residents of the times when Głogoczów was a village where many initiatives were carried out jointly, and the village itself was not regarded as a mere "bedroom" of Kraków.

The project called "To save from oblivion..."

One of the biggest projects carried out by the Głogoczów Rural Women's Association in 2021–2022 was the task "To save from oblivion...", which was subsidised by the National Freedom Institute – Centre for Civil Society Development from the Government's New CIF Programme for 2021–2030.

The aim of our project was to strengthen social ties and increase awareness of the local identity of the village of Głogoczów (among a minimum of 50 villagers). This was to be achieved by activating residents around a common good – the Community Archive of the village of Głogoczów – and celebrating together the 10th anniversary of the Głogoczów Rural Women's Association (from 1 June 2021 to

31 December 2021). The Myślenice Cultural and Sports Centre, and in particular its subsidiary, the Rural Cultural Centre in Głogoczów, where the association has its headquarters, became a partner in the project.

As part of the implementation of the idea, activities were carried out to develop the Community Archive of the village of Głogoczów and to involve residents in the 10th anniversary celebrations of the Rural Women's Association of Głogoczów. There was also training in the preparation, conduct and processing of oral history interviews. Trained members of the association conducted ten biographical interviews with the oldest RWA members in Głogoczów. These interviews were processed, transcribed and published in the archive. In addition, each of the interviewees and the Association's activists had the opportunity to take part in a professional photo shoot. The portrait photographs taken were used in the preparation of the exhibition. Participants in the photo shoot also received framed photos – as a memento and as a thank you for their involvement.

An activity carried out in parallel with the interviews was the collection of archival photographs relating to the activities of the Głogoczów Rural Women's Association. As many as 650 photographs were successfully acquired and, after scanning, added to the archive. All the materials collected were used for activities related to the Association's 10th anniversary celebrations mentioned above, namely the preparation of a brochure entitled "To save from oblivion... the history of the Rural Women's Association in Głogoczów", and an exhibition with the same title. As the history of the RWA in Głogoczów was very interesting and rich, the folder focused on showing the evolution of the association's activities from the 1960s onwards. It was in the 1970s until 2011, when it was formalised as the Rural Women's Association of Głogoczów.

In addition, to increase the involvement of local people in the project, four local history cooking workshops were held with talks on local heritage while making pickles and biscuits. Also of great interest was a workshop on making traditional Christmas "worlds" from Christmas wafers, which inspired residents to take part in

an online contest for the most beautiful “world”⁹. The workshop was accompanied by a talk on Głogoczów’s Christmas traditions. The “My World” contest consisted of two stages – submitting entries and voting via Facebook. Thanks to the involvement of voters, the message about the contest reached more than 6200 people. As the essence of the Association’s activities is to bring people together and show them that they have a say in village affairs, all participants in the described contest received prizes in kind and diplomas, and the winners individually could choose their prizes online. This form of rewarding the participants in the contest was to their liking, as they could choose exactly the prizes they wanted.

A very important role was also played by the promotion of the activities carried out as part of the project, which included the creation of a subpage dedicated to the Community Archive of Głogoczów village on the official website of the Association (<https://gospodynielogoczow.pl/>), the purchase of a promotional wall, the sending of non-addressed printed materials to all houses informing about the planned activities, posters, a campaign on Facebook concerning the Community Archive and the 10th anniversary celebrations of the RWA, online contests with interesting prizes, a sponsored article on the local Internet portal and information about the project in other local media, e.g. *Dziennik Polski*. A video summarising the activities carried out was also published.

It is worth pointing out that an additional measure to better understand the “new” villagers and to act more effectively in the future was an online survey asking them about their reasons for living in Głogoczów¹⁰. The results show that the three main reasons for choosing Głogoczów as a place to live are the nature and beautiful landscape, the short distance from Kraków, and the presence of relatives living in the Myślenice commune.

⁹ “Christmas World” is a traditional Christmas decoration made of wafer. Elements of the ornaments were cut from white and coloured wafers and then glued together in light, delicate compositions. As a rule, ceiling beams were decorated with them.

¹⁰ The online survey was carried out between October and December 2021. Fifty-four people took part.

The project culminated in the ceremonial opening of the exhibition “To save from oblivion...”. It was combined with the celebration of the 10th anniversary of the RWA and the release of a brochure on the activities of the Rural Women’s Association in Głogoczów. The setting for the event included the Christmas wafer worlds entered in the “My World” contest, as well as a textile wall printed as part of the project and photos of RWA members. The hall for the vernissage was made available in partnership by the Village Cultural Centre in Głogoczów, local entrepreneurs supported the ceremony with drinks and refreshments, residents, representatives of local government, local organisations and befriended RWA brought gifts and congratulations, and an invited folk band prepared a special song about the association’s activities. The event was also attended by a representative of the NFI-CCSD, who read a congratulatory letter from Mr Wojciech Kaczmarczyk, Director of the National Freedom Institute – Centre for Civil Society Development. The success of the event, the number of congratulations and the partners involved in the jubilee are proof that the direction set by the Association has proved to be the right one.

The success of the project is also evidenced by the results of the evaluation carried out. They show the broad resonance of the project among the inhabitants and residents of the village of Głogoczów¹¹. Although respondents were largely not directly exposed to many of the events/activities (there were 163 direct participants in the project), they were well aware of them and were able to identify them. At the same time, these activities they encountered and the wide promotion of the project increased their knowledge of the history of the village. Residents of Głogoczów overwhelmingly applaud the project’s efforts to collect local history. They recognise the usefulness and need for such activities. They justify this view above all by caring for the heritage passed on to the next generation of villagers. The high level of commitment to the idea brought into the village space by the project “To save from oblivion...” is evidenced by a number of ideas for further similar activities related to social

¹¹ An online survey of 50 Głogoczów residents was carried out in December 2021.

archiving, i.e. the history of the volunteer fire brigade, sports in the village, the parish, the school, the shop. The results of the evaluation also reveal the potential for continuing the activities initiated in the completed project.

NFI-CCSD support for women changing local communities

Summarising the discussion of the role of women so far, it can be said that a rural leader is a woman with a vision for change, a woman who builds environmental evolution with respect for local history, traditions, and involves other people, organisations and institutions at every level of action. It all happens, starting from planning, through the completion of activities, to the study of their effects.

For more than five years, the National Freedom Institute – Centre for Civil Society Development has been supporting women leaders to bring about change in local communities. Thanks to various support programmes for NGOs and informal groups, such as the Government's New CIF Civic Initiatives Fund Programme, local initiatives are becoming easier. Winning funding in a national grant competition requires strong substantive skills (which do not always go hand in hand with a passion for action). Therefore, providing substantial support for fledgling organisations and leaders is the first priority of the Programme, namely small local grants. Subsidised by the NFI-CCSD provincial and regional CIF competition operators support young non-governmental organisations and informal groups of active residents in the development and implementation of the vision of social change. They educate, animate and organise a mini-grant competition, which simply makes local leaders more effective in their actions.

If an NGO already reaches a more advanced level in its development and if it succeeds in securing a large grant from the other priorities, the great flexibility of the Programme and the substantive support of the NFI-CCSD staff are noteworthy. The possibility of allocating part of the grant to the NGO's institutional development activities is also an important asset. In the case of rural women's

organisations, these are often investments in: professional kitchen equipment, the purchase of folk costumes, office equipment or specialised training for the members of the organisation. The Rural Women's Association in Głogoczów refurbished its kitchen and bought catering furniture as part of its development activities.

Thanks to the support provided, the organisation already has the resources to implement professional cooking workshops with local history in sanitary conditions, and the activities implemented have been the beginning of a change in the awareness of the villagers. Moreover, they started a discussion on the identity of the village and its importance in the life of every resident.

The Rural Women's Association of Głogoczów plans in the near future, among other things, to continue work on the creation of the Community Archive of the village of Głogoczów and the implementation of the information and education campaign #MaszWpływNaGłogoczów (#YouHaveInfluenceInGłogoczów). What's behind that hashtag? The history and identity of a village written by the individual choices of its residents – past, present and even future. What Głogoczów is like as a town, how it is perceived, what happens in it – depends on all of us. We want every resident to know that even the seemingly insignificant choices that accompany each and every resident of Głogoczów in their daily lives have an impact on how we function as a village community, as well as on how the village is perceived from the outside. Among other things, the investments made in the village, such as the replacement of coal stoves or the amount of educational subsidy for the school, also depend on our choices. It is up to us to decide whether the village is well-kept or whether rubbish is lying around. Together we create the history and reality of our village. It depends on us what Głogoczów will look like in several decades and how future generations of Głogoczów will remember us.

Making residents aware of their impact on the village is the first step towards the social change being introduced by Głogoczów housewives. The end result of the planned activities will be more socially engaged and aware citizens of Głogoczów.

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The world is changing, we are changing. A post-pandemic reflection

Introduction

Our way of life is changing at a frenetic pace. We are chasing the “West”, running rampant in pursuit of convenience and trying to adapt to the changing technologies that are directing the reality in which we live. The past five years have brought many joys, sorrows and disappointments – both in the personal and social spheres. We have experienced how unstable the world around us can be, how little resistance we have to pressures that are in no way dependent on our superiors, family or school. It is no longer a question of a “race” towards a better life, no longer a question of catching up with fleeting challenges and dreams, but of finding oneself as an individual alone in society and yet implanted in it without the possibility of total isolation.

The time that has passed has given us the opportunity to reflect on our existence in society and has given us many opportunities to review our actions, desires and expectations. It has changed us, and consequently it has also modified the creations of our hands and hearts. We have come to understand that the morning is a precious gift, but each hour can change our reality, and the evening can already find us as completely different people, stripped of our dreams or, on the contrary, strong and action-oriented. The night to come, on the other hand, may not bring us rest, but a time of increased vigilance or searching for more caves of safety or tunnels for escape. Is it possible to dream and plan in such a time perspective?

Is it possible to be active and do so creatively? Or is our activity only about defending our individual selves? Do we know how to think socially and with responsibility for others, in a reality so fast and baffling? A number of questions arise at this point: how do we describe a state of insecurity in order to defend the individual and at the same time neither trample on his or her dignity as a human being nor disregard the challenge of the desire to defend and develop society that lies within the human being?

People, as social beings need others. However, in order to face “otherness”, they should first of all get to know themselves. In order to be able to sympathise, they must suffer harm themselves. In order to be able to cheer others up, they themselves must experience rising from the rubble and reaching out joyfully to the sun. Empathy in action, sensual and bodily sensations, emotional “drivers” of our social activities, this is what activates us, what drives us to create, think about ourselves and others, about us as an inseparable social organism.

What drives our social activism?

Certainly, our social engagement is influenced by an inner love – not only for ourselves as individuals or for our immediate family, but also that for the people and the universe around us. Our activity elevates, builds, develops, gives opportunities, fulfils dreams, gives wings, opens eyes, awakens, rejoices and calms, gives a sense of security, helps people to grow, but also to leave in a dignified and loving way.

The multifaceted nature of approaches to social initiative is primarily due to the internal aspect of each person. Acting together – being active not just as an individual – requires many additional character traits from a person. It is no longer only empathy or love for the task at hand with which one wants to incentivise oneself, but also the gifts of interacting with others, listening, working out compromises in action, working hand in hand or leading a group, being perceptive. Some of the volunteer activists are “leaders” who

are full of charisma and who can pull the crowds together and show them a common idea. Another group are the “helpers” – able to assist the leader, often equipped with a technical and organisational sense. Yet another group consists of “executors” – people who feel great in the role of the executor of activities planned and defined in their character. Another group, which is also active in our society, can be compared to a “flock of sheep” following their guide, believing wholeheartedly in the genuineness of the task entrusted to them, even though they do not fully understand its purpose – they are simply doing the work assigned to them. Finally, there are those who use social initiative for their own purposes. However, it is not for us to judge whether any motives are right or wrong. For what matters is action – being active, wanting to help others.

Over the last five years, I have noticed a whole range of approaches to social activism and a variety of changes in the activism process itself. When the National Freedom Institute was established in 2017, it brought a fresh breeze of change. Hopes for evolution in the functioning of non-governmental organisations and volunteering, which is like “blood circulating in the veins of an organisation” and without which “the heart of NGOs it wouldn’t beat, were revived”. New perspectives appeared, dreams revived, which – as it suddenly turned out – can come true. The communities felt that they were important and that their initiative was valuable and recognised. After the years preceding the establishment of the NFI-CCSD, which were difficult for activists, in which the organisation’s initiatives lost their meaning and credibility in the eyes of the statistical Pole, there was suddenly a space for another evolution of social activism.

A “volcano of excitement” has “erupted” among community workers, which is usually felt at the beginning of an initiative, at the start of volunteering, when something is born or a new perspective is awakened. Organisations have started to analyse their action plans again – to think about what is actually important, how to act, looking at the long term, if and what needs to be changed in this action. The provisions in the bylaws of the NFI-CCSD programmes have given the opportunity to no longer just think and write the organisation’s strategy, but have brought genuine feasibility and interaction

between the desire to create something permanent and the realisation of it. I was one of the people who, among other activists, began to think of their organisation as a creation capable of surviving for years and helping those in need long-term, standing firmly on the ground on the strong legs of asset ownership. The power to own buildings, equipment, investments in training people, activities leading to raising funds opened up new possibilities for functioning, a new look at the future of social activity.

Active in solidarity

The idea of the Solidarity Corps is another living organism lending a hand to organisations and people wishing to act. After the establishment of this organisation, we stopped walking in the dark because volunteering became a stable space with a wide choice of activities and with the maximum range of incentives for action open to us. As a leader, I was given another useful tool to facilitate the selection of a group with similar challenges at heart. The organisation I represent deals with people in the crisis of homelessness. Is this a difficult group? Certainly, this is a body with very extensive dysfunctions and needs, individuals rich in stigmatising experiences and carrying baggage that sometimes they cannot realistically bear. Beings with damaged hearts, bodies and minds, extraordinary, impossible to be classified into any social group. Each person affected by poverty or homelessness has a different system of coping with the problem, with very individual wounds. An idealist who wants to accompany a person with such tangled characteristics, at risk of social exclusion, must be empathetic and unbreakable. Those who have not found themselves will not stand the test of time. It cannot be a person who wants to gain something in any sense of the word: whether it is to satisfy their ambitions as a “helper” or to stand out as a social activist. Such volunteers must put their ambitions away, must be full of humility and stability, which those who have fallen at times can lean on. The online portal of the Solidarity Corps gives the opportunity to describe the character of the volunteer sought,

which is necessary so that the social worker does not wander off looking for their place.

The idealist who wants to find their way into NGOs gains an unprecedented opportunity to almost touch and make a summary of the associations in which they would like to be involved in one place. Nor do they have to browse an incredible number of NGO websites, nor do they have to burn themselves out trying to help in the wrong place. Instead, they can more consciously approach the desires of “their heart” in assisting or creating – and in the form closest to them. The impact on the social activity of the Solidarity Corps manifested itself in a time that was calm, stable for us, full of confidence in tomorrow, good for planning and staging our activities. If we have already waited and expected changes, then only those that increase the number of volunteers and activists.

And so it was, the time for dreams to come true had arrived. The year 2019 brought joy and release of hope for a better tomorrow for many small non-governmental organisations. Particularly those that were not overly structured (especially in terms of staff and offices), but had “something special” that made them stand out from the crowd: they had charisma and a mission not just on paper, but in the hearts of the people who made them up, the heroes of everyday life – the future belongs to them. A total of 327 organisations were given the opportunity under Civic Organisations Development Programme (CDDP) to rise above everyday life. Being a member of various committees evaluating bids submitted for competitions for NGOs (announced in Białystok, the Marshal’s Office of the Podlaskie Voivodeship and the Regional Social Policy Centre, and concerning both social assistance, people with disabilities, health, culture, environmental protection, sport, agriculture and own contributions), I got to know the dilemmas of those who evaluated the submitted bids. This dichotomy concerned both very well-written projects and those poorly developed in terms of content. Behind every proposal there are people – their ideas and their vision of the future. I have read a lot of desires to make others happy, ideas about changing the microworld of optimists. I have seen how organisations change and how reality modifies concepts for activities and

demands for services. I had the opportunity to touch on wonderful thoughts, albeit described in a chaotic way, and their value could not be translated into scores due to the lack of descriptions necessary for evaluation. I realise that evaluation charts need to be in place, as discretion is hardly credible, so I looked with all the more admiration at the people evaluating bids at the NFI-CCSD. What deserves my praise is their unconventional approach and their noticing of what lies within the proposals being assessed. At one of the training courses on writing bids to the CDDP held in Białystok, a telling sentence was said by the presenter: “Please write using your own words, please don’t hire professionals to write bids” – this touched me and brought a smile to my face. After all, it is not just the reality around us that is changing, but also a new generation of people who want to interact with organisations. Someone finally recognised the activists and not the bureaucrats employed by the NGOs, someone spoke to us in our language, the language of the idealists – the active social activists.

Outflow of funding in the first CDDP competitions

The freedom of action of non-governmental entities, emerging at the time of obtaining funding (especially CDDP 1a), has given our “Ku Dobrej Nadziei” (Towards Good Hope) Association the opportunity to survive a crisis that no one expected. A few months of action and arousing social activity not only in those already “awakened” to social service, but also in the observers of the energy and verve of the “fighters for good cause” with which they started, involved this group in a lot of constructive work with fairly quick results.

Our reality changed radically in March 2020. Organisations had never before been prepared for the changes that were to come – isolation and closure, lack of contact with others. How to act, how to help when completely new challenges arise? A quick decision and the transformation into volunteers of a large part of society: restaurateurs, catering workers, caregivers and staff in nursing homes, workers in centres for people in crisis of homelessness, the military,

medics – everyone was now standing alone on their “barricade”, defending others and risking their own health and sometimes their lives. Many questions remained unanswered and there was a crisis in getting food for the poorest.

People in the crisis of homelessness, who had been living on the streets and begging in front of shops, suddenly lost the ability to support themselves in this way. In contrast, the centres helping them did not know how to provide assistance to those remaining on the street. Shops stopped giving donations of produce due to expire, resulting in food shortages at support centres as well. Food banks were not in a position to help because procedures did not take into account this type of emergency. The recommendation to “stay at home” could in no way be applied to people who did not own a home. Online work was in no way feasible for “street people”. It was therefore necessary to act unconventionally.

Changes in organisations

The following months of 2020 began to bring changes, crises and ever new solutions. Many social economy organisations and entities did not withstand the months-long crisis. We reflected on the development of social responsibility. What will the average Smith do: go to support others or shut down and emotionally bunker in a safe space?

Reality was changing for all of us, and social activism came into focus and hit with increased force. We have had to adapt, reduce some activities and learn to do “new” ones. A bit in the dark at first, like “children in the fog”, but then more and more maturely and responsibly. Our heads were filled with the search for the best solutions, which then became guidelines for coordinated actions and procedures in bringing relief to the most frightened and emotionally fragile. We all had one goal: to take the best care of our wards; other previous aspirations were sidelined (such as the implementation of training and festivals).

The 2020 holidays were a moment to catch a breath. My organisation, thanks to the funding received from *CODEP 5* and *CODEP 1a*, has not only maintained the ability to meet the basic needs of the people it supported, but also to provide them with small-group recreational activities in nature. We knew and felt that God was watching over us, and needs and crises were regulated almost on a regular basis. Staff and guests being together at the Centre for Escaping Homelessness for a few weeks provided the opportunity to get to know each other better and give birth to new family relationships. Volunteering has become a need of the heart and an understanding of the infirmities of others. What emerged in all activists was the understanding that the most important thing in social work is the human being and the satisfaction of their basic needs, not the creations and wares of the upper classes.

Unfortunately, some organisations froze in their activities, withdrew from undertaking any tasks, even those commissioned or co-financed. What followed were brainstorming and deliberations on how to redesign the work so that it continues to be effective, or even – how to make it more effective. How to engage those who have become good spirits who want to bring relief to others? The adjustment has taken place, social involvement has increased. Many people, pausing out of compulsion in their rush of daily life, took notice for the first time of the world around them and of their fellow human beings living around them. We have learned to live and thrive in a new space.

Illusory stability

We have learned to re-experience coming together, to rejoice in health freedom (albeit in a truncated way). We have started to breathe fully again as active citizens, admittedly under new rules and thinking about alternatives all the time. Autumn 2021 brought the “*Ku Dobrej Nadziei*” (Towards Good Hope) Association in Białystok a host of new interpersonal friendships, thanks to the implementation of a project under the new *CIF* competition. At that time, a large

part of the local community had the opportunity to work side by side with people in the homeless crisis to get rid of stereotypes about this group. Stability did not last long, however, as a time came that no social worker expected, the ground shook under our friends from abroad – war broke out in February 2022.

Our Ukrainian neighbours – not just socially-involved people and activists, but ordinary people – needed our help. So, once again, reality has challenged us and changed our priorities. After all, we had only just put the jigsaw puzzle of social existence together, until suddenly our world, glued together with a “health solutions tape”, was torn apart again. Many community workers have since stood at the posts of their organisations day and night to help refugees from Ukraine. Funding priorities have suddenly changed. We had (and still have) to feed and take care of not only the homeless, not only our people with disabilities, but thousands of people in need of protection fleeing from death. We started to organise aid, accommodation, clothing, food, medical assistance, transport to other countries. We shared what we have, what we put aside or what others needed more than we did. More community groups have become active. The next layers of altruism in Polish society have been activated. Despite the fatigue of recent years, despite adapting to a new reality and learning to operate in it, we have found, as idealists, further strengths that we did not know we still had within us.

The future is marked by questions and uncertainty. When will there finally be the time for rest? What will be the consequences of this constant standing guard and vigilance? Will there be a time of burnout and breakdown? How many community activists will persevere, what will be left after such emotionally tense times? Are we ready for what the time ahead will bring? How adaptable are we and how chameleon-like are we able to move from one phase of our changing reality to another? How fast are we running, and can we cope as activists with the obstacle course set by reality?

Conclusion

After so many challenges over the past five years, we are more resilient. We have been able to adapt as an active society to a changing reality. We may have settled for a while, and the waves of challenges may have often swamped us in a sea of needs, but there were moments when we caught the wind in our sails and were able to throw a lifeline to others. The ship of our active society will continue to sail steadfastly for a long time to come, and we are delighted that new, spirited, deep-hearted sailors clad in ideals are boarding our community deck every now and then.

The emergence of the NFI-CCSD before the storm of coronavirus and war provided the opportunity to have a strong anchor. And although we have been tossed around like “shells” in recent years, we have maintained stability in social initiative. As for an assessment of the past five years and an assessment of us as social activists, I believe that we have passed the test of living actively in our reality. Of course, a reappraisal will be wanted by future generations, attempting to take away or concede our actions with the comfort of hindsight. But I don't think they have the right to do so – they won't know our hearts or touch our wounds and fears, nor will they see the sparks that lit the fire of our hopes. The next generation can only know bits of our thoughts and imagine the basis of our decisions.

I look forward to the next years of the National Freedom Institute – Centre for Civil Society Development with an open mind and I wish all community members to be quietly active and grow in what we know and value. May future days bring us no more crises, and if anything, I firmly believe that the past has burned us sufficiently in the fires of challenges and equipped us to be persistent, flexible and see opportunities to help others and integrate effectively.



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International Meeting Centres – their mission and challenges

International Meeting Centres in their peculiar formula escape from fashionable trends, political dependencies and economic calculations. They do not stand out with their brand and are not followed by high stock market ratings, first places in recognition rankings or spectacular successes. Unencumbered by the desire for profit, lobbying, concern for their media image or market competition, they have only one objective – to carry out their mission to the best of their ability, in which people are paramount. The younger generation in particular – with all its baggage of disordered emotions and desires, its insecurities, its search for its own identity – seems to be crying out today for help and interest in its problems. Young people need “helmsmen” to point them in the right direction in creating a future and discovering the true, rather than the apparent, meaning of life. International Meeting Centres accept this demanding challenge of being their “helmsmen”.

Introduction

First of all, it is important to mention the dilemmas that accompanied the author in the search for the most appropriate formula for this study. The fundamental issue to be resolved boiled down to the question of whether it should be a personal reflection based

on one's own experiences and feelings, or the article should rather present a broader spectrum of the issue, illustrating the objectives and key issues concerning International Meeting Centres operating in Poland.

I therefore feel obliged to clarify beforehand that the concept of the study, which emerged from various conflicting assumptions and difficult choices, was ultimately based on the experiences of the St. Maximilian M. Kolbe Reconciliation and Meeting Centre in Gdańsk (in terms of the main theme of missions and challenges). In the background to these considerations, I would like to touch upon the key issues and problematic questions relating to all entities operating under the International Meeting Centres formula. In my opinion, such an approach will, on the one hand, protect against unnecessary theorising of the titular threads, and on the other hand, against overly trivialising the key issues. The format adopted for the study therefore implies a certain degree of subjective assessments and observations, which I hope will usefully influence the exchange of mutual experiences against a background of highlighted differences. It can also contribute to a wider debate on important issues concerning the present and future of International Meeting Centres.

For the sake of order, it should also be made clear that, for the purposes of this paper, the term "International Meeting Centres" (abbreviated to *IMC*) is to be understood as an umbrella term for all bodies whose principal area of activity and statutory objectives relate to the strengthening of international contacts and exchanges and the promotion of solidarity and unity between peoples, irrespective of the proper name adopted and the legal and organisational form in which they operate. However, in the scope relating only to the St. Maximilian M. Kolbe Reconciliation and Meeting Centre, I will be using the abbreviation "Reconciliation and Meeting Centre" or "RMC".

Historical outline and legal basis of operation of the IMC

The premise of this section is not to provide an exhaustive reconstruction of the historical outline of the IMC or a detailed analysis of the legal sources or other documents that underpin their activities. After all, it is worth emphasising that we are dealing here with a deficiency, or rather a lack of studies and monographs addressing the issue in question. In fact, the broadest source knowledge of the organisation, objectives and operation of the IMC is provided by websites and social media, where the profiles of entities subscribing to this peculiar formula of activities can be found.

However, it is impossible not to mention that a great support in systematising and supplementing the information obtained from there is the Annex to Resolution No. 163/2020 of the Council of Ministers of 13 November 2020, which introduces the essence of IMC and briefly outlines their history and scope of action. Moreover, an attempt has been made to fill some of the gaps resulting from the lack of legal regulation of these entities¹. Nevertheless, it should be borne in mind that the document in question serves a specific purpose and its content should be read in this context. The fact that there are a limited number of sources of information and publications on IMC should therefore inspire the effort to disseminate knowledge about the subject, but due to the nature and volume of this article, this idea should be left for a separate study.

It should be mentioned that IMC do not have a very long tradition, as their genesis is essentially linked to the beginning of the Third Republic of Poland. It was only then that the idea of solidarity, which was probably intended by many to develop much earlier, could be realised. Indeed, the political and systemic conditions prevailing until 1989 were not conducive to the development of free people-to-people contacts and cooperation between nations. This trend began to change in the 1990s, when the urgent need to rebuild mutual

¹ *Program Wspierania Rozwoju Międzynarodowych Domów Spotkań na lata 2021–2030* [online] <https://niw.gov.pl/miedzynarodowe-domy-spotkan-edycja-2021-ogloszenie-o-konkursie/> [accessed: 02.07.2022].

social bonds in the international space was noticed, in order to bring societies of different nationalities and ethnic groups closer together.

The history of individual IMCs usually begins with spontaneous actions in response to the need to build solidarity and unity between peoples who, as a result of their painful history (particularly in the twentieth century), have lost their common roots, damaged their trust and still have wounds that are difficult to heal. These activities had no formal basis, but they manifested ideas, messages and values, the context of which was the political events at the time in the arena of uniting Europe. Over time, this has led to the emergence of institutionalised forms of IMC activity.

At the beginning of the 1990s, German-Polish relations became the focus of attention, where the agreement between the government of the Republic of Poland and the government of the Federal Republic of Germany on German-Polish youth cooperation became the most dynamic platform for embodying the ideas of solidarity, partnership and tolerance. A significant role in the development of the IMC was played by German-Polish Youth Office (GPYO)² which, by providing substantive and financial support for meetings and exchanges between young Poles and Germans, shifted the focus from ideological programmes to specific activities. It has thus fostered processes of institutionalisation of international cooperation activities. Quite quickly, this model contributed to the development and dissemination of international exchanges in new dimensions, especially with the participation of countries from across the eastern and southern borders.

It should be noted that there is currently no legal regulation in Polish legislation that would standardise the principles of IMC. This does not mean, however, that they are created in a complete vacuum, as the rules for the creation and functioning of such organisations can be seen in EU legislation. For example, Article 165 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union places a strong emphasis on international elements in the development of education and training, promoting exchanges of young people and socio-educational

² *German-Polish Youth Office (GPYO)* [online] <https://pnwm.org/> [accessed: 04.07.2022].

instructors, promoting student and teacher mobility or cooperation between educational institutions³.

The need for EU youth cooperation, as well as strengthening dialogue and unlocking the potential of young people, is extensively addressed in a document dedicated to these issues called the “European Union Youth Strategy 2019–2027”⁴. It sends a clear message to Member States to engage and support youth action at all levels and through all available forms of mobility. In the context of the development of the IMCs, it should be noted that the document attributes a not insignificant role to non-formal education, considering it to be one of the instruments that can be used to foster solidarity and the future development of the European Union. It is not uncommon for the issue of international youth exchange to also be the subject of bilateral agreements concluded by Poland with partner countries.

Peculiar legal status of the IMC

A problematic issue seems to be how to understand the specific organisational form adopted for exchanges and meetings of an international nature. This is a complex problem for at least two reasons. However, before these are briefly described, I would like to turn further consideration to another problem concerning the definition of IMC. It could be resolved relatively easily by a legal definition introduced by the legislator, but unfortunately it is futile to look for it in legal acts.

An effort to develop a definition of IMC was made by the authors of programmes aimed at International Meeting Centres, managed by the National Freedom Institute – Centre for Civil Society

³ Official Journal of the European Union C 202 of 07 June 2016. Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union – Consolidated text incorporating the amendments introduced by the Treaty of Lisbon.

⁴ Official Journal of the European Union C 456 of 18 December 2018. Resolution of the Council of the European Union and the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States, meeting within the Council, on a framework for European cooperation in the youth field: European Union Youth Strategy 2019–2027.

Development. An unambiguous definition of the beneficiaries was necessary in order to trigger the grant process under the programmes in question. According to the accepted definition, IMC is

[...] a non-governmental, non-formal educational establishment run by a non-governmental organisation [...] operating on an international basis, with access to catering accommodation and educational facilities, irrespective of the form of ownership, and with teaching staff who are qualified to deliver the educational and cultural programme adopted at the establishment and addressed to the participants of the meetings [...]⁵.

Without usurping the right to evaluate the formulated definition, which *incidentally* only serves the purposes of the mentioned NFICCSD programmes, attention should be drawn to the dualistic legal nature of the IMC, which appears against the background of the division of institutions into formal and informal. In the literature, formal institutions that are “[...] legislated, enshrined and imposed on communities for compliance” are contrasted with informal institutions that “create themselves, as a result of actions and their repetition they become fixed in the social consciousness”⁶.

There is no doubt that the IMC have grown out of the acceptance of certain ideas and values, which have been given a specific mission, often carried out according to informal rules (due, for example, to the lack of appropriate legal regulation in Polish legislation). On the other hand, however, it is difficult to deny that currently IMC are part of an institutionalised system which, while characterised by orderliness and predictability, is based on formal institutions. For the sake of completeness, it should be pointed out that most often

⁵ Programme to Support the Development of International Meeting Centres for 2021-2030, annexed to Resolution No. 163/2020 of the Council of Ministers of 13 November 2020.

⁶ E. Gruszevska, *Instytucje formalne i nieformalne. Skutki antynomii*, „Prace Naukowe Uniwersytetu Ekonomicznego we Wrocławiu” 2017, No. 493 „Instytucje w teorii i praktyce”, p. 36–50.

IMC operate on the basis of the Act of 6 April 1984 on foundations⁷ or are a church legal person to which the provisions of the Act of 17 May 1989 on the relationship between the State and the Catholic Church in the Republic of Poland apply⁸. At the same time, it can be observed that the mission of building solidarity and international contacts still seems to retain a certain autonomy and in this aspect brings the IMC closer to informal institutions. The perceived duality of the legal nature of the IMC undoubtedly calls for much deeper analysis and academic debate.

Finally, one should consider whether a *de lege ferenda* proposal to introduce a dedicated IMC regulation into the Polish legal system is justified. Indeed, it is hard to deny that the IMC have created their own operating formula, which for years has allowed them to pursue their leading ideas and set goals without legislative interference. Does this, however, close the discussion on the advisability of regulating their legal status?

It seems that in the search for an answer to this question one cannot lose sight of the current reality. It is characterised by dynamically changing social relations (with all the richness of diversity and complexity), and this, in turn, multiplies various types of interactions with extraordinary acceleration, in which IMC also participate. In this aspect, it seems desirable to provide them with more transparent operating conditions and strengthen their position, especially as rightful participants in market trading. This thesis can be reinforced by stating that the lack of specific legal regulations sometimes translates into efficiency in obtaining new sources of funding, transparency of accounts and difficulties in establishing partnerships, especially with public entities. Furthermore, the unregulated legal status of IMC is more conducive – somewhat out of

⁷ Journal of Laws of 2020, item 2167. Declaration of the Speaker of Sejm issued on 18 November 2020 concerning publication of the consolidated text of the Act on the Foundations.

⁸ Journal of Laws of 2019, item 1347. Announcement of the Marshal of the Sejm of the Republic of Poland of June 28, 2019 on the publication of the consolidated text of the Act on the relationship between the State and the Catholic Church in the Republic of Poland.

necessity – to strengthening the entities within which IMC operate (e.g. foundations). This does not portend good prospects in strengthening the image and recognition of the IMC as a distinct and separate formula for action in the international space.

Mission and key values of the RMC

For the sake of order, it is worth recalling the landmark dates and some of the fundamental themes concerning the Reconciliation and Meeting Centre. As already mentioned, the genesis of the IMC should generally be linked to the period after 1989, as most of them were created in the late 1980s and early 1990s. For the founders of the RMC, too, the expected time then came to gradually “quench” the growing desire to build unity and bridge barriers, especially where they were most marked by pain, prejudice or difficult experiences. One might even say that this desire became the cornerstone of this work and of all subsequent initiatives in which solidarity with others, irrespective of nationality, culture and language, became a priority and a challenge to build a fraternal international community.

The Reconciliation and Meeting Centre is part of the history of IMC in Poland, as it was established in 1992 as a special work of the Province of St. Maximilian Maria Kolbe Order of Friars Minor Conventual (Franciscans) in Gdańsk. In the leading document regulating systemic issues and principles of operation RMC its activities are focused on the comprehensive development of children, youth and adults, as well as intercultural and civic education⁹. In what follows, the overall message is made more specific by listing the key actions set out for implementation, which are then linked to the various forms of RMC mobility in achieving these goals.

⁹ The Statute of the St. Maximilian M. Kolbe Reconciliation and Meeting Centre in Gdańsk was adopted on 15 June 2012; See: RMC Statute [online] http://dmk.nazwa.pl/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/Statut_DMK.pdf [accessed: 02.07.2022].

From the statute of the RMC it is not clear what specific key values it is guided by in its activities. Nor does it have an explicit mission statement. This is by no means an oversight, but a conviction that the work of the Gdańsk Province is naturally influenced by the Franciscan charisma and spirituality, and international initiatives are carried out under the banner of unquestionable, universal values, regardless of the place, time or language in which they are understood. These values are what binds all the RMC's statutory objectives and activities together. On the institutional level, the most noteworthy year was 1994, when the RMC acquired ecclesiastical and civil legal personality¹⁰. This issue was resolved with the help of the Act of 17 May 1989 on the Relationship of the State to the Catholic Church in the Republic of Poland, which, in addition to the territorial and personal organisational units of the Church enumerated therein, also allows other ecclesiastical entities to acquire legal personality¹¹.

From a formal point of view, the RMC's activities were clearly oriented from the outset, as it was established as an international meeting centre and educational facility of the German-Polish Youth Office (GPYO). After all, with the vision of this work, the founders, and later its managers, had more far-reaching expectations. It was not enough to carry out various international exchange programmes or to actively participate in initiatives supporting the development and education of young people. Ways of changing the use of leisure time from a more passive to a creative use, developing new interpersonal relationships and building spaces for the integration of environmentally, culturally, linguistically and mentally diverse people – all of these, although very important, were seen only as necessary means to achieve more important goals.

¹⁰ Journal of Laws of 1994, No. 77, item 354. Legal personality was conferred on the basis of the Decree of the Minister – Office of the Council of Ministers of 27 June 1994 on the conferral of legal personality to the St. Maximilian M. Kolbe Reconciliation and Meetings Centre.

¹¹ Journal Laws of 2019, item 1347. The provision of Article 10 of the Act of 17 May 1989 on the relationship between the State and the Catholic Church in the Republic of Poland.

I make no secret of the fact that, from the moment I was entrusted with the management of the RMC, I was aware that without addressing the deeper and more delicate layers of the problem of human contact in the international space, one can, at best, pursue good ideas for noble reasons. However, it is not possible to step up to the level of the established mission. Thus, one cannot settle for mediocrity and half-measures in this kind of work. What does this mean, specifically? The answer is the word “reconciliation”, which is a key part of the RMC’s own name and is a peculiar distinction among the common phrases used to describe the IMC.

At this point, I feel the need to refer to the authority of St. John Paul II, who, as a tireless advocate of dialogue and unity, believed that unity is “fostering democratic, pluralistic change while firmly referring to unchanging principles and values”¹². Indeed, like no one else, the Polish Pope was able to unite the older generations with the young, teaching intergenerational solidarity and mutual understanding, perpetuating a pattern of actively embodying these values in the mentality of millions of people around the world. When the idea of setting up the Reconciliation and Meetings Centre was born, his example and enthusiasm were like a beacon for us, giving us direction and guiding us towards our goal. With doubts, with some anxiety, without specific scenarios or sufficient resources – the Pope’s vision of dialogue and unity was enough to take on this difficult challenge.

Conclusion

Due to the volume of the material, this study is characterised by a large dose of simplifications and abbreviations, which in turn causes some difficulty in choosing the appropriate formula for its conclusion. I will therefore stop with brief observations on the assumptions and future of the RMC.

¹² *Message from the Polish Bishops before the 25th anniversary of the Pontificate of the Holy Father John Paul II of 12.03.2003* [online] <https://m.niedziela.pl/arttykul/72264/nd/%E2%80%9E-Jan-Pawel-II---Apostol-Jednosci%E2%80%9D> [accessed: 04.06.2022].

When the RMC was founded, the motivations for organising international meetings and exchanges were grounded in the reborn freedom that had spread our wings. However, it was already obvious to me at the time that peace, democracy and unity must be constantly sought and painstakingly nurtured. As the RMC, we feel a special responsibility for this, and we want to make the successors to this responsibility, above all, the younger generations. Today, these values have not lost their relevance, and perhaps more than ever – in the face of dramatic reports of armed conflicts, disrespect for human rights, merciless exploitation of the environment or other threats – they have risen to the highest level. That is why today, in our mission, we are primarily looking for universal platforms – challenging, yet uncontroversial. Our goal is to address complex issues and answer difficult questions. I try to do this with the use of new methodological forms and in fields that are thematically neutral and safe, but flexible and developmental enough to strengthen the most important values and achieve the assumed goals. Thanks to the financial support of the National Freedom Institute, this idea has already been realised since 2021 in a series of projects that put the human being and his natural environment at the centre. In this way, we want to turn cultural and national diversity into unity, out of concern for the world and the ecosystem, prejudice into solidarity in solving common problems, the cult of individual success into the value of teamwork, and indifference into a sense of responsibility and the building of democratic order.

However, I make no secret of the fact that the difficulties and problems that the IMC have to face today dampen enthusiasm and are not conducive to developing new levels of support for young people. For some, they are perhaps even the brake on maintaining their current level of activity. The reason for this state of affairs lies in the still low popularity of IMC activities in the public perception and the lack of expected support from state administration bodies. A key problem, however, relates to the financial instability of the IMC, which by necessity must take additional measures to maintain the infrastructure and necessary facilities to organise international exchanges. Importantly, however, despite insufficient

funding, the IMC is still open to new challenges and, immodest though it may sound: it understands most appropriately the needs for building solidarity and unity in international relations. We are not just about education, spending time together, getting to know each other's history and culture, or creating conditions for mutual communication. While this is a very important and permanent part of building international solidarity, we try to see the deeper context of these activities, looking for common values and challenges, and rejecting everything that divides people. The key concept here is the dignity of every human being, regardless of political situation, country of origin, history or culture. An eloquent example of this are the campaigns undertaken by the Reconciliation and Meeting Centre for refugees from Ukraine, in which, in addition to meeting basic living needs, we have tried above all to restore the dignity of these people, so that they do not feel alienated or unnecessary, but still valuable, for example by providing them with work, entrusting them with certain functions or involving them in the life of our local community. This is our understanding of solidarity – sharing, understanding and respecting dignity.

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Photo 19. Scouts attending the NFI-CCSD conference “Civic society: a space of concern for the common good” (29 November 2019)



Photo 20. Wojciech Kaczmarczyk (Director of the NFI-CCSD) and Piotr Mazurek (Vice-President of the Committee for Public Benefit) attending the NFI-CCSD Council meeting (15 May 2022)



Photo 21. Members of the Farmers' Wives Association from the Cmolos Commune presenting regional dishes during the NFI-CCSD conference "Civic society: a space of concern for the common good" (29 November 2019)



Photo 22. Iwona Blaszcak, Ph.D. and Sławomir Skwarek, MP, during the debate "Organisational activity in rural areas – challenges, resources, future" (19 November 2020)



Photo 23. Professor Ewa Leś (NFI-CCSD Council member) giving an interview during the conference “Civic society: the direction of the community” (20 November 2020)



Photo 24. Izabela Plur, Paulina Ruta, Bożena Malaga-Wrona, Rev. Zenon Myszk and Monika Wolańska attending the conference “People’s Universities towards the challenges of today” co-organised by NFI-CCSD at the Polish Sejm [Parliament] (10 June 2022)



Photo 25. Dorota Chilik (Mayor of the Commune of Miejsce Piastowe) and Agnieszka Węgrzyn (Farmers' Wives Association of Głogoczów) during the debate "Development of local communities under the CIF: identity, regionalism and civic society" (26 November 2021)



Photo 26. Winners of the First Competition for the Best Master's Thesis and Doctoral Dissertation on Civil Society, accompanied by the Director of the NFI-CCSD and members of the Chapter (25 November 2021)



Photo 27. Winners of the Solidarity Corps Volunteer of the Year and Volunteer Coordinator Competitions with Dariusz Malejonek – Solidarity Corps Ambassador – during the Volunteer Awards Gala (16 May 2021)



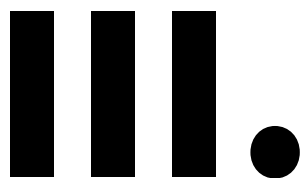
Photo 28. A performance by the Dąbrowa Zielona Youth Brass Band at the 2018 NFI-CCSD anniversary conference.



Photo 29. Zbigniew Wejcman of the sPLOT NGO Support Network and Arkadiusz Jachimowicz of the ESWiP Association during the discussion “Self-regulation of the civic sector – implementation of the 1996 Charter of Principles” (19 November 2020)



Photo 30. Veronica Najda (NFI-CCSD Deputy Director 2018-2021) during the panel discussion “CSR in corporate foundations as a factor in the development of the third sector” (29 November 2019)



Challenges and prospects for the development of the non- -governmental sector

School education for civil society

School education – civil society – tasks and challenges for educational entities

School education can and should play a significant role in building civil society, providing a kind of key to solving the problems and tasks it faces. The question that arises, however, is what civil society challenges does school education face today? There is a wide spectrum of these, but the most relevant are:

1. effectively counteracting the breakdown of traditional norms and patterns of action and value systems by undertaking systemic tasks for the integral development of pupils and the social local community;
2. effectively counteracting the manifestation of consumerist attitudes and undertaking a kind of struggle against the dehumanisation of human beings;
3. creating a new school model that represents the values and ideals of civil society and supports its development;
4. educating of a person capable of creating conditions for action and coexistence within different communities, orienting them towards the common good.

An important issue in this matter is the development of creative thinking, the formation of creative optics for perceiving the world in the perspective of change and transformation according to the criterion and principles of objective good.

One of the priorities of school education should be civic education. Noteworthy in this respect is the development of higher feelings, moral sensitivity, an understanding of the other, a sense of community and the need to build it and be involved in its development. In this context, an important issue is the formation of an attitude of “to be” over “to have”. Answers should be sought to the question: what should a young person/student contribute to society, what should they guard against and what should they renounce? According to Tadeusz Lewowicki, “education [...] can promote ideas, goals and values, it can convince by examples of practical solutions”¹.

The state is therefore faced with the task of creating a new school model that represents the values and ideals of a civil society based on knowledge, commitment to the common good and the education of people capable of creating the conditions for committed, creative action and coexistence within different communities with a view to development.

School education must take into account that there are many groups, communities, organisations, associations, etc. in society – partly intersecting, independent, but also opposing each other in axiological terms. Oriented towards the integral development of the person, highlighting his or her qualities: dignity, reason, wisdom, freedom, responsibility, love, transcendence, but also, by some, marginalising or taking destructive action in this respect.

Educational institutions must be vigilant about the freedom of choice of civil society entities to cooperate and involve students themselves in the implementation of the programmes of various institutions. All of this is to ensure that young people, through this involvement, the fulfilment of desires and the pursuit of interests, do not become ensnared in their own egos, but are oriented towards serving others and creating the common good, through which they will build their “being” – becoming more and more fully human, striving towards personal maturity, towards the fullness of humanity.

¹ T. Lewowicki, *W stronę paradygmatu edukacji podmiotowej*, „Edukacja” 1991, No. 1, p. 9.

Young people/students need to be sensitised to the fact that in civil society many groups and institutions can emerge and operate, pursuing similar but also conflicting values; competing with each other, cooperating; functioning in harmony or generating conflict. An important task of school education is therefore to equip pupils with the ability to discern the aims, methods and forms of action, the effects of activities and to value them according to the criterion of the common good; to shape their own lives responsibly; to develop culture, dialogue, respect for the dignity of the person.

By developing axiological competence in young people, an opportunity will be created to put up a barrier to the student's confusion and disorientation over how to think, act, judge; to lose oneself, to alienate oneself, to fall into a state of "burden" and "anguish".

It is also necessary to prepare young people to seek an axiological consensus, an axiological basis provided by objective values, as a foundation for the common good of the whole society. Equip them with the strength and power to overcome the vested interests of social groups, institutions and community organisations of which they will be founders and members in the future. In this way, they will be the guarantors of achieving a balance between individual (personal) and social (fundamental) values².

By involving students in the institutions of civil society, both those existing in the school and (and perhaps above all) those operating in the social community, pedagogical/educational/didactic measures should be taken aimed at integrating internal experiences with a concern for transforming the external community. The student, through his/her participation in these institutions, must not be a "gatherer" and a "collector" of impressions, but one who is in the service of the other, of solving socio-cultural and economic problems, etc.; of building a new and better reality in various areas.

The following strategies and actions within school education can/should be used to address these challenges and tasks:

² See J. Mariański, *Pluralizm społeczno-kulturowy jako meta trend a religijność i moralność. Studia socjologiczne*, Wyższa Szkoła Nauk Społecznych z siedzibą w Lublinie, Lublin 2022, p. 59.

1. integrating civil society issues into the educational content of individual teaching subjects;
2. learning from a teacher – a personal role model worthy of emulation;
3. creation of authorship/innovation classes with in-depth education oriented towards the acquisition of civil society building competences;
4. formation of groups, communities, clubs, school organisations.

Civil society as the subject of tasks, content, student achievement in school education

School education has the potential to become an important area in which the motives and competences for building civil society will be shaped. For this to happen, the first and basic condition must be met: the provision of knowledge. So the question of its scope arises. In this respect, the basic elements of the thematic structure of teaching can be distinguished:

1) HISTORY OF CIVIL SOCIETY

The student should know that civic virtue as a moral virtue emerged in Ancient Greece (Plato and Aristotle) and Ancient Rome (Cicero and Seneca). Noteworthy is the British Enlightenment era and John Locke's conception of the foundations of modern civil society constituted by the ideas of democracy, freedom, self-government, involvement, responsibility. The primary aim of education here becomes to understand the nature of civil society and its concepts shaped throughout history.

2) CONCEPTS OF CIVIL SOCIETY

3) FEATURES OF CIVIL SOCIETY

Another important content area is the characteristics of civil society. These include: community building, awakening and developing an awareness of building community needs, involvement in meeting community needs, developing public/community interests, developing a sense of responsibility, manifestations of civil society in the immediate environment. The characteristics indicated can provide the student with criteria for valuing the functioning of groups, communities, school organisations in terms of civil society. Their assimilation is a kind of signpost for building its structural links.

4) MANIFESTATIONS OF CIVIL SOCIETY IN THE IMMEDIATE ENVIRONMENT

It is important to discern the manifestations of civil society, from the immediate local environment, through the voivodship and the country. The subjects of discernment should be: active citizenship, NGOs, self-governance, volunteering, cooperation for the common good, sustainable development.

5) THE IDEA OF CIVIL SOCIETY IN THE SOCIAL TEACHING OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

In particular, students' understanding of the various principles becomes the object of attention: solidarity, subsidiarity, justice, the common good. A special task is to motivate students to do support activities that strengthen the various social movements, including religious movements, associations, groups that take action for the common good and especially for the integral development of young people.

6) CURRENT STATE OF CIVIL SOCIETY DEVELOPMENT IN POLAND, EUROPE AND THE WORLD

The final element of the content structure is the current state of development of civil society in Poland, Europe and the world. The analysis of the structure of the civil society's links/entities, in the perspective of the expanding spatial horizon, starting from the nearest local environment and the goals and tasks undertaken, should lead to the discovery of "blank spots" that need to be managed in the future through their own initiatives and involvement in their implementation. In this way, students will be shown the horizons of their future action in the normative sphere and the social reality constructed by groups, associations, communities, organisations that create the democratic order, the common good – freely, independently of the state.

The range of issues presented above is open. Any teacher, with an understanding of how civil society works, can extend this content. The point is that the issue of civil society should find its rightful place in the curricula of various subjects. In this way, students will be shown a holistic view of it.

A teacher committed to building civil society – learning from the master

A teacher who reliably fulfils their responsibilities – didactic, educational, caring, cultural – cannot remain indifferent to the issues and the building of civil society. His/her tasks should focus on:

1. providing students with knowledge of civil society;
2. developing in students the competence to build this society;
3. motivating pupils to participate in the activities of groups, communities, organisations, associations for the common good.

The prerequisite for the above-mentioned tasks is the possession of certain competences, which Dorota Pankowska describes as civic competences. These processes include:

1. reflecting on one's own civic attitude – reflecting on the implementation of the idea of democratisation of school life, understanding the idea of democracy, civil society and one's role in society;
2. realising one's own civic duties – adhering to the principles of democracy and subjectivity in the school environment; exercising spheres of autonomy – engaging in social initiatives and realising the idea of civil society and one's role in society;
3. developing one's civic attitude – co-creating conditions/solutions conducive to the development of civic attitudes of students and other educational entities – Initiating actions to build governance and civic engagement in the wider environment³.

The acquisition of the above competences is a prerequisite for the teacher's involvement in preparing students for the building of civil society and their active participation in this process (e.g. by being a member or even founder of various types of groups, communities, organisations, associations). In the above context, the teacher should be a personal role model worthy of emulation, a 'significant other' who functions in the family environment, the school environment, the local environment, a group of friends. For on the basis of the interaction of personal and environmental factors, experiences, motives, decisions, choices, actions are born. The subject of special attention in this regard is the teacher's commitment to the aims and objectives of the structural links of civil society (groups, communities, organisations, associations). This is because it should be noted that the experience acquired, the attitudes displayed, the tasks undertaken and the results of the activities are the subject of observation and analysis by the pupils, and are therefore a source of knowledge that has a certain scope and development dynamics.

The engaged teacher observed by the students is the source of their attitudes and the perpetrator of behaviour worth imitating – not only by copying them, but also by modelling, involving multilateral

³ D. Pankowska, *Kompetencje nauczycielskie – próba syntezy (projekt autorski)*, „Lubelski Rocznik Pedagogiczny” 2016, No. 35(3), p. 201.

activity of learners (this activity undoubtedly has the characteristics of creative activity). Students in the initial phase draw on the teacher's work to create new solutions for building civil society based on their experiences. In this way, pupils' cognitive abilities and their own activity are engaged, up to and including creative activity.

Teacher behaviour modelling plays an important role in the dissemination of new and innovative solutions. Albert Badura identifies the main determinants of the adoption of new behaviours as "The incentives, the expected satisfactions, the observed benefits, the experience of their functional value, the risks associated with engaging in them, the self-evaluation of such behaviours, and the various social barriers and social constraints"⁴.

The engaged teacher is a source of knowledge about the processes of self-actualisation in which the teacher selects, organises and transforms the incoming stimuli. The pupil acquires the conviction that, through self-motivation, self-reliance, autonomy, the individual produces consequences and can influence their own behaviour.

An important issue is the axiological orientation of the teacher. The commitment to building civil society is a space for bearing witness to the real values that constitute that society. This axiological testimony is a significant factor in the axiotropic actions of students with the aim of building civil society. The teacher is faced with the task of becoming a personal role model worthy of emulation in the building of civil society and, through their personal model, animating pupils to this task.

An individual programme class as a micro-school of building a civil society

A school class may include in its educational and teaching programme the implementation of universal/specific objectives specific to civil society entities. Among these are cooperation, self-realisation, self-help, concern for and committed building of the common good.

⁴ Ibidem, p. 29.

Student participation and student activism in the class community enable the articulation and realisation of the individual goals of young people, as well as the goals of the class community. On this basis, class bonds are formed, friendly relationships are established and a high level of trust is achieved. In this way, a space for civic action is formed. The class is transformed into a social organisation, it takes on the characteristics of that institution based on interaction, agreement, dialogue, the need for joint initiatives in which a certain good is anchored.

The school class has the opportunity to become a micro-school of democracy and shared responsibility for united action, the success achieved provides the opportunity for self-realisation. Noteworthy in this respect are the individual programme classes/innovation classes, whose educational and teaching programme is oriented towards the goals, contents, tasks of civil society.

Through the implementation of the programme of the individual programme class, e.g. environmental, managerial, cultural and other class profiles, there is a natural involvement of young people in the implementation of the programmes of existing civil society institutions, thus enriching the class programme with the programme of these institutions. This provides an opportunity for students to acquire practical competences in planning, organising and undertaking activities and valuing their results.

In terms of the acquisition of competences for the creation of various types of institutions that are structural links of civil society, the managerial class profile is a good example. They may constitute a micro-school for acquiring skills and competences, such as:

1. sensitivity to social, cultural, economic problems;
2. courage to take decisions;
3. imagination of the consequences of projects undertaken;
4. ingenuity;
5. ability to solve problems creatively;
6. *savoir-vivre*;
7. ability to act effectively;
8. community involvement.

The type of class indicated allows students to create projects aimed at a vision of a future institution that is a structural link in civil society: a social group, a community, an association, a foundation. In this way, the individual programme class has the potential to become a forge of leaders for building civil society. From it can grow the future founders of associations, foundations, various public benefit organisations⁵.

An interesting example of preparing students to build a civil society are the individual programme classes with an in-depth civic education programme, which provide an opportunity to:

1. Developing individual, social, civic and political awareness:
 - gaining anthropological and philosophical knowledge; answering the questions: who is a person?, where is he/she going?, who can he/she become?, who should he/she become?
 - gaining knowledge of human responsibilities and rights;
 - gaining knowledge of social, state, non-governmental institutions;
 - analysis of conditions conducive to integral human development, sustainable development;
 - gaining knowledge about the constitution and other key legal acts of state importance;
 - promoting the value of cultural and historical heritage of local, regional, national, European scope;
 - promoting respect for other national, ethnic cultures.
2. Developing critical thinking, shaping attitudes, realising values:
 - shaping the skills needed for active participation in society:
 - being open to the other person and treating them as an end, not a means;
 - communication skills;
 - ability to cooperate with another person, a group, a community;
 - responsibility for oneself and for others, the group, the community;

⁵ See K. Chałas, I. Szewczak, *Przygotowanie młodzieży szkolnej do budowania społeczeństwa obywatelskiego*, Wydawnictwo KUL, Lublin 2021, p. 132–148.

- ability to deal with problematic and stressful situations;
 - willingness to engage in voluntary activities in various types of organisations;
 - commitment to tasks undertaken;
 - displaying an innovative attitude;
- forming respect for oneself and others/respecting one's own dignity and that of the other in order to understand each other;
 - making individual, social and moral responsibility a reality;
 - strengthening the spirit of solidarity to build social/community/group bonds;
 - education towards personal, social, moral, cultural values, taking into account different social perspectives in the light of axiological objectivity and personal (subjective) reference point;
 - fostering an attitude of friendship, a positive attitude towards others;
 - developing skills for peaceful conflict resolution;
 - fostering a pro-environmental attitude, expressing concern for the environment in favour of sustainable development;
 - shaping more active strategies to combat racism and xenophobia.
3. Promoting the active participation of students:
- project-based learning;
 - creating opportunities for activity by joining the activities of the school, local, national and international community;
 - creating opportunities to acquire democratic experiences at school;
 - creating student groups and communities⁶.

Axiological education and upbringing towards values are “embedded” in civic education framed in this way. The axiological basis here is formed by four circles of values:

⁶ See E. Potulicka, *Wychowanie obywatelskie – nowy przedmiot nauczania w Anglii, in: Wychowanie. Pojęcia. Procesy. Konteksty*, ed. M. Dudzikowa, M. Czerepaniak-Walczak, Gdańskie Wydawnictwo Psychologiczne, Gdańsk 2008, p. 58.

1. values that “describe” the human being;
2. values conditioning integral human development;
3. values of the environment in which people live and function;
4. values that constitute the European community of spirit⁷.

The school/college classroom is a community space where there is the opportunity to build cultural and social capital – they are the foundations of civil society. Multiplying and exploiting them increases future development potential. The individual programme class provides an opportunity to build – in an in-depth way – a community according to the ideas of civil society and thus builds a trajectory for becoming involved in the activities of the structural links of civil society: groups, communities, organisations, associations, etc. Through active participation in these, pupils participate in the processes that shape the living conditions of social groups and individuals, and thus have an impact on the implementation of the set goals and outcomes of these processes.

Groups, communities, clubs, school organisations as spaces for the acquisition of competences and the practice of civic activities

As already highlighted in the material presented, civic education is one of the basic conditions for building civil society. It should be an education that provides opportunities to gain experience and practice civic action, at the heart of which is solving specific local and supra-local social problems. It must be an “engaged” education, combining the school experience with the experience of civic virtue, which is holistic in nature. In this context, it should integrate three categories of education: about civic virtue, through civic virtue and for civic virtue⁸.

This holistic nature of civic education ensures young people’s participation in “school micro-institutions” that function along the

⁷ Ibid, p. 144-145.

⁸ Ibidem, p. 40.

lines of structural links in civil society. They include: Civic Thinking Clubs, PSGA – Polish Scouting and Guiding Association, SC – Student Council, PRC – Polish Red Cross, SVC – School Volunteer Club, SEC – School European Club, SSC – School Sports Club, SCC – School Caritas Club, SFC – Society of Children’s Friends, various clubs, e.g. animal lovers’ club.

It is becoming an important task of the school to create and support the activities of various types of groups, organisations that provide an opportunity for the integral development of the students and the building of the common good. In doing so, it should be emphasised that each organisation has its own objectives oriented towards building the common good through a specific axiological basis. Through learning about values and realising them, pupils acquire a sustainable axiological orientation, which determines the adoption of shared values in the future and the building of a civil society on it.

The activities of school organisations and action in school organisations provide opportunities for networking with other institutions. At the heart of this collaboration is a structure of action:

1. promoting one’s own activities, actions, programmes to interest other institutions;
2. taking action to incentivise institutions by offering them programmes developed by the school organisation;
3. involvement in the action programmes of local, supra-local institutions, including non-governmental organisations;
4. placement of student volunteers in institutions.

These joint activities – at different levels of participation and with different scopes – provide an opportunity to learn civic skills, build personal bonds, build a community, respect for dignity, solidarity, responsibility, properly understood tolerance, freedom; developing a sensitivity of conscience, a culture of giving; dynamising the spiritual and socio-cultural development of young people – students.

Piotr Gliński points out that

institutional cooperation should rather be based on horizontal and partnership relations, and should itself

be distinguished by the idea of civil society, i.e. based primarily on voluntary, grassroots initiatives and mutual trust⁹.

If the non-governmental institution is a role model for school organisations as a civil society actor, then it will provide a theoretical basis for school organisation members as well as a good example of social learning. Through their activities, school organisations provide an opportunity to acquire the values indicated above by building a community that becomes a civic community.

A fundamental question arises: how do we transform school organisations into communities, including civic communities? It is certainly necessary to provide opportunities for alumni to learn about the nature of the community and to understand its role in people's lives, to initiate its formation, to clearly define the community's goals and plans for its activities. It is necessary to teach the ability to solve social problems both in the near and distant environment, to value the results of undertaking tasks and work on oneself in terms of respect for oneself and others, to instil the need for one's own development, to implement the observance of mutually agreed norms and rules of interaction, to build an atmosphere of friendship and trust. Forgiveness, tolerance, responsibility, patience, kindness, commitment to the causes and persons of others, fidelity, dialogue, listening and recognising the needs of others, and a culture of giving should also be taught¹⁰.

In the activities of school organisations there is a huge potential for authentic civic involvement of its members of their own free will, for cooperation for the common good or subordination to the will of the majority and loyalty to the members of the organisation.

⁹ P. Gliński, *Demokracja bez partycypacji. O konieczności zaangażowania obywatelskiego uczniów*, in: *Wychowanie. Pojęcia. Procesy. Konteksty*, vol. 4, ed. M. Dudzikawa, M. Czerepaniak-Walczak, Gdańskie Wydawnictwo Psychologiczne, Gdańsk 2008, p. 198.

¹⁰ K. Chałas, *Pedagogia gimnazjum, Polskie gimnazjum – tradycja i terażniejszość*, Wydawnictwo ALEX, Dzierżoniów 2001, p. 170–171.

Conclusion

It should be emphasised, as Andrzej Ćwikliński writes, that

In the social discussion of the problems faced, the need for an increased role for education to prepare the young generations entering life to deal with the problems of the future, the image of which is often vague, undefined and often not realised at all, is emphasised¹¹.

Without education, including school education oriented towards fulfilling a social function in a creative, innovative way, there is no dynamically developing civil society. In the perspective of students building such a society, education must be committed and integral, i.e. putting the person and their integral development at the centre. In addition, it should provide knowledge about civil society itself and its institutions, develop students' competences to build civil society and involve civil society entities in the educational and teaching process. All of this should be directed towards enhancing the integral development and education of the student's person, their values and the values of the community in which he or she participates.

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¹¹ A. Ćwikliński, *Edukacja wobec zagrożeń i złożoności cywilizacyjnych*, in: *Dialog o edukacji wobec zmian w globalizującym się świecie*, ed. A. Karpinska, Trans Humana, Białystok 2010, p. 90.

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The future belongs to the young

Introduction

Young people now account for around 20% of all citizens of the European Union. It is an extremely important social group, with its own interests and a real influence on the process of change in society, the economy, culture or technology¹.

Today, many companies or personal brands reach their audience through TikTok, for example. The best example of this is Robert Lewandowski, who when asked during an ESPN interview which medium he prefers – TikTok or YouTube – he replied that he preferred TikTok. Our compatriot's response should not come as a surprise – TikTok is slowly displacing other powerful social media in many countries. Suffice it to say that in September 2021, 59 million users installed TikTok. This is 8 million more than the Chinese medium's main competitor, Facebook². Why is it important to mention this fact? "According to OpenMobi's latest report "TikTok users in Poland", the dominant group on the platform is now young adults, i.e. those in the 18–34 age range (60%). This is closely

¹ K. Messyasz, *Obraz młodzieży polskiej w dyskursie prasowym. Młodzież o sobie i rzeczywistości społecznej*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, Łódź 2013, p. 14–15.

² M. Świech, *TikTok kontra Facebook. Już nikt inny się nie liczy* [online] <https://www.telepolis.pl/wiadomosci/aplikacje/tiktok-kontra-facebook-juz-nikt-inny-sie-nie-liczy> [accessed: 16.07.2022].

followed by youth aged 13–17 (34%).”³. These figures illustrate how much influence young people have on the real attitudes and strategies of companies, celebrities or politicians. In this context, it is worth mentioning that one of TikTok’s users is the current President of the Republic of Poland, Andrzej Duda, who, thanks to his presence in this medium, can reach young people – also current or future voters – with his message. It is on TikTok that all sorts of consumer trends (and more) are created.

When we talk about young people, we reason on the basis of age category. However, there is no single, generally accepted definition of youth, nor are there universally recognised age limits that frame this category. In European Union countries, the upper age limit is usually assumed to be 35. This is due, among other things, to the lengthening human lifespan and the extended period of education. Interestingly, until recently, in some political youth groups, there were even 40-year-olds, who were also defined as the young generation. In the Young Lower Silesia Association (*Stowarzyszenie Młody Dolny Śląsk*), in which I was the president of the board, we stipulated by statute that members of our youth organisation may be persons up to 32 years old and this age limit was 100% successful in our activities.

For many years it has been said that “What we learn early we remember late”. This proverb referred mainly to vices and addictions acquired in youth, which are difficult to eradicate in later stages of life. However, the interpretation of this saying could be different – it could mean that the knowledge and experience gained in youth determines our later attitudes and behaviour. Therefore, the issue of development and the voice of young people in public life should not be underestimated, or worse, ignored. Because our future will soon be decided by Generation Z – with a completely different experience than only slightly older generations (Millennials or Generation Y). Hence, it is worth considering the role of youth

³ Ł. Majchrzyk, *Kim są polscy użytkownicy TikToka? Okazuje się, że to nie tylko nastolatki!* [online] <https://mobarank.pl/2021/11/17/kim-sa-polscy-uzytownicy-tiktoka-okazuje-sie-ze-nie-tylko-nastolatki/> [accessed: 15.07.2022].

in the development of the civic sector, which is increasing, but – in my opinion – still insufficient.

Glass half empty

The percentage of young people who are involved in social life in Poland, e.g. through volunteering or activity in non-governmental organisations, can be considered the first major challenge. No institution in Poland has yet undertaken a real count of how many youth organisations are operating in our country, how many young people participate in the leadership of NGOs, etc. To a person active in the non-governmental environment, it may seem that many young people are currently active in the civic sphere. In contrast, people outside the community may consider that youth activity and participation in the third sector is merely a “needle in a haystack”. So here we have a dilemma – is the glass half empty or is it full? In my view – based on my experience of social activism – unfortunately it is empty.

When giving talks or attending meetings with young people, I often ask them: how many of you are involved in community life and concern for the common good? Most often, the results range between 10–20% of people. In addition, I clearly see two basic types of activities undertaken by young people: organised and unorganised.

The organised type is one in which a young person is aware of their needs and goals and expresses a willingness to engage in civic activity in the form of volunteering or belonging to a non-governmental organisation (e.g. one in which he pursues his passions and satisfies his needs). A young person undertaking this type of activity identifies with the organisation and feels part of a larger community. The second type I notice – unorganised – includes activities resulting from the needs of the moment or the specificity of a given situation. A young person gets involved as a result of pressure from the environment or the desire to help one time. At the same time, they avoid formalised activities e.g. within the membership of a particular organisation. They do so for various reasons – time, bureaucracy

(signing special clauses) or reluctance to participate in the life of the organisation.

The above distinction is, in my view, important for the development of the civic sector, as well as for effective methods of reaching young people with offers of social action. The increasing atomisation of society means that the young person does not feel the need or see the point of being involved in organised action groups. In addition, the ossified education system discourages young people from becoming active in the civic sector. The teacher-student relationship is largely a facade, and the teaching system is focused on the quantitative rather than the qualitative aspect. The schools' lack of flexibility in the face of changes in socio-economic life is also noticeable.

All this means that the great challenge facing the state is institutional support, improvement of the education system and creating a real space for young people for self-development. And before that, the challenge of increasing the proportion of young people involved in society, e.g. through volunteering or activity in NGOs, must be tackled. This needs to be done to avoid over-generalising the phenomenon – a general statement that young people do not get involved in society or that many young people are active in the third sector.

Institutional support for youth and a failing education system

In recent years, there has been a positive trend in terms of support from government, local authorities or business for the activation of young people. Well-planned development paths and programmes dedicated to young people are being created (e.g. in areas such as the labour market, science, environmental protection or broader social initiatives). One of the leading institutions that supports young people with funding is the National Freedom Institute – Centre for Civil Society Development (e.g. through the Civic Initiatives Fund or the Solidarity Corps). Also important is the substantive support provided by the NFI-CCSD (numerous experts from the NGO community sharing their knowledge) and promotional activities (reaching

many diverse communities with programme offers). Suffice it to mention that a programme aimed at young people, entitled “Youth in Action”, Government Youth Fund Programme 2022–2033 was launched in 2022. It is worth noting that an increasing number of youth organisations are obtaining funding from NFI programmes to implement their projects. This is certainly positive news for each side – the public (the Institute) and the civic (active and imaginative youth).

Another example of measures that have been taken to highlight and attempt to empower youth activism is the appointment of a Government Plenipotentiary for Youth Policy and the Act on Youth Councils at Local Government Units. Thus, tools are being created so that the younger generation can finally have a real impact and influence on their local environment. Local governments at every level are also trying – better or worse – to incentivise and encourage young people to act for the common good. Youth councils are therefore being set up and funds are being created to support young people. Young people are encouraged to volunteer or are offered trips abroad and the opportunity to learn about the activities of their peers in other countries.

The role of business must also be mentioned, which offers a wide range of tools to help young people develop, from job offers to grant competitions and training. In addition, companies are increasingly valuing young people who get involved in the community (e.g. by allocating extra points for volunteering during job interviews).

Also significant is the role of non-governmental organisations (NGOs), which in the main create a friendly space for young people to carry out creative initiatives, gain skills and work experience, and at the same time help other people, cultivate the traditions and history of their country or region, or care for environmental protection. If any young person wants – proverbially – to “to have one’s cake and eat it”, I would venture to say that NGOs provide just such an opportunity – for personal development and useful activity.

Certainly, there are still many things to be improved in the area of education. Schools should be the natural place where a young and maturing person could learn about and begin their adventure

in the social sector. I have gone down this road myself – I started my activity in non-governmental organisations at school. However, I am well aware that my *casus* may be one of the few such examples.

During the implementation of the “Disconnect” (Odłącz się) project by the Young Lower Silesia Association, which deals with the prevention of mobile phone addiction among young people, we have encountered cases where young people have told us behind the scenes that, at the primary or secondary school level, they were ridiculed or disregarded by teaching staff and peers when they proposed social initiatives to them. Teachers recognised that young people’s ideas of, for example, collecting pet food or cleaning up their neighbourhood did not belong to the school’s area of activity, but to the statutory activities of NGOs (or animal shelters). What was the effect of this approach? Young people stopped coming up with their own initiatives for fear of being ostracised again. What are the chances of a person treated this way to become involved in social initiatives at a later age? Not great, as they were brutally brought down to earth right from the start. Unfortunately, this is how the potential of young people is stifled, sometimes for their own selfish comfort.

The education system in Poland, without modernisation and dissemination of proven solutions (e.g. in the area of volunteering), will not be a driving force for the development of social initiatives in educational institutions. Although it would seem that it is there – in the schools – that a sense of concern for the common good should already be growing among young people .

Examples of initiatives and involvement of the young generation

Young people have enormous potential, which has not yet been fully used by the institutions of socio-economic life. The resources of young people that are worth mobilising include such qualities as creativity, a different (“fresh”) perspective on the reality around us, sincere commitment, relatively more free time and the ability to learn quickly, as well as a desire for social change (idealism).

These elements, put together, can result in amazing ventures being organised by young people.

CLIMATE PROTECTION

Currently, one of the main areas of youth activity in the civic sector is concern for the environment and climate, including a growing awareness and knowledge of changes. Young people are keen to get involved in environmental projects – regardless of their worldview. They join organisations concerned with environmental protection in the broadest sense and carry out many initiatives related to this topic (from climate education and lectures in schools to neighbourhood clean-ups or the fight against urban paving). One of the projects in this field, in which I participated, was to prepare a report on mowing grass in the communes of the Wrocław agglomeration. Not only did the document appear in the national media (e.g. on the Wirtualna Polska portal and in the magazine *Krytyka Polityczna* magazine), but – importantly – local government officials were also interested in it because they wanted to compare their expenses and the advantages/disadvantages of frequent grass cutting.

Young people also organise various types of protests and demonstrations in an attempt to force local or national authorities to take action against climate change. This is certainly linked to the growing environmental awareness in Polish society, but it is worth emphasising here the significant role of the young generation, who in a sense have initiated a broad discourse on the ongoing climate change and its consequences. According to a report prepared by Deloitte in 2021, among the Millennial generation, anxiety regarding the environment is huge (after concerns regarding health and unemployment, it ranks third on this list and accounts for 26% of responses). For Generation Z, on the other hand, climate protection invariably remains a key concern⁴.

⁴ *Co czwarty młody człowiek najbardziej boi się zmian klimatu* [online] <https://www2.deloitte.com/pl/pl/pages/press-releases/articles/co-czwarty-mlody-czlowiek-najbardziej-boi-sie-zmian-klimatu.html> [accessed: 20.07.2022].

MENTAL HEALTH

“One in seven children in Poland feels dissatisfied with their lives to the extent that their mental health is threatened. Older girls and adolescents from large cities feel worse. Half of young people do not accept themselves” – this is according to a nationwide scientific study on the quality of life of children and young people, commissioned by the Children’s Ombudsman⁵. Young people, especially in the era of a pandemic and the related remote learning, have lost “real” contact with peers for the virtual world. Today, many are struggling with all sorts of mental health problems. The problem seems to be growing.

It is interesting to note that NGOs were the first to recognise how far the phenomenon described was going and called for the intervention of local, regional and national authorities. One entity that has intervened in this way is the Lower Silesian Council for Public Benefit, which has made many comments and demands to the provincial government, including for a stronger emphasis on mental health and behavioural addictions in the Lower Silesian Social Integration Strategy for 2021–2030. Interestingly, young people have also recognised that their friends are struggling with mental health issues and have started a number of initiatives from the bottom up to bring their peers back to healthy life after the pandemic. An example of such an initiative can be the “Disconnect” initiative I mentioned above.

SOLIDARITY WITH UKRAINE

With the outbreak of war in Ukraine on 24 February 2022. Poles threw themselves into supporting and providing assistance to our neighbours across the south-eastern border. Undoubtedly, young

⁵ *Młodzi potrzebują pilnej pomocy psychologicznej – alarmujące wyniki badania Rzecznika Praw Dziecka* [online] <https://brpd.gov.pl/2021/11/05/mlodzi-potrzebujaja-pilnej-pomocy-psychologicznej-alarmujace-wyniki-badania-rzecznika-praw-dziecka/> [accessed: 20.07.2022].

people have also been active in this area. In organised (e.g. through youth organisations) and unorganised forms, young people provided various types of assistance – from serving hot meals, coordinating aid actions, fundraising, to providing all necessary information, e.g. to travellers at train stations. Young people have also willingly expressed their opposition to the war – if only through peaceful demonstrations such as the one in Wrocław on 27 February or 13 March 2022.⁶

Young people's activities in the civic sector are multifaceted, just as young people's passions and points of view are diverse. During the pandemic, youth volunteers supported seniors (by shopping and participating, for example, in the Solidarity Support Corps for Seniors). On a daily basis, young people are also involved in issues that are important for their local communities, e.g. through youth councils or local NGOs. Young people take up activities to cultivate history or tradition, belong to scout associations and are increasingly bold in their involvement in political life. It is therefore not surprising that with each successive election there are more and more young people in local government and in the Polish parliament. The young generation is also conquering the worlds of business and science. Innovative start-ups are being created, talents are being developed (we remember that Mateusz Hołda became at only 29 the youngest professor in the history of Poland)⁷. All this means that young people cease to be objects, but become *de facto* subjects of activity in the public space – they perform a monitoring function (e.g. of local authorities, educational institutions), as well as initiating useful projects themselves (building skateparks, promoting

⁶ *Free Ukraine – Wrocław residents demonstrated their solidarity for the fourth day. Na protest przyszli młodzi*, „Gazeta Wyborcza”, 27.02.2022 [online] <https://wroclaw.wyborcza.pl/wroclaw/7,35771,28162871,wolna-ukraina-wroclawianie-czwarty-dzien-manifestuja-swoja.html> [accessed 21.07.2022]; *W niedzielę demonstracja „Solidarni z Ukrainą” w Rynku. I zbiórka żywności*, „Gazeta Wyborcza”, 12.03.2022 [online] <https://wroclaw.wyborcza.pl/wroclaw/7,35771,28215555,w-niedziele-demonstracja-solidarni-z-ukraina-w-ryнку-i-zbiórka.html> [accessed: 21.07.2022].

⁷ *Najmłodszy profesor w Polsce nie ukończył jeszcze 30 lat* [online] <https://forumakademickie.pl/zycie-akademickie/najmlodszy-profesor-w-polsce-nie-ukonczyl-jeszcze-30-lat/> [accessed: 22.07.2022].

green transformation, etc.). Young people are building and at the same time changing our reality.

Opportunities and risks for young people

Every generation has faced, and continues to face, different kinds of challenges on the road to personal development. At present, young people are focused on returning to their “normal” life after the coronavirus pandemic, on showing their opposition to Russian aggression against Ukraine, and on seeking economic security in the face of an economic downturn, high inflation and an increasingly high cost of living. All phenomena present both opportunities and risks for the younger generation.

OPPORTUNITIES:

1. taking the initiative, “taking matters into their own hands” and trying to find a way out of crises, such as the economic one;
2. accelerating the education process – remote learning;
3. expanding the labour market (e.g. more and more companies are looking for employees whom they will “educate” and specialize in their industry).

RISKS:

1. politicisation of youth initiatives – the association of youth organisations with either side of a political conflict in the country;
2. bureaucratisation and over-formalisation (e.g. when writing and accounting for grant applications);
3. attempts to treat young people instrumentally (e.g. by politicians or for political purposes);
4. digital threats – hacking attacks, deepfakes;

5. greater susceptibility to manipulation due to large amounts of information – lack of adequate education in this area;
6. an inability to cope with the current difficult socio-economic situation, which can lead to depression or psychological disorders.

The instrumentalisation of young people and their being harnessed to the pursuit of someone else's private goals and interests must be considered one of the greatest threats to contemporary youth. This involves politicising initiatives and dividing young people into better or worse, e.g. on the basis of their values. An opportunity to defend against such practices should be found in the now traditional and typical behaviour of young people – rebelliousness and a desire to change the world for the better.

Nothing about us without us

The European Year of Youth will be celebrated in 2023 to draw attention to the role played by Europe's youth in building a better future. It would seem, therefore, that this publication should contain nothing but praise for the growing role of young people in the civic sector. However, this would not lead to anything other than a mutual "pat on the back". The presentation in this study of the current situation of young people – their problems and challenges as well as their opportunities – is intended to make us look at youth development horizontally and with an eye to detail, which can have a huge impact on our overall assessments. Such a look may be particularly necessary for public institutions. For the Polish state faces major challenges, not least in improving the education system in Poland. In turn, this approach can encourage young people themselves to make bold use of the opportunities given to them by modern times. Because, just like the title of the iconic film *Gone with the Wind*, youth and enthusiasm for action – devoid of some self-reflection – can pass quickly.

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A story of the creation of NGO networks

At one time, the Warminsko-Mazurskie Voivodeship was excluded from participating in a grant programme aimed at building NGO networks. Why? Because it is one of the most networked places in Poland. This is the measure of success for a group of a dozen community activists. Let's look at how this happened, bearing in mind that this is not a closed question, as we are dealing with a process that must be constantly monitored.

First we inform, then we network

The first thing I was responsible for in the association was the creation of a database of the addresses of social organisations in the then Elbląg Voivodeship. At the time, we said to ourselves that in order to fulfil the role of an organisation supporting other organisations, which is the mission of Elbląskie Stowarzyszenie Wspierania Inicjatyw Pozarządowych, *ESWIP* (the Elbląg Association for the Support of Non-Governmental Initiatives), we had to get to know them and – precisely – network them. Networking means putting them in contact with each other, enabling dialogue, identifying converging goals, facilitating joint action, and building their identity, making them aware of their extraordinary role in society. As it turned out, this was the smart, forward-looking view of the

association's "founding fathers and mothers'. How much time have we spent meeting, talking, getting to know each other? How much time was spent travelling around the entire voivodeship (at first Elbląg, then – after its dissolution – a much wider one: Warmińsko-Mazurskie)? The first dozen or so years of the association's work was a great effort in this regard. At the same time, we created information databases – first on paper (I fondly recall working on the first publication of its kind, *Elbląg obywatelski*, in which we described Elbląg's organisations active in 2000), then online, which we are still doing today. But – as we will see further on – informing, integrating and eventually networking has greatly facilitated further work on more advanced forms of cooperation between organisations: representations, federations, dialogue bodies, partnerships.

Social capital and the common good

In the hustle and bustle of day-to-day work, we do not give much thought to the overarching goals of our activities. What does our work give to the local community and to the regional community? The nationwide level of such action quite eludes us. There is too much daily busyness in our lives, a necessity to do what needs to be done and still get the money to do it. The mundane part of civic life... And yet, tens of thousands of sites of this social busyness are building something extremely important for social development.

Social capital (alongside human capital, financial capital, etc.) is the value created through the ability to cooperate based on trust. In practice, this means that the more organisations work together, trusting each other, the more they can do together in the community and further afield – for the common good of the local community and the country as a whole. There is then a synergy effect – together we will achieve far more than alone. The common good, on the other hand, is such an arrangement of social conditions that will allow the fullest possible development of individuals or the organisations

they create¹. As organisations, we should therefore work to develop the common good in line with our own capabilities (for example, to help those who have difficulties in this area to get into work or education), but we should also expect higher-level entities – local authorities, public administration, government – to create such conditions so that we can develop the common good (this could be, for example, the effective work of the Public Benefit Council, creating conditions for good cooperation between organisations and local authorities). This is also where the principle of subsidiarity comes into play, which regulates the relationship between – in our case – organisations and the local or national government, to give us space to act, to assist in times of need, but not to bail us out. This, however, is a separate topic.

By working socially, we are not working for ourselves. We will be far more effective as a civic sector if we work together, building trust and therefore social capital, and remembering that we are working for the common good and not just our own organisation. By the way – the longer I work in the civic sector, the longer I look at this reality, the more I respect community workers. They are an extremely valuable asset to our country: people who are responsible, concerned about others, consistent, laboriously building those elusive everyday values of social capital and the common good of Poland and Poles.

Operators are needed

As an association, we were also learning (by the way – we do this constantly). We joined the SPLOT NGO Support Network, an agreement of support organisations from all over the country, where we learned from the best how to work with organisations, including – how to build networks of organisations. It might seem that supporting organisations or community initiatives is easy, anyone can do it. Well, we have experienced that this is not the case, that it takes

¹ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Wydawnictwo Pallotinum, Poznań 2002, No. 1906.

a great deal of knowledge, experience, a certain sensibility, consistency and even passion, that you cannot shy away from “learning the competition”. How many organisations have we taught to write projects effectively! But this does not prevent us from developing our team, now almost fifty strong.

Networking requires an operator (referring to telephony). The usual organisation is busy with its own affairs and does not have the time or inclination for the arduous process of putting leaders in touch with each other and constantly proving that networking pays off. It is different with organisations that need partners for their activities, in which case things accelerate (I am thinking here, for example, of Food Banks and their networks of partners). There are federations in this vein, which bring together a number of organisations, although this is already a higher level of formalised cooperation. However, I see a paucity of organisations willing to carry out such networking processes in various dimensions. Yes, there are SPLOT Network organisations that form networks on a usually regional basis. Sometimes this function is also performed by local governments, if there is a committed official serving organisations in the commune or district. But all this is still not enough. The social sector is still not sufficiently networked, it does not fully use its resources and opportunities. Competition is high and the synergy of activities is still too low.

It is worth taking a look at some of the NGO networking activities in the Warmińsko-Mazurskie Voivodeship. They represent good practices that can give impetus to similar solutions in other regions of Poland.

First – the HEROLD Network

The HEROLD NGO Support Network is the first of our activities to build a kind of support and cooperation system for organisations in the region (systemic rather than action-based activities are important to us). In the 1990s, the wind was still blowing in the civic space – the few old agreements of organisations had gone to seed

and new contacts, agreements or networks were not yet in place. So we decided to take advantage of this space by presenting the organisations with the information that was important to them first – because there was a huge hunger for this (especially information on where to raise money from). At the outset, we convened a dozen organisations from the Warmińsko-Mazurskie Voivodeship to conduct outreach activities to their surroundings. As a rule, these were districts. The next step was to expand and strengthen these organisations and to clothe them in the common name of the HEROLD Network (in the sense of – carrying the message). But soon we realised that information alone is not enough, we need to support existing and emerging organisations. In 2001, the HEROLD NGO Support Network was established. ESWIP was the inspirer and operator of the activities – someone had to give it a go. However, we immediately stated: we play as partners, everyone is important, no one loses autonomy, we provide a service, not a representation. We were attractive to other organisations because we were able to solicit project money for activities, we were able to implement these projects well, we had an idea and determination.

Together, we have developed a standard for the work of the network organisation, and formed a democratic programme board. There were many meetings, conversations, including ones that lasted until the morning. Together, we built the foundations of cooperation, forging the identity of the civic sector in our region. These were important, beautiful, pioneering times. The legacy of those efforts is still paying off today. It should be added that the above activities were subsidised by several successive projects financed from various sources (EU funds, World Bank, the Polish-American Freedom Fund – PAFF, and others).

The HEROLD network followed the needs of the social sector in subsequent years – first handling information, then organisation support (running a network of NGO centres at one time – we still dream of returning to this concept), then local development. Today, the Network brings together social entrepreneurs, although it has to be said that social businessmen are a different world – they don't have time to chat, they have to make money...

The district councils were next

The first representation of the non-governmental sector was established in Elbląg in 1998. The immediate reason for this was the dissolution of the Elbląg voivodeship – it was then that the organisations from Elbląg decided that it was necessary to choose their own representation, so that it could be the spokesman for the interests of the Elbląg non-governmental sector vis-à-vis the voivodeship authorities, which had moved 100 km, to Olsztyn. The Council's Rules of Procedure of Elbląg Non-Governmental organisations were prepared, the document was adopted during the organisation's plenary conference, at which attendance was impressive. There, an eleven-person representation of almost three hundred non-governmental organisations from Elbląg was selected.

The Council's Rules of Procedure set out a number of tasks incumbent on representation: above all, they envisaged cooperation with public administration, giving opinions on draft laws, resolutions and administrative decisions concerning the non-governmental sector, developing positions, integrating the sector, promoting the Charter of Principles for the Activities of Non-Governmental Organisations and others. The Council elected its president. It set out the principles of its operation. Each year, at successive plenary conferences, the Council presents the results of its work, and each year it receives further tasks from the conferences to be carried out. It works to this day. Using the "Elbląg model", the ESWIP Association – in cooperation with the HEROLD Network – led to the establishment of NGO councils in almost all districts of our voivodeship. Again – these are hundreds of meetings, tens of hours of talks, thousands of kilometres travelled. And there was the satisfaction that here were organisations from the district meeting for the first time at a joint conference, getting to know each other, working together. All this – and especially the new relationships and friendships – provided the basis for building something much more difficult: regional representation. As it turns out, this is a formula that is unique in the country.

The Council of Non-Governmental Organisations of the Warmińsko-Mazurskie Voivodeship

Work on the creation of a provincial representation started as early as 2000. We knew that no federation would be able to meet the requirement of representativeness of the whole civic sector, that a different, looser but at the same time more complete formula was needed. A working group of more than a dozen members worked on this formula for more than a year, proposing that all entities that meet certain conditions should be invited for “key” representation. This turned out to be a good idea. The right to delegate one’s representative is granted to:

1. the non-governmental organisations’ representatives of the district or the non-governmental side of the district’s Public Benefit Councils (subject to election by all organisations in the district);
2. provincial federations (unions of associations) with member organisations in at least six districts of the voivodeship;
3. non-governmental organisations of provincial scope with branches in at least four districts of the voivodeship;
4. agreements (networks) of NGOs comprising at least twelve organisations in at least six districts of the voivodeship.

The statute, which set out the objectives and structure of the Council, was developed over several successive meetings, and the final version was widely consulted. The Council was constituted on 17 September 2004 during the conference “Agreement for the Development of the Warmińsko-Mazurskie Voivodeship”.

The Council currently has 37 collective members – federations, networks, district representations and organisations with a regional dimension. It represents more than 1,200 non-governmental organisations in the Warmińsko-Mazurskie Voivodeship. It is an important, obvious partner for the provincial government and the provincial governor. It is worth emphasising that the Council has no legal personality, as it is an agreement, i.e. a kind of network of those organisations that have stated that they want to cooperate

with each other. But it is not the National Court Register that gives power, power is given by the people!

Forum of Public Benefit Councils

The Public Benefit Councils are bodies for dialogue (although only consultative in the Act). They are teams bringing together the two worlds of public administration and civic organisations. Admittedly, these are different worlds, but worlds that ideally should not compete with one another. Worlds that should use their strengths and values for one purpose – to create the common good in local communities. I have to admit that I am surprised that there are so few of these entities, and that they operate quite poorly. I understand that at the level of rural communes, organisations cooperate with the local government on an ongoing basis, but in urban communes, district capitals? You can still see the untapped potential here and something needs to be done about it. Arguably, the remedy is to strengthen the powers of the councils so that these bodies are more valuable and causal for both parties (local government and NGOs).

When more than a dozen Councils were set up in our voivodeship, it was obvious that we thought it worthwhile to network them – after all, they have something to talk about together. In fact! There, councillors as well as officials and NGOs are present – all those who care most about cooperation and development. We organised the first Forum of Public Benefit Councils very soon, in 2014. We now organise them from time to time. Unquestionably, the best-performing PBC is the provincial council – without any break, with a democratically elected non-governmental side, with regional representation. A true role model.

Convention – Networking is not enough

Moving beyond the provincial garden, mention should be made of the Convention of Provincial Public Benefit Councils established at

the inspiration of the SPLOT Network on 24 March 2016 in Warsaw. I had the pleasure of being the president of SPLOT at the time. Representatives from as many as 14 provincial PBCs attended this first working meeting. As the note reads:

All stressed the need for this body, with the need to exchange information and experience, to undertake joint activities and mutual support, to cooperate with the National Council and the environment, etc. being cited as the most important arguments.

Thus, the classic – I would say – needs satisfied by networking were indicated. The convention has been operating for seven years. It brings together NGOs and local government officials from all voivodeships of the country. The basic idea of it being a network for sharing experiences and information has changed significantly over time. The Convention is today an important partner in the public space, at the interface between the civil sector and provincial governments. It is important to emphasise that the National Freedom Institute – Centre for Civil Society Development is a key partner of the Convention.

Networking officials – Plenipotentiary Forum

Every marshal's office, district and municipal office has an official responsible for cooperation with NGOs, and there are even more officials being in official contact with organisations. We estimated that in our voivodeship this amounts to 300 people. With them in mind, we have developed another network, this time of officials.

Together with the Marshal's Office and the Council of Non-Governmental Organisations of the Warmińsko-Mazurskie Voivodeship, we organised the first conference called the Plenipotentiary Forum in 2006 (incidentally, with funding from the Civic Initiatives Forum). The "organisation-responsible officials" present at the meeting said: "yes, we need it!". In this first discussion on forms of cooperation,

they stated that they do not know each other, they lack meetings organised specifically for them, so they do not exchange information and share their experiences, and this would be very useful for their daily work. As these people are crucial (in addition to their managers) for the quality of cooperation between local governments and NGOs, it became obvious that the expected platform – a place to meet, share information, experience and education – should be created. The next step was to spread the idea through the SPLOT Network centres, then even organising nationwide forums. Recently, the plenipotentiary of the Marshal of the Warmińsko-Mazurskie Voivodeship for non-governmental organisations (NGOs) decided that officials were her domain and organised networking meetings for them herself. Good, although it is always worth inviting interested organisations to meetings of this kind as well. Let these worlds merge!

Contacts, networks, partnerships

Networking is an obvious (automatic) activity of ESWIP. To name but a few: networks of professional organisations (e.g. Volunteer Centres Network), partnerships (e.g. district social development partnership or neighbourhood partnership), federations (e.g. Federation of Social Organisations – FSO), coalitions (e.g. Coalition for Circular Economy in Elbląg). Some of the agreements that have been created have exhausted their mission and are no longer in operation, but person-to-person contacts continue to operate. Some networks are inactive, but are ready to be reactivated if necessary. Some, on the other hand, operate continuously, affecting social change. As is often the case in the civic sector – we notice progress, a lot of change. But – and this is encouraging – there will always and everywhere be a group of socially-minded people ready to make an effort for the common good.

As I have already mentioned, in order to create network synergies, an efficient “network operator” must be in place. They must make frequent contact, talk, provide information, inspire, edit positions,

encourage. In spite of difficulties, poor feedback or conflicts and the forcing of individual organisations' own interests, it must "stand its ground at the civic post" (the careless abandonment of these "posts" – is a separate and difficult issue, unfortunately all too common in the civic sector). It is not an easy function, because we are generally task-oriented, so the results of our work should appear immediately, but here they are usually far postponed, far away. My father used to say: "there is no art in sowing, the art is in bringing in the harvest". The trick is not to bring organisations together, but to develop an effective system of cooperation with them.

To summarise

Looking through the annual reports of the ESWIP Association, for which I collected data on networking activities, I realised that many of them were supported by the Civic Initiatives Fund. As you can see, public money has not been wasted, good work has been done. Support for networking continues with the National Freedom Institute – Centre for Civil Society Development, and in a much broader and more resourced format. I appreciate the work of this institution. In five years, the NFI-CCSD has really strengthened the sector, given money to previously overlooked spheres of NGO activity – institutional strengthening of organisations, new solutions like endowment, regranting, etc. For the first time since I started working in "NGO", I feel that the government agenda understands and feels the sector. It is understood that to be workable, NGOs need significant financial support². I remember a dozen years ago, during one of the countless debates, I stated once again that in order to empower organisations, you have to give them money to develop. Just like that. The response from politicians was predictable: you have to fend for yourselves (implicitly this is what they thought of us: "claimants,

² What I hear is that the emerging Social Service Centres are desperately looking for organisations to commission their services and there are no such organisations, and certainly none in smaller towns. How many years has it been since 1989?

they just want more and more money!”). A good tool always costs money. Organisations are a tool for social change. You simply have to invest in them.



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Civil society does not happen by itself – inspiring versus maturing

Defining civil society

Reflections on the definitional framing of civil society are a constant motif at meetings of people active in socio-political life – a necessary procedure and a point to base further discussions on mutually agreed concepts (definitional and narrative areas). On the other hand, nothing stimulates the participants in many meetings, conferences and gatherings more than a ritually reheated argument: what is and what is not a marker of civil society.

Understanding the necessity and relevance of reflection on the definitions of civil society, we recognise its intellectual “density”. The very vocabulary and expression of the “golden-voiced narrators” may be an important, yet reproductive reflection, as we are *in statu nascendi* – becoming a civil society. It is the process of citizens’ real entry into the role of active participants in social life, in its various areas, that is *the sine qua non* of becoming a civil society. The primary, individual factor is the drift (impulse) towards having the feeling (and in time the conviction and certainty) that the fate of the social space in which I function and which is tasked to me also depends on me, the citizen. I am pointing here to the processual nature of, on the one hand, the maturation of the individual to “be more” and, on the other: of society itself, “to include more” individuals, groups of citizens, social circles in its co-creation. Of course, this Frommian “to be more” includes a volitional element, which is also a consequence of the crystallisation of the concept of self (self-condition)

in each of us. This concept is directly and indirectly entangled in the civilisation and development contexts of the times in which we live. If, for example, we call up two sequences of the development of civilisation: the contemporary one (of the post-modern world) and the one from the recent past of the modernising era, both in one and the other the presence of the individual in society will be characterised by different expectations, privileges, rigours, restrictions. This is externalised even more strongly in a comparative perspective: what is condoned/prohibited/desired regarding women vs. men.

Therefore, when analysing the drift towards civic virtue, one has to dialogue with the civilisation and cultural contexts and the conditions for the empowerment of the human individual (in becoming a fully conscious citizen). At this point, it is worth recalling one of the important factors for this impulse to be active (in various matters), namely the feeling of deprivation – want, poverty (in the material, spiritual, social or other spheres). In other words: sometimes we take action because we feel some kind of “hunger”. This may seem to the reader to be a naturalisation of human action too far, but: a stimulus (hunger) triggers a reaction (satisfaction of hunger). In any such experience (relative or absolute deprivation), there is contextual conditioning:

1. awareness of the source of hunger;
2. awareness of how to satisfy it;
3. conditionality of its satisfaction;
4. readiness to act.

The answers to these questions contrast the specific openness vs. hermeticity of the State’s institutions and the citizens’ willingness to share responsibility for them.

Material saturation and the development of civil society

In order to intellectually stimulate the debate, some worthwhile hypotheses can be put forward to shed a contrasting light on the process of becoming/establishing civil society. For example: it can be assumed that the richer the society, the lazier it is in terms of

civic virtue. The opposite hypothesis can also be put forward: the “satiety” of a society is a factor that clearly modifies the attitude of active civic virtue, as is its “poverty”. In order to make this antinomy more readable, I will limit it to two dimensions, namely material wealth and institutional wealth (in the sense of the institutions of the state and the authorities at various levels). It can be considered that material affluence displaces, diminishes, clearly modifies in personal action pro-civic attitudes – it favours entrusting (delegating) them to professionalised entities (civil society agencies: NGOs, preferably with the status of a public benefit institution). Here comes the case “the more I have, the more I will give to be more...”. At the opposite end of the spectrum are the poorer people, who become more radical and selfish as “hunger becomes tangible” and attitudes begin to prevail: “no one else will eat for me, I have to do it myself”¹. The nature of the impulsiveness and radicalism of these “hungry” people is predictable in its essence and can be trivially, socio-technically tamed by the obviousness of its manifestations.

As a result of this predictability, we can deal with reactive strategies:

1. ad hoc saturation (most often leaders, shouters, initiators of change);
2. creating a façade and “fast food” civic virtue (numerous formal entities, including councils, councils, councils);
3. unenforceable entrustment (lack of competence, experience, awareness of the matter).

In the case of the former, it is most often the case that the leaders of claimant groups are satiated with splendour, honour, attention or some other “gra(n)tification”. In other words: using the “screamers” by changing the scene – we introduce from the opposite scene to our

¹ I trust that the reader will find inspiring reflections in these phrases. I feel the intensity of thoughts inside me, I follow the pen that “guides me”. This is because the topics I address are organically close to me, as I have participated in the creation of civic society (both in my daily organic work in NGOs and in the work of the Public Benefit Council or through my cooperation with the Council for Dialogue with the Young Generation and the NFI-CCSD).

scene. Mechanisms quite simple, but effective and unfortunately confirming the folk wisdom that “everyone has a price”².

In the second case, the proliferation of consultative and advisory bodies, i.e. multi-stakeholder bodies and committees, has been effective and has resulted in a large number of memoranda and recommendations, circulars and demands, all signed in praise of the signatories and the represented council. These documents are a kind of fast food for document shredders, greedy binders, sharp staples, paper clips and document folders that (making their existence more human-like) feel they have utility and meaning.

In the third case, a neat shift of responsibility is made to those who are aspiring but unprepared to handle it. They therefore score a spectacular “slip-up” and mostly tame their appetites to “be more”. In turn, those who put them in this position say with a wince: “don’t push yourself on the stage if you can’t handle it”³.

The spherical nature of civic subjectivity

Taking into account Stanton’s⁴ idea that civil society is both an idea and an ideal, I will guide my reflection towards the processual aspects of this experience and becoming. I am doing so on the occasion of the fifth anniversary of the NFI-CCSD, an institution which seems to me to be a real emanation of the thoughts, ideas and also postulates put forward by Piotr Gliński and put into practice with the Institute’s team under the leadership of Director Wojciech Kaczmarczyk.

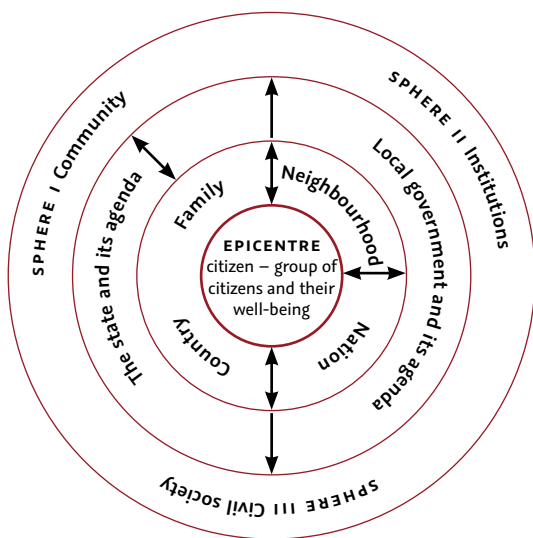
² I am not being cynical here, I am simply describing a more general strategy – other than one based on steadfastness and transparency.

³ The trouble I have with each of the above-mentioned subsections is that I can freely cite examples both from every level of State (local government) organisation and directly from within civic society. The sad thing is that the indicated mechanisms tend to replicate themselves (thus harming the processes of change in various spheres of life, including in the domain of becoming a civic society).

⁴ K. Stanton, *Promoting Civil Society: Reflections on Concepts and Practice*, in: *The Revival of Civil Society: Global and Comparative Perspectives*, ed. M.G. Schechter, P. Macmillan, London 1999, p. 243-245.

I see the spherical nature of civil society, in which the different spheres orient themselves towards each other in dynamic resonance: sympathetic, attentive, supportive, complementary, co-creative and thus co-responsible. This ever-changing nature of relationships, resonating, takes place both from a horizontal perspective (from the citizen through institutions to civil society) and from a vertical perspective (between citizens, groups of citizens, communities, institutions and agendas of authorities at different levels).

Figure 1. Sphericity of civil society



In the above spherical arrangement, there is a divergence into the classical dimensions of social civic activity, which Gliński⁵ divides into verbal, potential, enclave and experiential activity. Each is active and, in well-established democracies, an equal factor of social development and shared responsibility for the Nation and the State (taking into account the primacy of citizens' subjectivity). Of course, our reflection and the achievements of the NFI-CCSD over the past

⁵ P. Gliński, *O społeczeństwie obywatelskim w Polsce. Teoria i praktyka*, in: *Homo eligens. Społeczeństwo świadomego wyboru. Księga jubileuszowa ku czci Andrzeja Sicińskiego*, ed. D. Gawin, Wydawnictwo IFiS PAN, Warsaw 1997.

five years also need to be presented in the specific developmental context of Poland and the historical context of Europe and the world. It would be disingenuous to ignore this aspect when, I assume, many of the readers are experienced citizens, aware of what is happening around us: in Poland as our homeland and in the community of our Nation.

At the beginning of this text, I indicated that becoming a civil society must include a certain readiness on both sides (Sphere I – the epicentre and Sphere II – the field of dialogue and openness) to merge into the sphere of civil society (Sphere III) by taking joint responsibility for the common good. At present, there are manifestations of a far polarised perception of both the community of the Nation and the definition of the State. Without exegesis of this state of affairs, the areas of strong social antagonism are situated at the poles of identification and/or the lack thereof – they are linked to:

1. The community of the Nation, which manifests itself in the presence of neo-tribes in the area of the community of Poles divided into “more Polish” and “less Polish” and “foreigners to the Polish *raison d'état*” or “Europeans” vs “nationally homogeneous”. What I am stating here is that in the current context of the political-ideological dispute, the positioning of circles, of civil society leaders, is also taking place.
2. The understanding and attitudes resulting from the two overlapping crises of our time: the pandemic (sometimes a plague) and a war (Russia-Ukraine).

In both cases, we are dealing with excellent means for examination of whether we can speak of a flourishing vs withering civil society in Poland. Clearly, an individual's attitude towards emergency situations (pandemic/war) is a conglomeration of many different factors:

1. In the case of the social challenges of a time of pandemic disease, civic activism may be conditioned, for example, by one's own state of health, a sense of threat to loved ones, empty spaces to be developed (i.e. finding answers where State and local government assistance does not reach and/or is limited),

formal-legal restrictions of sanitary rigour (which severely narrows the possibility of interpersonal contact).

2. In the case of war, these are, for example, regulations on activity in the border zone⁶. But there is also a real sense of danger vs responsibility for the members of their own associations and involving them in such a task-intensive area and risky time.

It has been justifiably stated in many quarters that, thanks to the activity of citizens – their spontaneous self-advocacy and self-help – and the activity of NGOs, it has been possible to pass this difficult test of testing times and to support as many people in need of help as possible⁷. This is also the effect of recent initiatives of the NFPI-CESD,

⁶ Ordinance of the President of the Republic of Poland of 2 September 2021 on the introduction of a state of emergency in the area of part of the Podlaskie Voivodeship and part of the Lubelskie Voivodeship, Journal of Laws 2021, item 1612.

⁷ Often, these statements are based on the perspective of the assessment “from one’s own window”, i.e. the privatised (subjective) perspective of the participants of the activities who did not eat enough, did not get enough sleep – they were constantly at the police station (the environment referred to it as “operation frenzy”). At that time, one crisis (pandemic) would go to the next (war) and a specific type of behaviour would occur: “hyperactivism/superactivism”, which at times had a toxic form. This absolutely does not undermine the credibility of the overall accurate environmental assessment as to who helped, how and how effectively. However, one would like to base such claims on cross-sectional, well-established research on aid phenomena, which is obvious, but not sufficiently appreciated. An example of this is the ad hoc cross-sectional research project I prepared in relation to refugee assistance: Research project for 2022–2023 *Cross-sectoral comparative analysis of socio-psycho-educational-economic factors enhancing versus disorganising aid processes in a refugee crisis in the experience of helpers and help-receivers*. Overall research objective: to make a comparative analysis of the aid system at the level of institutions of the State, Local Self-Government Units, civil society (NGO, Third Sector) in the situation of a growing refugee crisis. civil society (NGOs, Third Sector) in the situation of a mounting refugee crisis, from the perspective of two sides of the aid process: the giver and the receiver of aid. The study includes an in-depth analysis of the reinforcing factors, which are conducive to the assistance implemented, and those opposing it, i.e. making it ineffective or inappropriate. Elements of this differentiation are defined in the environment of those who provide and those to whom the aid is addressed. It is therefore a matter of *in statu nascendi* to gain knowledge of who is being helped, in which areas the help is being provided, which institutions are involved, how it is provided; how the complementarity and relevance of the aid provided relate to each other. the complementarity and relevance of the aid provided (government-government-civil society) and a description of the giver vs. receiver relationship; what is the motivation of the helpers, what aid recipients think about it; what are the conditions

as projects implemented with available funds and ad hoc allocations affect activities related to both crises – activities that impinge on project permeability. In addition, they were supported by numerous webinars and trainings devoted to the “here and now” of both crises.

We are therefore operating in turbulent times, marked in Poland by acute political strife, powerful upheavals on the European continent, a crisis of confidence in European institutions and the Russia-Ukraine war. All this at the same time as new waves of pandemic threats. This creates and defines special fields of social and civic activity for civil society representatives, which are organisations, associations, social workers and volunteers.

Signs of civic initiative in the Lubuskie region

The Lubuskie region, my homeland, is beautiful. I am a first-generation Lubuskie citizen, as my parents came here from different regions of Poland. From my father’s side I am from the Zamość region, from my mother’s side I am from Wielkopolska – from Poznań to be exact. My parents came here, like many of their peers, from everywhere, creating a rich socio-cultural mosaic of this land. A problem that needs to be addressed is the continuing tendency to exclude the Lubuskie region from cultural and historical coherence with the rest of the country. Anyway, this applies in a general sense to the entirety of the Western and Recovered Territories, perceived as “insufficiently ours”, as if “glued” to the area of indigenous Poland. Their Slavic ancestry is not taken into account, perhaps for the sake of centuries of German domination of the area. Post-war history (after the Second World War) is also not easy. The constant sense of the temporary nature of these lands within the borders of Poland was not conducive to the creation of a community of inhabitants or to the crystallisation of their bonds with the region, with this land

of effectiveness (barriers), what strengthens effectiveness, and finally deriving relevant recommendations from the research. Despite this, the project makes a lot of sense, it has not been approved by any ministry, and yet the authorities will soon be held accountable for this.

and its history, as “everything here was not ours, not the cemeteries, nor the churches, nor the houses...”.

Under conditions, it was easier to socio-technically model attitudes favourable to the (communist) authorities of the time, to create the identity of the “new socialist man”. In this process, the cultural heritage brought here by the incoming population was erased, ignored and fought against, whether it consisted of soldiers of the Second Army returning from the front, or those returning from camps, captivity, deportation to forced labour in Germany, from the Gulags, or those “brought in” as a consequence of the operation *Wisła* from the Eastern Borderlands and/or other regions of the country. These lands are characterised by long years of silently enduring the oppression of the new authorities and frequent building of an illusory community – forced, directed, “because it was convenient for the authorities”, rather than spontaneous, internalised. This situation lasted for many years and gave birth to a new generation of “reproducing elites” and “permanently marginalised”. In both cases, reproduction was taking place: an awareness of who you are and what you can aspire to. With the former being consistent with the world of power, more expensive in the way of career and social advancement, and the latter increasingly interpreted as unpragmatic, oppressive, isolated, unnecessary “tilting at windmills”. Social moods and political sympathies over the years became more and more homogenised, at the same time rising environments and political groups ancient regime and/or over time, promoting left-liberal parties with clearly pro-German and pro-Russian affiliations.

Both in the past and now, the civil society of the Lubuskie region has been strenuously empowering itself. The latest Report from the Central Statistical Office⁸ shows that the rate of NGO presence

⁸ Report: Działalność stowarzyszeń i podobnych organizacji społecznych, fundacji, społecznych podmiotów wyznaniowych, kół gospodyń wiejskich oraz samorządu gospodarczego i zawodowego w 2020 r. – wyniki wstępne [online] <https://stat.gov.pl/obszary-tematyczne/gospodarka-spoeczna-wolontariat/gospodarka-spoeczna-trzeci-sektor/dzialalnosc-stowarzyszen-i-podobnych-organizacji-spoecznych-fundacji-spoecznych-podmiotow-wyznaniowych-oraz-samorzadu-gospodarczego-i-zawodowego-w-2020-r-wyniki-wstepne,3,9.html> [accessed: 09 August 2022].

reaches only 2.4 per 10,000 inhabitants. The Lubuskie region is at the bottom of the list, although it has invariably been accompanied for years by the Opole region with an index of 2.5. And this state of affairs has continued for years.

This is why the organic, arduous, difficult, time-consuming work involved in awakening civic virtue in the Lubuskie region (also in the Opole region) is indisputably necessary. The effort to build civil society is done in collaboration with various entities and people recognising that civil society will not happen by itself (unless in a process of rapid, revolutionary change) and that it needs both leaders and places for its identification, meetings and events crucial to self-identification and self-organisation⁹.

The people I cited in the footnote see the NFI-CCSD as a creator vs demotivator of civic activism. This is because it sometimes stifles grassroots creativity through bureaucratic barriers. On the other hand, our network of colleagues – “acting on the front line” – is often characterised by a poverty of task competence, resulting in the primacy of emotion over pragmatism (especially in the context of contacts with such professionalised institutions as the NFI-CCSD). As a result, too often in our actions we respond to the call of the spirit when the idea withers away. The implication is that community work is not to be “the work of one for all”, but “the work of all for the sake of the community”. By this I mean a process that has to

⁹ I would therefore like to thank Mr Wojciech Jachimowicz (member of the PBC and the Programme Council of the NFI-CCSD, community worker, passionate about regionalism) for his many years of ‘ploughing the fallow land’ and supporting NGOs in my region, Mr Kamil Sieratowski (secretary of the Obra-Warta Local Fishery Group) – a man of institutions, creator of many entities and activities; Ms Beata Zaliwska, President of the Miecznik Pomocniczości i Dobroci Association from Ciborz, a psychiatric nurse, sensitive to human fate and professional in supporting those in “misfortune”; Mr Tadeusz Płóciennik (President of the Sokół Sports Association in Żary), educator of many generations of young athletes, representatives of the country, region and city; Wojciech Weryszka from Biazków near Cybinka – a steadfast son of Polesie, who successfully revives the traditions of his ancestors in the Lubuskie Land; Mr Piotr Kowalczyk from Wymiarek, Mr Krzysztof Warcholik from Świebodzin; Mrs Henryk Starosta, a long-standing animator and creator of the “Mała Tęcza” children’s and youth song ensemble from Olbrachtów, which together with the “Złoty Kłós” ensemble from Marszów, led by Mrs Jadwiga Siri, received MP cultural patronage.

happen, i.e. a maturation of civic virtue: institutional and personal, taking place with the hope of ability to process and sustainability of change. This must be realised in dialogue with the institutions of power at every level, i.e. “those in power must want it!”.

Any advisory, formal, financial, functional, environmental support from the NFI-CCSD is worth appreciating and I praise it in all forums, taking into account the not inconsiderable role of both the leaders and the many young staff members of the Institute who created it five years ago and still constitute its prestige and good reception in the beneficiary community. However, critical reflection is also necessary. Even comparing such a young institution to the Youth, then Youth Plus, then Youth in Action and finally Erasmus and Erasmus+ programmes that have been in operation for many years, it must be firmly stated that NFI-CCSD has nothing to be ashamed of. It has already become a major player in supporting civil society in Poland.

Conclusion

Certainly, there remain quite a few reefs that need to be eliminated in order to meet the challenges of the difficult times. I encourage the NFI-CCSD to have a process of constant self-evaluation, change and compatibility with the pulse of district-commune Poland. This Poland feels inadequately looked after, suffers from high staff turnover, outflow of people, discouragement, resignation, and feels fear and apprehension that “the authorities” (unfortunately the NFI-CCSD is sometimes perceived this way) will punish NGOs with draconian penalties, make them return the funds, and after all “where are we supposed to get it from, since we spent on initiatives”¹⁰.

I would like to draw particular attention here to a key element of synergy between the CITIZEN and the authorities – that is trust.

¹⁰ Please don't be upset with the NFI-CCSD that its role is interpreted in this way, but the common perception is that people find it difficult to get rid of the habit of such – often unfair – generalisations.

It must be assumed that the vector of this process is bidirectional – works both ways and is mutual. Thus, NGOs are expected to increase their organisational efficiency, functional relevance, representativeness for local issues. But after all, clear expectations are also being formulated for NFI-CCSD to move away from functional blockades, mechanisms that nullify the smouldering mutual trust. In conclusion – as someone who is in touch with the civil sector – let me list some of the accusations made against the Institute:

1. The lengthiness of decision-making processes regarding the announcement of the results of grant competitions – we all complain about this (especially those entities that do not have sufficient own resources to make a deposit for projects in preparation).
2. Lengthy and hyper-detailed – excessive bureaucracy (even though much good has already been done in this area) in the process of phased accounting for year-long projects, which dramatically delays the payment of successive tranches of funds for their implementation¹¹.
3. Emerging tendencies towards both clientelism and unauthorised harm to the independence of the institution and its financial and programme decisions.
4. Insufficient institutional memory, especially in the context of the time of the pandemic, when the specificity of the forms of action and the organisation of work required greater reactivity and modality in the face of the rules of the sanitary regime and the phasing out of the pandemic threat.
5. Insufficient (yet increasing) responsiveness to the contexts of the socio-economic environment conditioning NGO activity (inflation, war, new ad hoc task challenges).
6. The volatile, chimerical nature of the mutual trust of the Institution (NFI-CCSD) towards the beneficiary (with undisguised

¹¹ Of course, the malice can be multiplied and bizarre examples can be cited, such as stories in circulation that the funds for the project came in December – the project, in turn, was for year-round activities and... it is clear that a hundred-odd unhelpful rumours do the job, but I am sometimes the recipient of factual information entrusted to me by confused beneficiaries, so there is a grain of truth in this...

suspicion that it has something to hide) and the beneficiary towards the Institution, that decisions are not transparent or based on factual, substantive grounds.

It would be worthwhile, at this special time of the NFI-CCSD's fifth anniversary, to incorporate the above-mentioned expectations of the Institute into the process of change at the institution. It is worth streamlining operations, opening up programmes more widely and engaging more boldly in dialogue with NGOs, listening to their expectations and needs.

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Third messianism. Janion as a total work of art

The most beautiful definition of community – a community based on true solidarity – that I know is a community of those who go through limit experiences together: suffering and joy. Community is people laughing together and crying together. What is it like with us? In our country, some people laugh at those who cry, and others cry when others laugh. There can be no deeper division than this. A wall of misunderstanding, indifference and anger comes out of our heads, and finally – it passes through Poland.

Over the past few years, Poland has experienced a series of shocks: catastrophic weather events (drought, fires and floods alternately, and smog, all the time), the covid-19 epidemic, and finally war. Once, each of them would equal a great crisis, a social apocalypse, and we had to go through them all at once, through their explosive, unpredictable accumulation: “air, fire and war”. I remember the sighs of my students, exhausted by visions of climate Armageddon and endless Covid quarantines, when we met after Russia’s attack on Ukraine. We started the semester with one of the brightest students defining her own generation as the generation of anxiety. And now the “generation of anxiety” was ending their semester with war. How do you make a transition from the brutal world to the university class? How can we talk about quality methods when a country is burning next door and thousands of refugees are storming our borders? There was some disagreement and misunderstanding

in the eyes of the students, that behold, in front of their eyes “it has begun”. And what “is beginning” in this part of the world, trying to carve out some existence here between Germany and Russia, West and East, the USA and China? There is only one answer: the war is beginning. War – for which no one prepared my students and us the same. When we say: “It has begun”, then we know that the end has begun. “This is the beginning of the end”, as Kazik sang in his prophetic song about “this land”.

Law and ritual

Any society subjected to such powerful overloads is at risk of apocalypse. When the world around us falls apart, we most often jump at each other’s throats. As the French-American anthropologist René Girard has shown, stories about the end of the world – about floods, earthquakes, conflagrations – are in fact always stories about the crisis of society and the breakdown of relationships between us. In such a situation, the gift of community and solidarity becomes the most fragile gift. The paradox is that only community allows us to go through the apocalypse – for we can only go through the end together, “one bearing the other’s burdens” – and it is community that we are losing the quickest. We are losing it because we are tearing it away from each other. We want to appropriate it. And then we return to the most archaic of social processes. To regain the lost sense of unity, we, like ancient societies, use two primary strategies: law and ritual.

The strategy of the law is that we repress all disordered desires: sexuality and aggression, we impose taboos and restrictions on ourselves, we root out all violence between us, all irritations, we avoid stepping on each other’s toes. In the language of Girard’s theory, the law is at its deepest level based on the prohibition of imitating others – it forbids us to covet all the “things” that belong to our neighbour, because thanks to this we cannot enter the spiral of aggression. This was the path unknowingly chosen by most governments in the face of the epidemic. The laws they enacted were extremely strict – they even forbade us to meet in the forest! We could not bury our

dead! When we cannot see each other, even during our civilisation's founding burial liturgies, it is clear that all causes of conflict have been eliminated. But at what cost! Moreover, the absence of conflict does not at all mean peace and unity. After all, order is maintained only because the state has a monopoly of violence, which it will use to enforce the law if necessary. In such a harsh world, a world of draconian laws, one cannot live. It is impossible to breathe in it.

Therefore, archaic societies developed a competing strategy alongside the strategy of law, the strategy of ritual or carnival, which brings life and heat to the cold world of law. However, this strategy of regaining unity is paradoxical. Well, it involves ... breaking the law. What was forbidden by law, ritual commands. All taboos must be shattered. The ritual is based on imitating others without any boundaries, legitimises the desire for what others have, stirs up latent aggression and sexual impulses. Out of minor transgressions slowly emerges a violence that absorbs everyone. Okay, but what does that have to do with social cohesion if a ritual makes everyone fight? Well, at some point, the dynamic of "all against all" turns into the dynamic of "all against one". Society finds a scapegoat and – through their exile, persecution, murder – rebuilds its unity. Everyone unites in hatred against the scapegoat. Another paradox is that it often becomes the incumbent king, the legislator – the one who introduced and enforced the law. Only then can you finally breathe.

Now, if we look at our societies in the last two or three years, we see that there has been an oscillation between a regime of law that tried to keep society from boiling, and a regime of ritual in which societies exploded and focused their aggression on "kings" (prime ministers, presidents) who represented the law. This, I believe, is how the Black Lives Matter movement in the USA, or the All-Poland Women's Strike should be understood¹. After a sterile, suffocating time of Covid restrictions came a time of breaking all the rules that had previously been heartlessly enforced. With economic and

¹ M. Łuczewski, *Wirus społeczny. O konflikcie społecznym w pandemii* [online] <https://wei.org.pl/2021/dokumenty/raporty/mluczewski/wirus-spoecznyo-konflikcie-spoeczny-m-w-pandemii-michal-luczewski/> [accessed: 29.07.2022].

political institutions weakened by the wave of crises, it was no longer economic or social progress but moral and religious progress that was most important. Contemporary societies have begun to move away from traditional forms of social mobilisation to heated, explosive social performances that resemble the carnivals and religious rituals of archaic societies. While it is possible to attribute law to the domain of the state and the ruling elite, and ritual to the domain of society and the counter-elite, it is apparent that society itself moved between law and ritual. Often, the same people who called for radical precautions such as not leaving home unnecessarily and social distancing were moments later taking part in the All-Poland Women's Strike, which gathered millions on the streets.

How can the community of Poles be rebuilt in such a situation of polarisation? Can we find community and solidarity in this oscillation between law and ritual? This is a breakneck task, because in our Christian culture – Polish atheists are of course Christian atheists – we do everything in the name of community and solidarity. In the name of solidarity, all restrictions, even the most dubious ones, were observed and in the name of solidarity these restrictions were broken. But neither side has been able to create an inclusive community. Moreover, some built social unity on law and others on ritual, but all became increasingly polarised. The combination of these two mechanisms in one society led to even greater social division and disintegration. The scapegoating mechanism could not bring false and temporary peace, because the other side could not be eliminated in any way. Trying to make it “disappear” only made it stronger. Consequently, what one side of Polish society saw as an expression of solidarity, the other saw as an expression of hatred – and *vice versa*.

Some clue to getting out of this dead end can be the concept of my mentor, Charlie Palmgren, who says that restoring trust involves going through four steps: (a) interacting with another, (b) recognising another, (c) integrating insights, and only then is joint action possible and (d) development. Following his master, one of the most eminent American theologians of the twentieth century, Henry Nelson Wieman (Martin Luther King dedicated his doctorate to

him), Charlie describes this process as a creative interchange². To illustrate this process, I will use my experience from the last years and decades of the Polish culture wars.

Past experience is not just a matter of the past. The Polish-Polish war will not end, but rather – we can be sure of this – it will get even worse. We can learn from past wars about future wars. For it is clear that further, perhaps even more catastrophic shocks are coming (energy poverty, the impoverishment of societies, inflation, stagflation, state bankruptcies, the radicalisation of the masses, the collapse of governments, the change of world order and even the vision of nuclear war) and our society will once again reach for what it has always reached for: law and ritual, except that they will be correspondingly more radical, because the reality they will face will be radical. And everyone, even more desperately looking for community, will forget about it once more.

Interaction: Seeing reality

During the most heated protests following the announcement of the Constitutional Court's verdict on the "Act on the Protection of Life" I could not move from my bed. When the fever had passed and I thought I would be able to return to normal life, but the coronavirus struck me suddenly. In a way known only to itself, it found this most painful place, which awakens in me in moments of stress and turns into a hunched, suffering body. Every attempt to change position was torture. I looked at everything through a Covid fog with the fear of another attack of pain. And then my son brought me a recording from outside Warsaw's St. Alexander's Church. The whole of Three Crosses Square filled with a crowd of "fuck PiS" placards above their heads chanted: "Fuck off, fuck off, fuck off", "fuck your arse, fuck your arse, fuck your arse", "fascists, fascists, fascists". It looked like

² S. Hagan, Ch. Palmgren, *Chicken Conspiracy: Breaking the Cycle of Personal Stress & Organizational Mediocrity*, Baltimore 1999; Ch. Palmgren, *Ascent of the Eagle: Being and Becoming Your Best Paperback*, Dayton 2008.

sacrificial rituals taken from anthropology textbooks, all taboos were destroyed and the hitherto repressed aggression, violence and sexuality came to the surface.

I saw men dressed in black outside the church, who wanted to defend it from the pressing crowd. Between the two groups, police in full combat gear: batons, shields, helmets³. One woman in the front row, who clearly didn't care that she was being recorded, shouted into the camera: "Bąkiewicz, you fucking whore, fascist, suck a dick, you twat - go for it!" - "Dad" - Jeremi looked at me inquisitively. "Would you defend the church if you could?" "Yes" I heard myself reply.

I don't know what went through my mind. Demonstrations, protests and counter-protests are not my style. I don't like crowds. Besides: I would be afraid to stand in the crumple zone, at the intersection of these two Polands that could drive me apart, among extreme emotions and insults, and then - criticism of friends who would connect me with "fascists". Nor, in this frenzy and exultation, would I be able to forget the silent death that rose into the air with every exhalation of excited bodies. They were all screaming, strong and compact, but an invisible virus was already flowing between them to find their most sensitive point. In the name of what would I risk my health and life? That cold, boiling square was the last place I should have been, and yet I responded: "Yes" - and tears came to my eyes.

This answer surprised me because it came from outside my calculating and fearful brain, somewhere from the depths of my heart, in whose bloody recesses Polish, arch-Polish sentimentality had been deposited. On my bed of Covid sorrows, I felt that I was straightening up, that facing the crowd would do the right thing. Like when I travelled into the unknown to Kiev's Maidan because my pregnant wife had sent me to Ukraine to fight for "your freedom and ours". But my progressive friends, trained in suspicion and criticism, would not see in the scene between the suffering father and the curious

³ St. Alexander's Church (26.10.2020) [online] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=droq4bQcxcu> [accessed: 29.07.2022].

son “the stubborn persistence of Polishness”, but a reproduction of patriarchy and nationalism.

The wall, which passed first through the steps of the St. Alexander’s Church was now passing through my thoughts. I was moved that I would defend the church, and “they” were certainly moved that they defended women, I was afraid of “their” aggression, and “they” – of mine, I was angry at “them” and “they” were angry at me. This apocalyptic confrontation between us only took place in my battered head, as I lay in malaise for weeks afterwards, struggling to turn from side to side. I just watched as symbols of the black strike, lightning bolts and eight stars appeared on my friends’ avatars, from under which our faces could no longer be seen, as more university faculties issued increasingly fiery proclamations and how far we had strayed from the old world, as the noble Professor Jerzy Bralczyk, whom we always obediently listened to, became the object of ridicule when he ordered the protesters to replace the vulgar slogan “fuck off...” with the old Polish “begone”.

Every day, when I drove my children to school, I passed the church and I felt a bit like when, as a quite young boy, I passed the mighty Berlin Wall. On the west side it was peppered with the strangest graffiti and might have seemed like a giant art installation, but its true meaning was revealed on the other, eastern, “my” side: empty, sinister and bloody. And now, thirty years later, I was looking at similar colourful inscriptions in Warsaw, behind which lurks emptiness and hostility. Here is my itinerary. Stop one: there were two vans standing on Marymoncka Street with signs reading “abortionists killed 131 children in the Bielański Hospital”. Then the inscriptions were painted over (“Yes to choice, no to terror”), so 1–0 for progress. Stop two. A string of red graffiti: “We are taking over the means of reproduction”, “If I want an abortion, I will have one”, “I will not give up my freedom”. Here no one even tried to compete, only Legia fans added the L symbol and cwks here and there. Stop three: “Fascists are just scumbags,” said the inscription that replaced the blurred “Gays are just fags”. Finally, I was home. My wife and a bunch of kids welcomed me with bread and salt.

In my street nobody wrote anything because there was nothing to write on. We are destroying public property, not private property. Only once did a neighbour put up an Andrzej Duda election poster, but someone vandalised it after a week. That was the end of our discussion of politics, and from then on Duda stared at our street with his empty, cut-out face. Even though we don't talk about our views, after all, this invisible wall still passes between us: through our streets, our families, our neighbourhoods. Although we do not say out loud what we think about Poland, we easily recognise who is who, "team Tusk" and who is "team Kaczyński".

Recognition: Appreciate your opponent

The barricade between us is powerful, we suffocate under it, but it simultaneously protects us from the apocalypse. Without it, there would be a social explosion, because we would really kill each other. At Three Crosses Square, in the place where two Polands met, there had to be police so that we wouldn't hurt each other. Just when it seemed like this wall was about to break and we were going to kill each other, something happened that I couldn't explain. Suddenly, this blasphemous crowd that was alien to me began to sing the Polish anthem. Among the "fuck you" and "fuck offs" our national anthem and its words, "March, March Dąbrowski" sounded out. At first I thought it was a joke, another transgression, but no – everyone stood at attention and sang in concentration, with seriousness. The crowd calmed down and united. It was overwhelmed by some strange sublimity.

I smiled as, despite all the pathos, the protesters sang the Polish anthem as incompetently as I did at every school assembly. I found myself in all these falsehoods, inequalities, because they were my falsehoods. I always sang with great emotion, until at my first audition for the high school choir, the director told me not to try any more. But I continued to sing, even more fiercely, to silence his unfair opinion. Professor Antoni Sułek believes that people who talk too politely and around the topic should not be trusted, and

late Krzysztof Michalski reiterated that he did not trust people who did not curse (after the strikes, he could trust many more people; except, of course, Professor Bralczyk), and I don't trust people who don't sing off-key. Every time someone sings loudly despite all their auditory and articulation imperfections, I feel close to them.

The Dąbrowski's Mazurka, the Polish national anthem! Two decades ago, my friend and I walked along the boulevards of the Zayandeh Rud River, which flowed through Isfahan, an architectural pearl of Iran and at the same time a "city of Polish children", who found shelter here during the World War II. We were accosted by some Iranians. When they found out we were from Poland, one of them said: Mrożek. And he said it perfectly with a beautiful, clear Polish "ż" in the middle. "Mrożek?" I asked, because I was not expecting to hear this word in this setting. "Yes, his plays wonderfully describe the absurdity of our life in Iran". We laughed, and some kind of cross-cultural, intellectual thread was formed between us. We sat down under the bridge and they began to sing their polyphonic songs, which echoed against the spans and brought me to some distant times of Hafiz and Rumi. But in the end they did what had to happen at some point. When they finally finished, their gaze went to us and they said it was our turn. What? Hold on! How come? We were terrified. In panic, we tried to think of some songs whose words we knew. But nothing was suitable. If I came up with something, Maciek spread his hands helplessly. If he proposed something, I was helpless. We had a few carols left, but as liberals and atheists we were too proud to sing them. Until, finally, we went to the last resort: the anthem. Singing off-tune, uneven, not hitting the right sounds, more and more embarrassed and with increasing pathos, we melodeclimated this Dąbrowski's Mazurka of ours and this Dąbrowski's Mazurka really turned into Mrożek.

Twenty years on, in front of the St. Alexander's Church I heard the same anthem sung with such effort over Zayandeh Rud. And if it hadn't been for the trip to Iran, for me and Maciek the beginning of the tortuous path that led him to Islam and me to Christianity, I would probably be singing it now among that black crowd. Suddenly I realised that each of us, in our own way, tried to sing this

anthem so that we could “be Polish” again. We can distort it, torture it, torment it, but there is in us this hidden desire for unity, community and solidarity, the desire to be Polish, the desire to simply be. Yes, that’s what it’s all about. We want Poland to be Poland. We want to march “to Poland” in order to “merge” with it, because then only “we will be Poles”. So we all marched to the Three Crosses Square – from our beds, from behind the screens, from combat posts, standing on the stairs. Those were citizens, Poles, my neighbours.

Integration: Integrating symbols

We want peace, but we are preparing for war. We long so much for solidarity and community that we are capable of killing each other. Who cast this curse on us? Everyone shouts “Poland is here”, and I don’t know where and what it is. Our brains tend to understand reality with cold sentences and logical inferences, but social movements are moved by hot symbols and archetypes.

I wanted to understand these perceptions of the other side that pushed my friends onto the streets. Joasia, who is a professor of sociology in Kraków, answered that for her, somewhere at the bottom, it was *Freedom leading the people to the barricades*, and Tomek, one of Poland’s most eminent social scientists, explained to me that it was “the body, a woman’s body, a free and independent body (I think, I feel, I decide!)”. The same associations came to mind for the editors of the website *kobieta.pl*, who juxtaposed *Liberty Leading the People* with two Polish women who climbed onto cars and exposed themselves to the crowd during the protests.

Looking at these scenes, Agata Szczęśniak, founder of “Krytyka Polityczna” and journalist at oKo.Press, wrote: “Since revolutions ‘are born’ they must have at least mothers? Mothers, lovers, sisters, aunts, but also more or less holy patrons, warriors, fighters, Amazons. In a word, a feminine symbol of revolution is emerging”⁴. Here she recalled the words of professor Maria Janion, the doyenne of

⁴ M. Janion, *Kobiety i duch inności*, Wydawnictwo Sic!, Warszawa 2006, p. 5.

Polish feminism, one of the most outstanding Polish intellectuals, patroness, matron! of the Women's Strike. Szczęśniak spoke for Janion, as Janion herself had died a few months before the strikes broke out. But at her funeral, as if foreshadowing what was about to happen, the women dressed in black hiding behind their masks stood in a single line – strong, compact, ready – with the sign “We are all of her”. It was a reference to the words that the bard Krasieński referred to the bard Mickiewicz. Here followed the posthumous apotheosis of Janion, who replaced Mickiewicz in the national pantheon of saints and became the new bard, while her female disciples also acquired bardic status. Janion liked to say that upcoming events cast a shadow over the present. And that's what happened at her funeral. The blackness of feminist weepers was still the blackness of mourning, and masks were still trivial accessories to protect against coronavirus. In a few months, on October evenings and nights, the same black will become the black of revolution and medical masks will become different type of masks.

The words recalled by Szczęśniak opened Maria Janion's *Bogini Wolności* (Goddess of Freedom). Why is the revolution a woman? – asked the author – and answered: so that the woman does not become a revolution.

Women's “phantasms, allegories, symbols” of the revolution, homeland or republic, which gained immense popularity since the French Revolution, were a kind of exaltation and sacralisation of women, which served to give abstract ideas and beings about at the same time obscured real, concrete, existing women. Women gave their bodies to symbols, but at the same time they lost their bodies themselves. The woman was glorified in allegories but forgotten in reality. After all, it was men who created these symbols and projected their desires onto them, making them a lofty object (homeland-mother), carnal (homeland-sister) or sexual (homeland-lover). In his brilliant book, *Źródła narodowości* (*The Origins of Nationality*), Nikodem Boncza Tomaszewski showed that the modern nation was created by men who abandoned their love for their wives, mothers and mistresses in order to love their homeland all the more. Polonia became more real and more worthy of love than a specific woman,

the good of a woman-homeland outweighed the good of a woman who lived in her homeland. It was the homeland that was becoming the erotic object with which the young man wants to “join”.

Bogini Wolności opened Janion’s famous book *Kobiety i duch inności* (*Women and the Spirit of Dissidence*), which was published in 1996. However, the author did not write it in order for women to remain “symbols, phantasms, allegories”, but for them to become reality. If the revolution is a woman, then ultimately a woman is destined to become a revolution. And here these women, once imagined by men, were reimagined by Janion and came straight out of the pages of her books, with Janion at their head. In 2000, at the turn of the millennium, she initiated the first Manifa (an annual feminist demonstration) together with her beloved IBL student Kazimiera Szczuka, and Agnieszka Graff (who came from the Club of Catholic Intelligentsia). In this way, Janion stood as the Great Mother, Freedom and Revolution and led women to the barricades. The first women’s march she initiated led, two decades later, to the All-Poland Women’s Strike, the largest “manifa” since Solidarity. Today we know: Janion was the great mother of this revolution, mother, lover, sister, aunt, but also saint or less saintly patron, warrior, fighter, Amazon. All its participants were able to repeat: “We’re all of her.” In the thought and work of Janion, the Great Mother, lies the key to understanding the women’s revolution itself.

Two messianisms

Janion may not be the heroine of the romance of those with conservative sensibilities, but she can be used to understand the movement that originated in her, and to move beyond that movement and division.

Janion herself went through ritual and law with her writing, while at the same time seeking community. She is remembered above all for when, towards the end of her life, she attacked the Polish right wing, representing justice and the law, with great vigour. In 2010, she particularly despised “Smoleńsk pop-messianism”. For her, this recurring Polish messianism became a phantom through

which she wanted to drive a stake. In 2016, she was no longer able to attend the Congress of Polish Culture in Warsaw for health reasons, so Kazimiera Szczuka drove the stake in her stead, reading out a text prepared by Janion:

Today, we are witnessing an obvious, centrally planned turn towards a culture of a failed, old romanticism – the canon of god-warrior stereotypes and Smoleńsk as a new messianic myth are supposed to unite and soothe those wronged and humiliated by the previous authorities. How inefficient and damaging is the prevailing pattern of martyrdom in Poland! Let me be clear – messianism, and especially the state-clerical version of it, is a curse, the doom of Poland. I sincerely hate our messianism. [...] The cry of “this is Poland”, I admit, frankly I am sick of it. I believe that it will not be raised today⁵.

At the same time, by burying and killing one form of messianism, the messianism of law, it brought the messianism of ritual back to life. As her right hand laid overly religiously and patriotically oriented Romanticism in the grave, her left hand revived its inverse: a dark, transgressive Romanticism. She herself did not live to see this romanticism transformed into a social explosion and embodied in the women’s movement she created.

If she had lived to see October 2020, she would certainly have given some rousing interpretation of the Women’s Strike. She would not, of course, have seen in it the overly religiously and patriotically oriented attitude she hated, the epic romanticism “to comfort hearts”, but the hidden current of dark patriotism that attracted her the most. Demonic, vampiric, Dionysian, chaotic, gothic, mad patriotism. For exploring this Promethean, explosive tradition, which was most fully expressed by the Polish Romantics, Janion was expelled

⁵ M. Janion, *List do uczestników Kongresu Kultury*, 07.10.2016 r. [online] <https://www.kongreskultury2016.pl/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/Maria-Janion.pdf> [accessed: 29.07.2022].

from university in 1968 and became one of the leading figures of intellectual opposition to communism, the best interpreter of Polish culture. Janion gave all her strength to describe the other face of Polishness and the “posthumous life” of Romanticism. What a pity that she cannot “after her death” see this endless “posthumous life” of Romanticism. Or perhaps she can see, since her passing was accompanied by the singing of Greek Catholics, which could lead her to the heaven she so disliked.

It is striking that the scenes and ideas she described on the pages of her books materialised in October 2020. In her texts on Romanticism, she emphasised the role of the North, Sarmatism and the Middle Ages (Gothic times!). And all these themes kept coming back. Polish women wanted to create a “second Iceland” using Polish men, they referred to Sweden as a women’s paradise⁶. They brought medieval political theology back to life. In Klementyna Suchanow’s formulation: they created a “new Middle Ages”. They brought Sarmatism back to life, but not the jovial and dull one, but the carnival, frenetic one. From the spirit of this Sarmatism came a belief in the homeland as the greatest value for which we can sacrifice our lives. *Propatria mori*.

It’s hard to find a Janion book that hasn’t been materialised at Women’s Strike. In *Women and the Spirit of Dissidence*, the author emphasised that the nineteenth century, the age of the formation of the modern nation, was based on homosocial relationships, male fraternity and friendship. She contrasted this homosocial community of men with a community of women with empathy at its core. During the strikes, these two representations of the community clashed in front of St. Alexander’s Church. This is why a woman in the name of empathy (“I think, I feel, I decide”) could scream for Bąkiewicz “to suck a dick”. There was a resounding hatred here for the male nation that should be created by a sister nation.

In *Niesamowita Słowiańszczyźna (The Amazing Slavonic)*, Janion proclaimed the need to return to our pre-Christian, pagan, Slavic

⁶ M. Malinowska, *Martyna Wojciechowska apeluje do Polek: „Pełna mobilizacja! Zróbmy Islandię w Polsce”. O co chodzi?* [online] <https://www.kobieta.pl/arttykul/martyna-wojciechowska-apeluje-do-polek-pelna-mobilizacja-zrobmy-islandie-w-polsce-o-co-chodzi-201028101800> [accessed: 29.07.2022].

roots. Wasn't the Women's Strike a great outbreak of archaic, pagan, Slavic rituals? Even Dziady was played on Adam Mickiewicz Street! She was fascinated by cainic, Satanic, sadistic, revolutionary and Tyrtean motifs and they too have returned on a grand scale. Janion was able to see the "shadow" of the strike during the first women's strikes in 2016. Vampiric themes then emerged. You don't believe it? I couldn't believe it either, but Janion's imagination proved more powerful and reality more radical than my faith. Just watch the *Wściekły szpaler* (*Furious row*).

Just before the first Black Friday, a punk-feminist group called El Banda uploaded a song that became the first anthem of the 2016 protests. In the video, we see women dressed in black coming to the fore, clenching their fists, painting their faces in war paint, hiding their eyes behind dark glasses (not yet masks!), one has stuck feathers in her hair, another has thrown on a black hood. To the rhythm of blaring trance music, they chant: „i w noc, i w dzień // wszystkie idą jak zły cień za cieniem // wszystkie szczerzą kły // jedna obok drugiej, wściekły szpaler // jeszcze za cicho mówimy // jeszcze za cicho krzyczymy // jeszcze za mało umarło nas // by każdy z was pojął godność” [and in the night, and in the day // all go like evil shadow after shadow // all showing their fangs // one beside the other, a furious row // still too quietly we speak // still too quietly we shout // still too few of us have died // for each of you to comprehend dignity]. Isn't this Maria Janion's beloved vampiric, werewolf, ghostly motif? The vampire is no longer a phantasm, but is reincarnated as a woman. The El Banda group shows that the women's march is in fact a procession of vampires who live on after their death, walking like "evil shadows" and "showing fangs". In 2016, this march did not get too far. It was not until 2020 that its strength was demonstrated. And again El Banda sang (*Królowe życia - Queens of life*): „Wywołali wywołali wilka z lasu a właściwie wilczyce // Królowe życia w obronie swoich praw hetery zołzy sekutnice [...] // Gniewnych nasion buntu naręcza piekielnice w łonie krzyku // Łan za łanem wiatr sieje nas wydry żmije kłótnice matki córki bojownice”. [They have summoned the wolf from the forest or rather the she-wolves // The queens of life in defence of their rights hetaeras, bitches, queens of mean [...] // Angry

seeds of rebellion, heaps of hellbirds in the womb of screaming // Field after field, the wind sows us otters, vipers, mothers, daughters, warriors”. This image somehow reminded me of the march of the wolves from the book *Akademia Pana Kleksa (Mr. Inkblot’s Academy)*. Janion described the theatricalisation of revolution, the Women’s Strike was theatricalising the revolution. Janion wrote about war and form, the Women’s Strike took the form of war. Janion explored the symbolism of “lightning” and “thunderbolts”, lightning and thunderbolts became the main symbol of the Women’s Strike.

In the history of art, there is the concept of a “total work of art”, i.e. a work of art that transforms all reality into its own image and likeness. Wyspiański dreamt of creating such a piece: in his theatre and art he imagined a free Poland, so that Poland would indeed be free. Wyspiański did not succeed in creating such a work of art. But after a century, Janion created such a piece. And she has become one. Her wild, frenzied imagination tore into such depths of Polish unconsciousness that it stirred the lava that was hidden beneath the crust. The Women’s Strike came to us straight from the pages of her books.

In 2020 Janion was slowly dying after her long, fractured and intense life, but she was being born again in her students and in the protests. “A mortal woman has died, a Goddess has been born...” her spirit is and will always be with us”, they wrote on a page dedicated to her⁷. Here, like Konrad Wallenrod, to whom she dedicated a book, she was beginning her “posthumous life”. From beyond the grave, like a bard, she shaped Polish culture and politics. It was her coffin that ruled our imagination.

Towards trust

Janion tried to move from the regime of law to the regime of ritual by means of textual mystery, but the community she so longed for did not materialize. Not only have the Poles failed to unite as a family, which would have been distasteful to Janion, but the Women’s

⁷ <http://janion.pl/> [dostęp: 29.07.2022].

Strike has now become an old memory – the rituals end as quickly as they begin. Their explosive energy burns right off.

But contained within Janion's life and work is a certain possibility of reconciliation. Janion was able to interact with, acknowledge and integrate other sensibilities. What's more, she devoted her academic career to old messianism, which she started to hate after 2010. While during the 2016 Congress she gave expression to her hatred of Pop-messianism, during the 1981 Congress of Polish Culture, interrupted by martial law, Janion glorified this Pop-messianism. Indeed, she described with delight how romanticism was embodied by the shipyard workers during the *Solidarność* carnival⁸. It drew attention to the omnipresence of Romantic motifs, such as the use of the *Pieśń konfederatów* (*Song of the Confederates*) from Słowacki's mystical drama *Ksiądz Marek* (*Father Marek*) in strike texts *W imię Boga przysięgamy...* (*In the Name of God we swear*), *Mystocznioicy* (*We shipyard workers*), and *Wolność naszą jest miłością* (*Freedom is our love*). She also paid attention to the *Jeszcze Polska* anthem chanted by Wałęsa every now and then whose words contain – according to her – “an eternal peculiar truth. [...] As long as we have our homeland in our hearts, Poland will not perish” and quoted Mickiewicz's lectures from the Collège de France in 1842: “For a man wherever he is, if he thinks, feels, acts, he can be sure that at the same moment thousands of his fellow-creatures are thinking, feeling and acting like him. This union binds nations.” Janion was deeply moved by the “workers” identification with confederates, knights, soldiers and defenders of freedom. [...] When workers write on the walls of their factories, on banners at ceremonies in honour of their fallen, the words: “God – Honour – Homeland” form – according to Janion – “the totality of working-class and national culture at the same time”, a “coherent emotional culture”. It was her Mickiewicz lecture from the Collège de France and it was her God-fearing and martyrdom moment. She loved what she would later hate.

However, you don't necessarily have to go to the other side to rebuild trust. I do not want to enrol Maria Janion posthumously in

⁸ M. Janion, *Wystąpienie podczas przerwanej wojennym stanem wojennym Kongresu Kultury Polskiej (fragments)*, Warsaw, 11–12 December 1981 [online] http://www.artin.gda.pl/text/10-6_pl.php [accessed: 29.07.2022].

the Polish-Catholic camp. I just want to show that in the epigone Romanticism of the law that she criticised so much, she once discovered something to love. And if so, anyone who walks in her path can discover it. In the 1990s, Janion herself abandoned her admiration for the Solidarity workers and buried the “romantic paradigm”, but at the same time turned romanticism into a certain existential project: a project of conversion and spiritual development, *Bildung* as the Germans say. At the time, she described the clash between values (in my language: law) and modernisation (in my language: ritual). She wrote “The point is not to excite a fight between ‘traditionalists’ and progressives, but to create a Polish culture in which both would feel comfortable. It is culture that must become the domain of compromise, preserving, after all, its pluralism and its desire for renewal, which is its permanent characteristic. True, but how do we do that”?

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Directions for the development of Public Benefit Councils – what will the third sector’s cooperation with local government look like in the future?

Public Benefit Council

In April 2003, the Sejm of the Republic of Poland passed an act on public benefit activity and volunteering. This legal act established the Public Benefit Council as an advisory and consultative body, first to the Minister for Social Security, and then to the Chairman of the Committee for Public Benefit. From the very beginning, the main tasks of the Council have included expressing opinions on matters relating to the application of the aforementioned act, draft legal acts and government programmes related to the functioning of non-governmental organisations. The Council also speaks on issues of public tasks, commissioning these tasks to non-governmental organisations and on the recommended standards for their implementation. In addition, it provides assistance and expresses opinions in the event of disputes between public administration bodies and non-governmental organisations, collects and analyses information on inspections carried out and their effects. It also expresses opinions and organizes procedures to select representatives of non-governmental organisations to the composition of the monitoring committee of operational programmes, referred to in this perspective as European funds for a given region.

The term of office of the Council is three years. Currently, for the first time pursuant to the provisions of law, it is composed of representatives of government administration, local government

units and non-governmental organisations, unions and agreements of non-governmental organisations. An important reservation was the provision that at least half of the seats in the council are reserved for the non-governmental sector. What is important is that under the provisions of the Act, the entire administrative service of the Council is provided by the Chancellery of the Prime Minister of Poland.

Such a unique body as the Public Benefit Council quite quickly began to be envied by local governments and they also wanted to establish their own public benefit councils. Some did not wait for statutory solutions – already in 2005, the first provincial public benefit council of the Pomeranian voivodeship was established.

Since Pomeranian voivodeship succeeded, non-governmental organisations from other regions also wanted to establish their benefit councils. However, it was not possible to count on the openness of officials everywhere (and, above all, legal advisers in offices) and in 2008, work began on introducing provisions to the Act on Public Benefit Activity and Volunteering enabling the establishment of self-government benefit councils. And we succeeded – in March 2010 these regulations came into force.

Voivodeship, District and Commune Public Benefit Councils

In the light of the regulations, it is the marshal of the voivodeship – at the joint request of at least 50 non-governmental organisations operating in its area – who appoints the voivodeship public benefit council as a consultative and opinion-giving body. Currently, in all voivodeships such councils already exist. The last one was created in 2015 in the Silesian voivodeship.

The tasks of the provincial council include: expressing opinions on matters related to the functioning of non-governmental organisations, including cooperation programmes with non-governmental organisations and on the draft voivodeship development strategy, giving opinions on draft resolutions and acts of local law regarding the sphere of public tasks, as well as speaking on matters related to

public tasks, including commissioning these tasks to be performed by non-governmental organisations and in matters of recommended standards for the implementation of public tasks. In addition, provincial benefit councils provide assistance and express opinions in the event of disputes between public administration bodies and non-governmental organisations and organize proceedings to select non-governmental organisations to the composition of the monitoring committee of regional EU programmes.

The term of office of the provincial council, as well as of all other bodies, is three years. The provincial council consists of a representative of the governor, representatives of the voivodeship marshal, representatives of the voivodeship parliament and representatives of non-governmental organisations. Obviously, there is the same reservation as in the case of the national benefit council: representatives of the third sector constitute at least half of the composition of the Provincial Council.

Despite the development of provincial councils it is to be regretted that for these twelve years have not managed to work out such solutions so that these provincial benefit councils are actually provincial not just part of local government. It is attended by a representative of the governor, but unfortunately he is not obliged to bring any topics to the agenda of the meeting. This means that even the governor's cooperation programme with non-governmental organisations does not have to be approved by the provincial council.

The members of the council are appointed and dismissed by the marshal of the voivodeship, but the appointment of members representing non-governmental organisations takes place from among the candidates proposed by these organisations. The voivodeship board determines, by way of a resolution, the procedure for appointing members of the council, taking into account the need to ensure the representativeness of the organisation in terms of legal forms and types of public benefit activities, as well as the dates and method of proposing candidates for members of the provincial council, as well as the organisation and mode of its operation. At the same time, it takes into account the need to ensure the smooth functioning of this body.

Benefit councils hold meetings, although the Covid-19 pandemic has changed this. It turned out then that the meetings do not have to be in-person only, but can also be held using electronic means of communication. Thanks to this, many benefit councils intensified their work, and after the pandemic restrictions ended, they kept operating in hybrid mode (to which I will return later in the text).

At the next levels of local government, there are commune and district benefit councils. They are appointed by the district board or the commune head, mayor or city president, respectively. This is done at the request of five non-governmental organisations within two months.

The district and commune council consists of representatives of the local governor, representatives of the district or commune council and representatives of local non-governmental organisations. Importantly, at least half of the seats must be filled by representatives of the third sector. The rules of operation and the method of election of the council are determined by the constitutive bodies of the commune/city or district. The tasks of the district and commune councils are slightly different from those of the voivodeship benefit council. It should be noted here that opinions are issued on draft local government development strategies, draft resolutions and acts of local law regarding the sphere of public tasks, including cooperation programmes with non-governmental organisations. Commune and district benefit councils also express opinions on matters related to public tasks, including commissioning these tasks to non-governmental organisations and on recommended standards for the execution of public tasks, as well as on issues related to the functioning of non-governmental organisations. In addition, the councils also provide assistance and express opinions in the event of disputes between public administration bodies and non-governmental organisations.

It should be emphasised that, in accordance with the regulations, the voivodeship, district and commune councils should cooperate with each other on the basis of partnership and sovereignty of all parties, in particular by informing each other about the directions of action. Unfortunately, this formula appears to be dead. In fact, it

is difficult to find a model solution for establishing such cooperation in the country, although there have been and are various attempts to initiate it. For example, recently in my region – Mazovian Voivodeship – the first meeting of benefit councils operating in Mazovia was organised. Representatives from eight councils attended. Yes, eight! It would be appropriate to ask how many local governments are there in the Mazovian Voivodeship? Well, close to 370. The response to the invitation, however, was not tepid. There are only eleven benefit councils in my region. The participants of the meeting decided that they would cooperate and meet regularly to discuss various current topics, such as cooperation programmes between local governments and non-governmental organisations or open tenders procedures.

Convention of Provincial Public Benefit Councils

The first and immediately successful attempt to integrate benefit councils at the voivodeship level was the establishment of the Convention, which is a voluntary agreement of sixteen voivodeship councils for public benefit activities and has no legal personality.

The initiative to create the Convention appeared in 2014, when projects supporting public benefit councils, undertaken by member organisations of the SPLOT Network, were completed all over Poland. The official establishment of the Convention took place during the celebration of the National Day of Public Benefit Councils on 27 November 2016. The purpose of the Convention is to create a platform for cooperation and exchange of information for members of the voivodeship Public Benefit Councils, as well as for expressing joint opinions on matters relevant to the functioning of the Councils, as well as in the field of cooperation between public administration and non-governmental organisations¹.

I can confirm with all my might that the initiative to establish the Convention has brought a positive result. The meetings, which

¹ *Konwent Wojewódzkich Rad Działalności Pożytku Publicznego* [online] https://www.facebook.com/KonwentWRDPP/about/?ref=page_internal [accessed: 25.10.2022].

are held once a month, are attended by twelve to fourteen representatives of the voivodeships. As a result, despite the passing of years, the Convention still has the power of attraction. Why is this? Because during the debates important issues are discussed – and on a national scale – for the cooperation of local government administration and non-governmental organisations. We discuss and exchange information on how to effectively create cooperation programmes, how to implement various laws (e.g. regarding accessibility), how to effectively take care of the interests of the third sector with new operational programmes for voivodeships. We also cover many, many other topics.

Certainly, it would be good if such solutions were introduced at lower levels of local government, but no one knows how many benefit councils actually operate today. It is estimated that there are about 300 out of 2,900 local governments. But is that the actual number? No one has counted it yet.

Problems of Public Benefit Councils

A certain regularity is that as long as we (we as a civil sector) try to change something, we are determined, united and willing to act in our efforts. Let us remember that in the same way Solidarity once won democracy and made it possible for every adult Pole to go today and decide who will rule in our local government or country. Today, the aforementioned situation is “reality” and hardly anyone expresses their appreciation, and experts are happy when the voter turnout exceeds 50%.

It is similar with benefit councils. When it is necessary to appoint one, non-governmental organisations “fight for it” in their local government. They consolidate, collect signatures. Later, however, when election time comes, it is rare for two candidates to run for one seat. It’s good, if there are even as many applicants as there are seats. There are benefit councils (e.g. in the Żuromin district, Mazovian voivodeship), where no one has applied for election for the next term! The council was not established there, and the initiative died

a natural death. Another example may be the town benefit council in Prudnik (Opolskie Voivodeship), where after the resignation of one representative of non-governmental organisations, there is no one willing to fill the vacant seat. And the other people representing the civic sector are people who operate in senior organisations.

This problem is highlighted by the “Study of civic activity in relation to the Public Benefit Work Councils in the Pomeranian Voivodeship”²:

It is observed [...] that we have a lot of such leaders in their 50s or older. These are people who have been very active for many, many years, but unfortunately they do not have successors, i.e. young people who could get involved and who would be introduced. I can see for myself that now, when I am active in various groups, I am simply the youngest person everywhere. This puzzles me a lot. Where is everyone else? And what causes that these councils do not get any younger, they age instead. There are no people who would become the successors. People who would learn. I think that this is a very difficult task for the Public Benefit Councils. What should we do to engage young people. It also seems to me that here, perhaps, the problem stems from the fact that these activities are social after all. There is no fee for being a member of the council when you are a representative of an organisation.

This opinion was formulated by one of the survey respondents – it very well shows how much there is a lack of young people willing to act not only in the non-governmental sector, but also in such advisory bodies as public benefit councils.

² *Study of civic activity in relation to Public Benefit Councils in the Pomeranian Voivodeship. Research report*, ed. M. Witecka-Wiese, Pomorska Pracownia Badań Obywatelskich, Gdańsk 2021, p. 27.

Another area that I see as highly problematic is the preparation and competence of council members (especially those representing the non-governmental sector). Although not only them, because I have the impression that often also councillors – despite the fact that they should have a lot of experience – do not know what matters are being worked on for the public benefit. I can cite here the example of one of such organisations in the Kuyavian-Pomeranian Voivodeship. Councils were established there immediately after the regulations entered into force (in 2010–2011). So you can say that they have been operating continuously for over ten years. Nevertheless, my training seminars were attended by municipal councillors (with a baggage of experience of many terms of office), who – as it turned out – did not know what the programmes of cooperation with non-governmental organisations or programmes for combating addictions were for, although they have been voting in these resolutions for years. This of course proves not only the level of work in the benefit council, but also in the commune council.

Also many representatives of NGOs have a problem with a substantive approach to topics presented. And here let me quote the above-mentioned study, and specifically recall two descriptive comments of the respondents regarding the necessary competences in the benefit council:

Perhaps an extension of competences or a narrowing of these competences, because when it comes to, for example, various issues raised in these bodies, which I have already mentioned, the scale is very wide. Perhaps all things related to industry issues like environmental protection. Perhaps these are things that should be excluded from the meeting. It's time we focus, as a body, on issuing opinions. And consult draft strategies only and exclusively on Social Affairs. In terms of some systemic support or cooperation with the third sector³.

³ Ibid, p. 32.

And a second comment going in the direction of solving problems:

I thought that maybe it was a matter of creating some smaller expert groups. And that we should simply select these members of public benefit councils so that they are specialists in the areas concerned. That such a member should, for example, have knowledge in the three areas concerned. It would probably be very difficult, but the current wide range of issues to be discussed means that not everyone feels competent. And we are the Marshal's consultative body. Which in a way obliges us. If someone is just starting out and you see that they don't have the right competences and don't know what the issues we are discussing are about, they might be a bit frightened. They may conclude that they are simply not fit for purpose. So building awareness of what the councils are for in the first place. In my opinion, it is very important. To know what they give and not to worry that we are not experts on everything⁴.

I find this idea very interesting. In fact, it has also happened to me that I did not know what the content of the draft resolution was about. For example, when I received a draft resolution on the clean air programme, i.e. the elimination of "stoves belching out black smoke". The specialised language of the letter meant that I did not understand anything about the project, and if it wasn't for friendly organisations dealing with this topic, I would have had a big problem with substantive reference to the provisions of the project.

Another area that I find problematic is the activity of council members. Even of those representing all the parties. Although I had the pleasure of taking part in meetings of such councils, during which all members present in the room gladly spoke, joined the discussion, took a position and submitted conclusions, very often

⁴ Ibid, p . 33.

only two or three active people take up the discussion, propose some solutions while others remain silent. I remember my first term of office in the Mazovian Public Benefit Council. At that time, many representatives of non-governmental organisations ran in the elections to the council only because it seemed to them that “they would distribute money there”. When this turned out to be untrue, they unfortunately stopped participating in the meetings.

Another problem is attendance at council meetings. Sometimes there are no people willing to meet. However, I have the impression that there has been a change here since the pandemic. It turned out that it is possible to conduct meetings equally effectively using electronic means of communication, and now as hybrid meetings. In my council, we agreed that we would meet in this way until the end of this term. This is understandable, because if someone were to go to Warsaw only for a two-hour meeting of the council, e.g. from Szydłowiec, 130 kilometres away, then thanks to these online solutions they will save time and participate in the meeting without any detriment to the substantive work. What needs to be emphasised, since we introduced this solution, there has been no meeting at which we had a problem with obtaining a quorum. Unfortunately, this had happened before.

Concluding this part of my considerations, I would like to look again at the results of the survey in the Pomeranian voivodeship. And although this is a study of only one of the regions, it shows the problems of the entire country as if through a lens. Therefore, let me quote an extensive excerpt from the summary of this report – and try to find a prescription for the above-mentioned problems⁵:

1. Motivation: qualitative research shows that motivations to act in councils, even if they are formulated as experiencing influence, are dictated by the desire to change, above all, the perception of the third sector. People operating in the Councils are aware of the lack of stability in NGOs and see the activities of the Council as an opportunity to ensure changes in this area.

⁵ Ibid, p. 36-37.

2. Lack of knowledge/level of competence: research has shown that in society there is a lack of knowledge about what a Council is and what competence it has. More so – it has also revealed that the deficit of knowledge applies even to Council members who are not multi-professionals and have to deal with many issues in various fields.
3. Lack of young people: young people in councils are, on the one hand, desirable, and on the other hand, while operating in them, they do not receive support and have to deal with the roles assigned to them on their own.
4. Attitude towards local authorities and politics: the analysis of the research indicates that the attitude towards local authorities can have a completely different impact on the functioning of the councils and the motivation of their members.
5. Lack of financial resources: probably the lack of financial gratification for acting in the Councils is the reason for the low public interest in this type of activity. Research also shows that pro-social attitudes and people who are ready to work pro bono are still present in society, if they interpret a given set of activities as causative for the local environment and constituting a kind of social control.
6. Relations: the study of the area of relationship again reveals the communication problems of the Councils. The conclusions from the analysis of the collected materials show the need to introduce a mechanism through which new members acquire the necessary knowledge, skills and behaviour to become effective activists.

Maybe it will improve...

Despite the above-mentioned problems, I believe that benefit councils are an excellent tool for developing social dialogue. However, it cannot be treated as in the current term of office of the Public Benefit Council. It happened that people with the largest number of

votes were not included in the council, because seats were needed for people who were “politically closer”.

In voivodship governments, I am not aware of any situation where, after the elections, any marshal (regardless of political preference) would not appoint the candidates who had the majority of votes. The obstacle was not even that later they could become “inconvenient” for the regional authorities. The more different voices there are, the better – the better documents can be developed together in such a body.

For twelve years of my activity in the Mazovian Benefit Council, we have done a great job. Among other things, we managed to get draft resolutions to announce an open tender. And without our opinion, it will not be submitted to the voivodship board to announce such a competition. It is worth mentioning here that a decade ago, when organisations submitted bids in competitions, they almost had to carry attachments (copies of the National Court Register, statutes, certificates, statements, etc.) in amounts fit for wheelbarrows. Today, an organisation submits such an offer via the application generator with one click on its computer. And the first contact with printed documents is only when he receives a subsidy and must fill in the documentation for the contract. The progress here is obvious. The last several months also show that this is the time when some voivodship benefit councils played a significant role in negotiating funds for non-governmental organisations from the so-called 0.25 from the European Social Fund and the number of seats in the monitoring committees of the new regional programmes.

So we have plenty of successes. However, sometimes we suffer from a lack of competence. In many local governments, benefit councils are not taken seriously, mainly because they do not fight very hard for the local government to perform its duties towards them – obligations arising from the law. There are also benefit councils, which only receive a programme of cooperation with non-governmental organisations for consultation. And nothing more. This is not only due to the reluctance of officials, but also because the council does not ask for other documents. However, a competent and committed composition of the board is only one side of the coin.

It is necessary also to ensure that there are efficient tools that will make the council able to be more effective. And here I look with envy at youth councils (e.g. communes) that have received the powers of legislative initiative⁶:

The Youth Commune Council has a consultative, advisory and initiative character. The Youth Commune Council may submit a request to authorised entities to undertake a legislative initiative. The procedure for submitting a motion to take a legislative initiative is determined by the statute of the commune or a separate resolution of the commune council. In matters concerning the commune, the youth commune council may submit inquiries or requests in the form of a resolution. The resolution should contain a brief presentation of the facts being its subject and questions arising from it. The mayor or the person appointed by him are obliged to give an answer in writing, not later than within a period of 30 days from the day of receipt of the resolution.

In light of the regulations cited above it appears that a youth council can do much more than a public benefit council. What's more, the authority of the administration has a specific deadline within which it must provide an answer to a given topic. In benefit councils we can only dream about such an obligation of authority. However, I hope that the first step has just been taken so that in the future benefit councils will receive such a pro-civic authorisation.

Let me express my regret at this point that my hard work, as well as that of a dozen or so other representatives of non-governmental organisations, government officials, a Member of Sejm of the Republic of Poland and local government officials at all levels, ended up in the trash bin. We have developed – as a team appointed by the Chairman of the Public Benefit Committee – a very good draft law on the Civil Dialogue Council, which would bring the status

⁶ Article 5b of the Act of 8 March 1990 on commune government.

of non-governmental organisations closer to that of trade unions. What's more, it would give us a legislative initiative similar to the one in the Act on the Social Dialogue Council. Unfortunately, for reasons unknown to the public, this project ceased to be processed after our work was completed.

With optimism into the future

Benefit Councils are an excellent tool for cooperation and the only statutory solution thanks to which representatives of all three parties sit at the same table – leaders of non-governmental organisations (being the voice of civil society), officials (performing public tasks on a daily basis) and councillors (taking all decisions, because after all, they ultimately adopt the budget or the cooperation programme). Therefore, this tool needs to be developed and made to have more and more competences, but also to enjoy a greater understanding of what its essence is. All parties on the public benefit council should be aware of the importance of the tasks and responsibilities they face.

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Alternative methods of financing NGOs in the future

Non-governmental organisations in Poland

Approximately 138,000 associations and foundations are registered in Poland, of which more than 70,000 are active. Associations are the largest group amounting to 107,000, while foundations account for 31,000 establishments. The social sector is complemented by a group of entities smaller in number but extensive in terms of their forms of action, including voluntary fire brigades, rural women's associations, farmers' unions and farmer's associations, employers' federations and confederations, social cooperatives and other¹. According to the Central Statistical Office data, in 2020 the group of actively operating NGOs totalled 95,200. At the end of 2021, more than 9,100 organisations had the status of a public benefit organisation².

It is worth noting that between 2010 and 2020, the number of actively operating NGOs in our country increased by almost 19% – from 80.1 thousand to the aforementioned 95.2 thousand. Several thousand new organisations are added each year, with around 5,000 added in 2021.

¹ B. Charycka, M. Gumkowska, J. Bednarek, *Kondycja organizacji pozarządowych 2021*, Stowarzyszenie Klon/Jawor, Warszawa 2022.

² Działalność stowarzyszeń i podobnych organizacji społecznych, fundacji, społecznych podmiotów wyznaniowych, kół gospodyń wiejskich oraz samorządu gospodarczego i zawodowego w 2020 r. – wyniki wstępne, ed. P. Łysoń, Central Statistical Office 2021.

The stable operation of the social engagement sector is ensured by the organisations' revenues, which amounted to PLN 34.4 billion in 2020, of which associations and foundations achieved a total revenue of PLN 28.4 billion, accounting for 82.4% of the total revenue raised by NGOs. As the number of organisations in Poland increases, so too does the portfolio they have at their disposal when carrying out their activities. By comparison, in 2010, NGO revenues amounted to PLN 23 billion. The nominal increase was therefore almost 50%. Taking a closer look, however, it is clear that the average budget of an NGO is still only PLN 26,000. Is this a sufficient amount to ensure effective and worthy initiatives for the public? Are NGOs in Poland striving for continuous development and seeking new sources of funding?

Bearing in mind the above data and questions, in this article we will analyse whether the current sources of funding give organisations a secure position to implement and develop their statutory activities and whether in a dynamically changing environment there are alternative sources of funding for the civic sector.

Impact of the external situation on non-governmental organisations

External factors, strongly influencing the situation of NGOs in recent times, should not be forgotten. The economic and political situation in Poland and the world is changing dramatically.

The first blow to the third sector was the covid-19 pandemic more than two years ago, because of which half of the organisations in our country suspended an important part of their activities for at least six months. This was mainly due to the need to reduce direct contact with the recipients of the activities carried out. Some 66% of organisations estimate that their situation has worsened as a result of the pandemic. On the other hand, as many as 38% of organisations

introduced new activities that they had not undertaken before, and for 8% of organisations the pandemic was an impetus for development³.

Another important event affecting the public sector in Poland (but not only) was the outbreak of war in Ukraine in February 2022. Once again, many organisations were forced to reduce their existing activities, but for other entities, helping the victims of this conflict (especially refugees coming to Poland) presented a unique opportunity for development, also thanks to additional funds coming from abroad and from public institutions.

At the time of this writing, concerns are growing in Poland related to the economic slowdown, or even the global economic crisis caused by the factors described above. How the expected crisis will affect the condition of organisations in Poland, and which ones will be able to effectively continue to fulfil their mission and which ones will fail in the face of a difficult situation (and why), we will find out perhaps as early as the beginning of 2023.

The civic sector, regardless of the changing environment, is becoming increasingly important in the modern economy – alongside state institutions and business, it forms the structures of the modern state. Parallel to the activities of state and local government institutions, the third sector is oriented towards the execution of public tasks, very often precisely on their behalf. The civic sector takes on the role of subcontractor of public services and often specialises in the implementation of such activities.

Financing non-governmental organisations – risks and opportunities

Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) are not intended to make a profit, but for their effective operation, the quality of the services they provide and their continued development, they need financial resources in adequate amounts from sources that are proven

³ B. Charycka, op. cit.

and adapted to their legal form. It is therefore permissible for such organisations to generate profit, on the understanding that all of it is devoted to statutory purposes.

Coming back to the previously quoted The Central Statistical Office data and observing the third sector's funding structure, it should be noted that at the end of 2020, well over half of the organisation's revenue, at 63.0%, consisted of non-market sources, including public funding at 45.2%. Market sources accounted for 28.5% of revenue, dominated by income from paid statutory activities (14.8%) and economic activities (11.6%). Other sources of NGO funding account for only 8.6% of the entire portfolio⁴.

Currently, very often the way organisations are funded determines how they operate. In this respect, NGOs are most commonly divided into the following types of entities:

1. operating on the basis of membership fees;
2. selling services and goods as part of a paid or commercial activity;
3. raising revenue through donations and fundraising from individual and corporate donors;
4. raising revenue from grants and subsidies, i.e. from public institutions.

The diversity of legal forms of NGOs in Poland favours the diversification of funding methods. The regulations applicable to the third sector as a whole also allow for this. Unfortunately, organisations very often artificially tailor their activities to the source of the funds raised, thereby limiting their own potential and opportunities for development. This may be due to a lack of equity and reserves that can be devoted to testing and introducing new funding mechanisms. Here, the functions of government and public institutions and organisations that care about the development of civic society are expected to be strengthened – they should ensure that NGOs have access to the knowledge and resources to carry out the activities indicated above.

⁴ Działalność stowarzyszeń i podobnych organizacji społecznych...

According to the data presented earlier, the majority of organisations – using mainly non-market funding, i.e. grants and subsidies allocated by public institutions, including local governments – enter a very narrow specialisation and close themselves off from potential development in other areas. This raises the risk that, in the event of a sudden change in the situation – a crisis or too rapid a development – these organisations will not be able to respond to the needs of the market and will be forced to reduce or even close down their operations.

Meanwhile, diversifying the modes of funding as described above can have a very positive effect on the development of individual organisations and even the sector as a whole. Associations interested in their own development and concerned about their independence should take the time to explore their potential and implement funding methods that are most convenient for them. With this approach, they will be able to increase the security and efficiency of their operations by appropriately allocating sources of revenue and begin to carry out tasks that are in line with their mission, not just those supported by the public administration.

When creating an action plan for the next year, for years to come, it is worth looking at the new opportunities that the third sector market offers. When benefiting from government grants or carrying out activities commissioned by the local government, the organisation should check what new tools grant-makers are proposing in order to develop cooperation or directly strengthen the development of the organisations invited to cooperate. It is worth taking an interest in the opportunities offered by institutions and organisations working for civic development, such as the National Freedom Institute – Centre for Civil Society Development, in terms of grants or training aimed at institutional development of organisations, strengthening their self-financing or creating equity capital allowing for long-term development.

Opportunities to improve the organisation's operations and make it financially independent can also be found in cooperation with local government. Indeed, local development organisations are more likely to have the opportunity to establish regular cooperation with

local partners – whether local government or the community – and their joint ventures are more efficient and have better results for their audiences. Such cooperation can also be an opportunity to share experiences of funding mechanisms used by organisations in the immediate area.

One of the most important partners for NGOs are other non-governmental entities working in the same area. Collaborating and learning from the experiences of other organisations offers huge potential for self-development. A particular value and opportunity to expand funding sources is seen in cooperation based on regranting. This is a relatively uncommon way of funding organisations in Poland, but one that may offer potential for the development of the third sector in the future.

Regranting as a mechanism for distributing funds

Regranting involves the use of a subcontracting formula for public tasks and its aim is for the organisation that has received a grant to transfer part of the funds from that grant to other organisations to perform a specific part of the public task. Subcontracting projects can be carried out through open calls for proposals or through the so-called small grants procedure. The regranting formula also applies to the implementation of grants financed by business foundations and foreign companies or organisations, which primarily choose large and proven organisations for the completion of outsourced tasks (further transfer of grants). In this case, regranting may be an opportunity for smaller organisations to develop their activities and gain know-how from a larger player in the area. A certain disadvantage of the implementation of regranting projects is the transfer of the risk of settlement of the awarded grant to the organisation (usually small, often without extensive legal and accounting facilities) that received the grant.

Perhaps the risk signalled above could be eliminated by better regulating the regranting mechanism for commissioning and funding public sector tasks. This certainly calls for a wider debate

and legislative action. Undoubtedly, however, cooperation between organisations conducted on the basis of regranting can be used to expand the activities carried out by smaller organisations in the field of public tasks. What is more, it can benefit from the experience and knowledge of larger, and therefore generally more professionalised, organisations also with regard to the various funding mechanisms for statutory activities. This may be the case, for example, when one of the elements of the task carried out thanks to regranting is to initiate or improve the methods of self-financing of subcontractors.

It should be emphasised at this point that for an organisation undertaking the coordination of regranting, experience with this type of activity is a factor that lends credibility to its presence on the market as a proven, reliable entity (worthy of entrusting significant financial resources to). By taking on the coordination and final settlement of the grant, it demonstrates that it has the expertise and administrative background to do so, as well as the knowledge in the area and the ability to pass this on to organisations in need of training and empowerment.

Business and paid activity

Another element of an organisation's funding is the provision of efficient self-financing mechanisms in the form of business or paid activities. It is worth thinking here about going beyond the usual pattern of activity and offering your audience services delivered as part of your business. And although adherence to market principles requires proper market analysis, an understanding of the local situation and the preparation of an attractive offer that will meet the interest of the client-consumers (a flexible and demand-responsive offer), it undeniably gives the organisation the opportunity to develop beyond the accepted standards. Generating additional revenue, e.g. from the sale of products or services, will allow the NGO to self-finance part of its activities, which will entail empowering them. When planning for this form of additional funding, it is important to be prepared for changes in order. Third sector

organisations undertaking business activities become entrepreneurs in the eyes of the law in this specific field of activity, which, among other things, obliges them to keep accounts appropriate to the type of activity. What is more, they also have to meet the challenges posed by competition.

Support from individuals and business

One of the most important funding mechanisms for organisations in global markets today is raising funds from individual donors and private companies and institutions. However, working with donors requires stepping out of a certain comfort zone, which is most often provided by regular cooperation with public institutions and local authorities, or the recipients of the organisation's activities. It is worth remembering, however, that such a wide opening allows the organisation to reach out to the public and, in turn, teach people about its mission and gain a circle of allies. It also allows for the social legitimisation of activities and establishes the organisation in the minds of donors. Above all, it allows for an even broader and more intensive development of the activities aimed at its audience.

Undeniably, the activation of mechanisms related to obtaining donations from individuals and companies strengthens the entire third sector. This is because it allows for the social mobilisation of individuals and the popularisation of social issues, in addition to supporting their awareness and sense of real impact on the activities of NGOs through financial donations.

There is a vast range of communication and marketing tools that can be used to invite individuals and the business sector to support the organisation's activities. The pandemic has forced non-governmental fundraising bodies of this type to move into the zone of electronic communication – using online and mobile mechanisms, which has only expanded the scope of their activities. Crowdfunding in which individual donors finance the realisation of an organisation's specific project, is becoming increasingly popular. More and more often crowdfunding is handled by specialised online services,

but this opportunity is also available to organisations themselves, building up their own portfolio of mechanisms for engaging individual donors in an appropriate way.

Another source of funding for NGOs by individuals that is gaining in popularity, is ongoing support for their statutory activities, based on direct debit or monthly credit card charges. Less popular on the Polish market is the mechanism of last will and testament, under which an individual may transfer to a non-governmental organisation an indicated financial amount, real estate (or part of it) or movables. A mechanism is also slowly developing for the involvement of major donors, i.e. wealthy individuals who join in funding the activities of NGOs of their choice.

A no less attractive form of cooperation is addressed to companies that want to get involved in supporting NGO activities. Indeed, in addition to making a standard financial or in-kind donation, they have the opportunity to implement joint communication and marketing activities with the organisation they support. Companies can involve their employees, customers and business partners in the NGO support programme. In the case of large companies, the advantage of entering into a partnership with a civic entity is a win-win strategy, allowing for benefits on both sides, with a particular focus on the public purpose pursued by the NGO. It should also be remembered that the majority of enterprises on the Polish market are small and medium-sized companies that are keen to build their image as socially responsible – to this end, and to the extent of their financial capabilities, they support NGOs with donations or donate their services.

One more element of individual and business engagement with NGOs that needs to be mentioned is the mechanism for donating 1% of individuals' personal income tax to public benefit organisations. In this case, the pool of organisations involved remains small, as only around 10% of those actively involved have PBO status. However, it should be borne in mind that the indicated mechanism is not a donation made by the donor in the strict sense, but a component amount of the tax paid, which the taxpayer can only decide to donate to the public activities of a specifically selected organisation.

The biggest barrier to engaging individual and corporate donors to support NGOs may be the cost of these activities. Mechanisms to encourage donors to support NGOs tend to be expensive, so when planning this kind of activity (e.g. campaigns), an organisation needs to prepare both budget-wise and project the hiring of qualified people to handle fundraising. Still, there is little competition in this segment of third sector funding and the fundraising methods described above can be a source of dynamic growth for organisations.

Conclusion

When looking for alternative methods of funding NGOs in the future, it is important to study the current situation. What standards do we have for third sector funding in Poland? Which methods of fundraising are most common today and which are just starting to take off? Which new practices offer an alternative solution to the predicament of lack of funding for operations?

It is worth looking at the examples of third sector development in other countries, the models of NGOs and the long-term benefits they bring. Are we closer to the model operating in the UK, where there is a reliance on private sector involvement? Or would we want to follow the model adopted in the USA, where the commercialisation of NGO activities is highly developed? Finally, how about focusing on the German model, which works in the neighbourhood, with the most developed cooperation between NGOs and government and municipal institutions?

The role of the state is to provide organisations in the third sector with favourable conditions for development in accordance with their own, but also its own and citizens' needs. In other words, putting in place funding mechanisms that take into account the diversity of the sector and make demands that are tailored to the size and modus operandi of each type of organisation. Now is not the time to make legislative decisions or change the system, but perhaps it is worth reflecting today on how institutions and NGOs – and ultimately donors – in Poland want to perceive the third sector and

what future they expect for it. It is worth seeking answers to the question of what changes and facilities are particularly needed to achieve the objectives identified for the civic sector.

Finally, coming back to the NGOs themselves: I think the biggest threat to their development and the search for new, alternative methods of funding activities may be the organisations themselves. Flexibility and willingness to seek new funding mechanisms may be the best measure of quality and effectiveness in building an effective third sector in Poland. The ability to choose the right tools at any given time to meet financial needs is undoubtedly linked to leaders' openness to change. A lack of flexibility and a fear of taking risks can be a major roadblock to finding alternative methods of raising money for community activities. This blockade is worth breaking and must be courageously broken.

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To be at home and to take action at home. Towards a community of citizens

In the modern history of Poland, 1989 was a turning point. After the June elections to the Sejm and the Senate, rapid changes took place in the country, affecting many areas of public life. They were supposed to result in the empowerment of society, making it a civic community. Did this actually happen? This article is an attempt to look at the Polish experience from the perspective of the formation of civil society and, by extension, the defence of the Polish community in these difficult times.

Polish disputes as an important beginning of a civic community

The transformation process launched in Poland in 1989 started many of our disputes. You can look at them as the beginnings of our Polish civic community. The transformation has taken place primarily on a political level. In the most general terms, it was a transition from a totalitarian-type state to a democratic state. In other words, it was about a new shape of the country, different from the previous one, and about the way power was exercised.

Generally speaking, the public has taken a positive stance towards political change. Indeed, it can be said to be effectively empowered within the new structures of state functioning. However, taking a positive stance did not imply an uncritical attitude. On many issues,

however, the public, while responding positively to the substance of change in the political sphere, takes a variety of positions. For the purpose of exemplification, some of these can be highlighted.

The first issue on the political plane, which should be considered positive, although raising various disputes, is the very nature of the state. There are many issues at stake in this dispute. One of these, however, appears to be of particular importance. It concerns a core function of the state. It is not the very essence of a social entity such as the state that is at issue, although its function is undeniably related to this issue. It is about the task that the state has to fulfil towards the citizen and other communities living in its space. Different positions are emerging in Poland on this issue. Considering the extreme attitudes, it should be noted that, on the one hand, it is emphasised that the state as an institution should solve all the basic problems of its citizens (the so-called welfare state), while on the other hand, it should create as much space as possible for the autonomy of the citizen going so far that it is the citizen himself who will solve his own problems (the so-called liberal state). In this dispute, however, parts of society emphasise the servile function of the state towards the citizen as a subject of social life, as well as the smaller communities that form an integral part of the state community.

Another important achievement of the Polish political transition is the recognition of democracy as the proper political system. There is consensus in this area. However, the very understanding of democracy as a political system remains a contentious issue. For some in Poland today, it means simple majority rule. For others, the concept of democracy is exclusively associated with freedom. For an idea is democratic when it gives people the greatest possible scope for individual freedom detailed in so-called natural, inalienable, fundamental rights. However, the ongoing dispute emphasises that if one accepts the idea of freedom as the deepest and sole basis of democracy, this can be dangerous. It should be said in this way: where freedom is lacking, there man is not himself; but where freedom is misunderstood, overvalued, there man is not himself either. Hence the concern for freedom as the sole and deepest basis

of democracy. For historical experience has repeatedly confirmed that freedom can be the privilege of only some, the enslavement of others, an arbitrary anarchy of social life. The fundamental question is therefore – in the Polish discussion on democracy – what is and what should really be the foundation of a democracy that nevertheless respects human freedom?

Another major achievement of our Polish political transition is the possibility for man to realise his natural inalienable rights. For years in the Polish reality, we fought for them. You could say that our whole skirmish was a fight for human rights. In this area, too, there is an ongoing debate in the Polish reality, which, however, does not invalidate this achievement. At the heart of it is the validity of individual rights; namely, whether freedoms or social rights are more important. The contemporary discussion seems to focus on this very fact.

For the purpose of exemplification, only a few of the political issues that have become the subject of our disputes in the Polish reality of the transition period are shown. And this – this discussion and disagreement – is an important beginning of the civic condition of our society. This is because it shows that the public is active in deciding on important issues.

The second plane of Polish transformation is the social plane. Above all, it leads to enriching social life with a new dimension, creating a real space for individuals and communities to be active and to realise their own subjectivity. This was lacking in the previous period – the period of totalitarianism. The changes taking place in this area are generally viewed positively. The widespread support for these social changes does not mean, however, the absence of critical positions expressed not only by various political parties and groups, but also by a wide range of our citizens.

The first and most serious issue giving rise to Polish disputes is the problem of axiology in social life. These dilemmas can also be put in the form of specific axiological disputes that characterise our current condition.

One of the fundamental dilemmas is undoubtedly the dispute over the very place of axiology in Polish reality. At the same time,

this is not just a theoretical (academic) dispute, but a practical one – concerning important dimensions of the functioning of social life.

There is undoubtedly a strong trend in Polish social life today to detach individual human life, as well as social life, from ethical norms. In this view, axiology itself is treated as a specific limitation of freedom in both individual and social terms. Thus, only positive norms determined by the way they are established are important in social life.

On the other hand, there is a strong tendency in contemporary Polish reality to emphasise that axiology is important for both the quality of individual human life and the quality of social life. In the context of this polemic, it is also important to ask not only about the place of values in contemporary reality, but about the quality of these values. In Polish reality, this dispute often concerns the relationship between Christian and liberal values.

Today's Polish axiological polemic, in addition to addressing the place of values, also has the character of a dispute over core value. It can be encapsulated in the fundamental question of what is a core values. There is no doubt that two values occupy a central place in contemporary axiological systems: the dignity of the human individual and freedom. The dispute is about which of these values is constitutive and ultimately decisive in the assessment of today's multifaceted reality. The axiological dispute also concerns the understanding of freedom in Polish reality. It was mentioned above that freedom is recognised as an important value in many axiologies. In e.g. personalistic axiology, it is a consequence of human dignity, while in e.g. liberal axiology, it determines the quality of human existence and thus human dignity. This framing of the issue, however, does not mean that there is no dispute on the matter.

An important achievement of the Polish transition on the social plane is also the issue of mass media. They have found their permanent place in modern democratic society and thus in the life of today's man. In Poland, the mass media have been somehow "reclaimed" for society after the period of totalitarianism. It can therefore be said that freedom has created the right space for action this type of media and their use by modern man.

However, the problem of the functioning of these information carriers in the new Polish reality, which has been received with great enthusiasm by various circles and institutions, has, like other issues, given rise to numerous discussions, which often simply turn into fierce disputes. They concern a number of issues relating to the functioning of the media. One of the most important is the one concerning the limits of freedom in the mass media. It can be encapsulated in the following questions: how far does freedom go in terms of communicated facts and programme making? Are there any limits to freedom on this plane? How far does a person's freedom extend in enjoying the programmes offered by the social media? Polish disputes thus address the problem of the relationship between freedom and the social media in a democratic society.

And this time, only certain facts of Polish social life that have become part of our disputes were highlighted. Disputes in this plane of the Polish transition are also an expression of our Polish civic virtue.

The public also commented positively with regard to changes on the cultural plane. This is also fully understandable. The new cultural reality was to become a space for the proper functioning of human beings and social groups. There have been many positive phenomena in this regard, such as: the abolition of censorship, universal access to the entirety of national and world culture, the dissemination of the means of social communication, etc. A positive stance this time, however, does not mean an uncritical stance. Also in this area, the Polish transformations gave rise to numerous discussions and even disputes. Two issues in particular have become subject to debate.

The issue of European unity and integration became the first point of contention. The issue of national identity in uniting Europe was also debatable. It can therefore be said that the subject of European integration has become a permanent feature of Polish social life, giving rise to numerous discussions and even disputes in this area. Various aspects of European unity can, of course, be discussed: economic, political, social, institutional, etc. One of them, it seems – a very important one – is the cultural aspect. After all, when asking about Europe, one should not only have a geographical or political

unit in mind, but above all a certain community of values and culture. Hence, in an informed discussion on the unity of Europe in its historical and future perspectives, and on Poland's place in a renewed vision for our continent, the cultural aspect cannot be absent. It is an attempt to seek an axiological foundation for European unity. This very aspect is raised in Poland in the discussion on the cohesion of this part of the world.

The changes taking place in Poland since 1989 have also raised the issue of preserving national identity in the process of European unification. This problem, which often takes on the character of a discussion or even a dispute, has come to the fore in the context of the threats posed by globalisation. It is about a fundamental question: does globalisation – in our reality, this unity of Europe – not conflict with the world of national heritage? Is there still a place for national heritage, or has it receded into history? Can Europe be a Europe of nations? These questions define the essence of the Polish dispute over national identity in a unifying Europe. Positions on this issue range from full enthusiasm about integration and thus lack of concern about the loss of national identity, to extreme pessimism seeing integration processes as a serious threat to national heritage.

And this time, only a few issues are presented at the cultural level that provoke disputes within Poland. The collisions on this plane also testify to the civic virtue of the Poles. In conclusion, it should be emphasised that the Polish transition has brought many positive developments in various aspects of our reality. They also aired many polemics. They undoubtedly constitute an important beginning of the current condition of Polish society as a civil society. For they testify to the activity of the people, and this is an essential element of civil society. But can disagreements alone build a full civic community?

A sense of identity as the foundation of the civic community

As mentioned above, we live in the Polish reality in a world of great disputes. By their very nature, these are positive processes that allow us to resolve many of our difficult problems through dialogue. And in this sense, they represent the essential leaven of civil society. However, in order for us not to get lost and remain only on the level of conflicts, but to be able to build an authentic community while preserving diversity (diversity is the richness and dynamism of a community), we must have a strong sense of our national identity. Indeed, feeling it is the foundation of civic community. A diversity of views, discussions and disputes does not hinder this. At this point, a fundamental question must be asked: are we, as Poles in the midst of our transition, able to build the identity of our community at the same time?

Human beings are characterised by a number of traits. Primary among these is that we are social beings. This property is important insofar as the sense of identity that is important for our analysis will be revealed in its context. Human community has two consequences. First, it means that people, in every dimension of their development, life and becoming, need other people as individuals and communities of people. On the other hand, the community makes the human being the quality and richness of social life. For every community is what people make it. Man, therefore, by his very nature is a “citizen” of many communities. They all shape his sense of identity, which in turn also influences the formation of these communities. The nation-state community appears to be important in this area.

We most often put it as a community of people who are in solidarity with each other by origin and culture and who have a sense of their own identity. A nation so understood must, in turn, either have its own state structures (nation-state) or function within the structures of another state (multinational state). In a nation-state community seen in this way, the following elements are important and will be fundamental to the formation of a sense of own identity. The first is a community of solidarity in origin, i.e. growing on

a single ethnic stem. The second element is the national culture that is the fruit of the life of this community. Both details are axiological categories, i.e. carriers of multiple values. It is through community and culture that people: learn, grow up and take root. All these functions help to shape a sense of identity.

What, then, is a sense of identity growing out of a nation-state community and culture? In extracting it, one must start first of all from the fundamental thesis that the sense of identity belongs to the category of mental experiences, which means that it concerns some inner reality. However, such a statement does not mean that it is detached from external reality. For this mental experience is intentional in nature. It is therefore always addressed to something, to a specific object, and in it it finds its proper content expression. We are touching on an important issue here. For this concrete reality and the concrete object in which the said mental experience finds its proper content are the objective elements, i.e. the community and the national culture. This is a specific “universe” that we inherited as already given, as it were, beyond our will and knowledge. In the form of community and culture, it constitutes an objective substrate of the social life of the national-state community, and as such, it “reaches” human consciousness and “feeds” it with its content. As a result of the processes that take place in this way, self-awareness emerges and takes shape. It is the first essential content element of a sense of identity.

Considering the subject of the aforementioned self-awareness, there are two levels and dimensions to it. The first is self-awareness of belonging. This is always about belonging to a community and culture. The second level is the awareness of separateness from another community and culture. The two dimensions of self-awareness discussed above, i.e. self-awareness of one’s own national belonging as well as self-awareness of national distinctiveness, constitute its entire dimension.

In extracting the full content of a sense of identity, however, one needs to go even further. For self-awareness, as mentioned above, is only the first content element of a sense of identity. The second is identification. It is always an internal, active response, a central

dynamic attitude towards this very “universe” which is community and culture. This means that this “universe” appears as a set of values that we inherited as already given, somehow beyond our will and knowledge, but which we recognize and accept as our world of values by a conscious act of will. It is this conscious act of will that is essentially identification. It is not just a mental experience, but an active relationship, i.e. taking an attitude towards the values of the national “universe”. Ultimately, identification will mean recognising it, i.e. the national community and culture in their axiological dimension, as one’s own, and thus it will be a form of participation in it.

In this view, we can ultimately define a sense of identity as the self-awareness of national belonging and distinctiveness and as the identification that is formed on its basis. Thus, it can be said that on the basis of community and nation-state culture, a sense of one’s own identity is born as an important attribute of human beings living in the modern world, in different socio-cultural spaces.

Above we have shown how community and nation-state culture shape a person’s sense of identity. However, there is also an inverse relationship in this matter, namely that it is the strong sense of identity of individuals that shapes the unity of the nation-state community. More precisely, it forms a sense of identity that belongs to this type of community in the form of the so-called “we”. It is therefore social in nature. You could say it is social awareness. However, such a statement does not imply that it exists as something independent of man. On the contrary, the material of identity is the experiences and acts of the individual. They form social consciousness when, identical in content, they are the property of many people, and when certain contents of individual experiences and acts are shared by a particular individual with other individuals. A sense of national and state identity, understood as a civic awareness of belonging and distinctiveness and the social identification formed on this basis, is thus made.

A civic community requires that the people who make it up have a sense of their own identity. It is about both individual and community equivalence. Our Polish transformation must therefore move in the direction of forming a national-state identity in order, despite

the disputes (may they continue), to shape an authentic civic community. Indeed, a sense of conformity of this kind is the foundation of an authentic civic community.

Community involvement as an expression of civic community

Polish disputes are undoubtedly an expression of civic community. For they testify to a commitment to shaping our contemporary reality. Concern for the formation of a national-state identity is, in turn, an opportunity to preserve the civic community, and involvement in social life in its various dimensions is the realisation of this community.

It should be unequivocally stated that a man cannot passively vegetate in the reality surrounding him. Certainly, an important rationale for his activity in the world is the dynamism of its nature. This means that he naturally wants to participate in the reality close to him, manifesting his dynamism in action. In practice, this activity should manifest itself in a variety of attitudes, which can be generally referred to as social or pro-social attitudes.

It is fundamental to realise what it means to be involved in society as an expression of our civic virtue. In the most general terms, it can be said that being actively present in the surrounding reality (for it is the main element of involvement) presupposes being a valuable individual. Social commitment means the value of the person to the environment in which we live. The concept of the “worthiness” of a person used here may raise reservations and doubts. They seem fully justified. The human person in its deepest essence is a value, which means that every person in the community is a value by the very fact of being human. Simply – there is no “worthless” individual.

If we use the term “value”, we want to emphasise man’s actual participation in the reality around him. For it can happen, as indeed happens in many cases, that the individual is only a passive member of social life. This can manifest itself, among other things, in the so-called reverberations of individualism in the form of a one-sided

accentuation of one's own rights, claiming benefits and social security, without a concomitant commitment to certain political and socio-economic conditions. The term we use therefore implies the conscious responsibility of a person for the co-creation of their own environment, responsibility for the national culture, for the quality of life, including for the quality of interpersonal relations in everyday life, for the quality of work in production and services. Full prudence of an individual in terms of caring for his own environment means his activity for the common good, which activity is defined by some as a catalogue of civic duties towards reality, in which man lives and functions.

At this point, however, it should be emphasised that participation thus understood in the form of responsibility and active commitment to one's environment is, as it were, the final dimension of a person's "worthiness" in society, a dimension that is perceived and assessable. The real participation of man in his own environment is grounded on the basis of his actual "rootedness" in the structures of this environment. In other words, for an individual to be truly responsible and actively involved in the environment, he must feel tangibly belonging to it in the form of so-called "rootedness". Some call it the actual feeling and awareness of "being at home". It is simply about the real integration of the person into their own environment. This is because integration into a concrete reality gives a sense of this "being" and thus allows one to understand one's duties and tasks and to actually become part of the mainstream of this environment. In this connection, the concept of people's "worthiness" should also be understood as its real integration, that is, real membership in a specific environment. In other words, a "rooted" individual who is integrated and has a sense of belonging is valuable to the community.

Finally, it should also be mentioned that the full, but at the same time proper integration of the person into the environment is only possible on the basis of the strong sense of personal identity and subjectivity that the individual possesses. Only in this way is a person consciously and fully "rooted" in the structures of a specific reality. This can be put in terms of the fact that it is only on the

basis of a sense of “being oneself” does a person integrate with a specific environment and shapes the awareness of “being at home”. For if we do not experience and live ourselves as a person and our subjectivity, we are either socially alienated, i.e. we are protected within a community, but we are in fact alien to nature, to the other person, to the community, or we become an object of assimilation. A person who does not have a sense of their own personal identity never integrates into the environment, never finds their “rootedness” in it. The individual’s worthiness must therefore also capture their actual awareness of their own personal identity and subjectivity.

Ultimately, it must be stated that “worthy” for social life is the individual who is aware of their identity, who is integrated into the community and who actually participates in its life in the form of responsibility and active commitment to their own environment. All the elements here add up to real value.

Community involvement understood in this way means activating all forces, in all spheres, to modernise life in the immediate environment as much as possible on many levels.

A person’s social commitment can and should manifest itself, for example, in a political issue. This plane of activity in Polish reality has, until recently, aroused a number of controversies. This was due to the existing system, which “by nature” isolated many from political activity. In the meantime, this is an important basis for social commitment that no human being can be indifferent to. In this view, devotion in the political plane is a duty of service to man.

Such social involvement in the political sphere in practice means the participation of the person in the resolution of the affairs of the state, national as well as local community for the benefit of its members and entire communities, through participation in the exercise of power at all levels, in its election and creation, in its control, in the determination of the content of its tasks. In addition to activities in the context of greater politics, “lesser politics” related to the local environment should also be taken into account. Political activity in this case will have the character of commitment to the autonomy of one’s own environment, its democratic management, and thus activity to preserve the values threatened by centralist egalitarianism.

Man's involvement in society should also be revealed at the socio-economic level, which makes it particularly clear that he is the goal of economic and social life and that, as a subject of that life, he is entitled to a wide range of activities. It is therefore about multiple actions for the state, national and local community in the form of strengthening their real identity, unity and dynamism. Also important are the forms of activity aimed at helping the members of these communities in various ways, securing their livelihoods, solving existing problems. Activation in the economic sphere is also important here. In today's era, the necessity and need for engagement in this area is increasingly highlighted. It is about responsibility for the management of one's own environment, better use of local natural resources, initiatives and actions to prevent land from being wasted on unsuitable crops, land being wasted in the form of leaving land fallow. In this area, more and more activity should also be manifested in the form of multiple initiatives and actions aimed at defending one's own environment by protecting it from investments that cause irreparable damage and increase the degree of degradation, as well as through extensive activities aimed at maintaining the beauty and purity of this environment.

Human involvement in society can and should also manifest itself on a cultural level. Culture is understood very broadly here. It includes those undertakings that lead to the strengthening of a person's autonomy, to his spiritual, intellectual and moral development. In such a view, human social initiative will mean that people become active in the area of cultural activities very broadly defined. Above all, it can be said to be highly active in the area of cultural activities related to both the nation and its own region. It is therefore about awakening multiple initiatives to preserve and cultivate one's own national and regional culture, to continuously revive and implement them, to stimulate the immediate community, but also the larger community. It is also about highlighting initiatives for culture, including for multiple artistic, literary and scientific activities. Therefore, it is an activation in the plane of care for the preservation of national and regional culture, but also care for its active and dynamic development.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it should be emphasised that human involvement in social life can appear and manifest itself on many levels. The most important of these are the political, socio-economic and cultural levels. In them, the value of the individual in social life should be apparent.

Social commitment understood in this way, which can be implemented in various areas, should manifest itself in the form of specific attitudes. It is about a whole range of attitudes, the most important of which are patriotism, local patriotism, solidarity, social love, social justice, commitment to the common good, commitment to the environment, commitment to peace, etc. It is a set of fundamental and basic attitudes in which an active presence in the world is expressed and demonstrated.

Human activity in the broadly understood social life inscribed in the life of the community is, in turn, an expression of the civic community. Indeed, its essence is the multidirectional mobilisation of people. A true civic community-building process should move from a community of dispute, through a community of identity formation, to a community of action. Then we will create a unity that gives the feeling of “being at home” and “taking action at home”. And this is the essence of a civic community providing opportunities to defend the Polish community in difficult times.



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Synergy effects in cooperation between NGOs and business and how to achieve them

Introduction

The economic situation in which companies, enterprises and various types of institutions currently operate has changed significantly in recent years. Business relations in which B2B connections prevailed are becoming blurred. It has become obvious that every entrepreneur in the delivery of their services uses the support of additional entities that provide them with resources or services appropriate to the branch of the economy in which they operate. This phenomenon is so common that business representatives are constantly looking for opportunities to stand out, improve, and introduce innovations to their activities. This means that more and more companies are turning their eyes to entities related to the public and social sectors. Cross-sector cooperation is becoming more and more common, even natural. It also provides the opportunity (apart from the issue of innovation) to build structures based on socially inclusive operating models. What is also worth emphasising is the fact that the planes on which the private, public and social sectors have functioned so far have begun to strongly penetrate each other, while the existing separation of these sectors is blurring. This situation is so interesting because it creates new opportunities for all market participants.

Of course, it cannot be said that cross-sectoral cooperation is an entirely new phenomenon. For years, companies have been seeking

out social or public institutions or cooperated with them. In many cases, however, these relationships were mainly based on one-way activities, where business entities were the “givers” and NGOs the “recipients” of benefits or services. One can even be tempted to say that these activities were of a strictly image-building nature, not entirely focused on doing business together.

The increase in opening up of the private sector to cooperation with social entities observed today is conditioned also by other factors. One can mention here social development, development of management sciences, including the development of the idea of CSR (since the 1970s) which has had a significant influence on the formation of inter-sectoral cooperation. Furthermore, it is worth noting the change in the approach of the consumer (end customer) to social issues. This results from the fact that today’s consumers are increasingly more aware and sensitive to topics related to the social and community issues. Thus, they require taking these factors into account in the daily functioning of the company (production process) whose products they purchase.

When talking about cross-sectoral cooperation, one cannot limit the discussion only to business and formulating expectations towards it. The appropriate approach of social and public entities is also important, as they increasingly see the need to cooperate with business partners and share their potential with them. They also notice dynamic changes in the market and try to adapt to them. This is manifested in the provision of solutions and services to the market that may be of interest to private sector entities. In the case of the public sector, universities offering their intellectual potential or research tools and resources can be indicated as an example. In the case of NGOs an illustration of this type of activities can be providing business with the products and services needed in normal organisational operations (e.g. catering or cleaning services). It is also important that the third sector is open to seeking innovation in the services provided, as well as increasing its competences, knowledge and experience especially since third sector entities are increasingly willing to become independent, i.e. to build structures independent of subsidies or project financing.

Expectations from partners

Often there are questions about the conditions that must be fulfilled in order for inter-sectoral cooperation to start bringing benefits to all parties. Apart from the obvious willingness and mutual “feeling” for each other’s goal, the key to fruitful cooperation is the concord of entities on many levels, among others by implementing common systems of values, assessment or ways of communication. It is important also to treat social organisations as equal entities with a different statutory purpose than business, but complementary with business in other standards. This approach is crucial for building structures that create links.

Another requirement for fruitful cooperation is the involvement of own resources, e.g. human resources (selecting people with desired skills and predispositions) and time. It is also important to produce a coherent strategy of action, including the collective and individual goals of each of the parties. If these conditions are not fully met, it may turn out that the tasks performed do not bring the expected benefits, and all the forces involved in the operation have been used ineffectively.

The importance of engagement of both parties

In order for to be able to talk about effective, beneficial cooperation, all parties involved must fulfil certain conditions. It is no different in the case of cross-sectoral cooperation. In this case, very often completely different entities meet, both in organisational, social and cultural terms, as well as in terms of expectations resulting from the cooperation they establish. While the business side seems better prepared to meet new challenges, third sector entities must prepare for such work.

The first and probably key element that affects the effectiveness of cross-sectoral cooperation is the need to unify thinking about the cooperation being established, the methods for carrying it out and the goals set. This is a challenge for all participants, because in the

initial phase of cooperation, two different worlds collide – a well-organised business with NGO entities, which often have to find themselves in a new reality and quickly adapt to it.

In this situation, cross-sectoral cooperation will require finding and specifying a common scope of activities that will enable the completion of tasks in the least burdensome way for each of the parties. A large part of the work now rests with business, who are the driving force behind the project in the initial phase. Due to its experience, knowledge and capabilities, business usually plays the role of a kind of mentor, indicating opportunities and directions through which the assumed goals can be achieved. Due to their lower level of business maturity, NGO entities need the support of external leaders who will inspire, advise and indicate appropriate directions of action (at least in the initial stages of cooperation).

Another important element is to clearly define the role of the partnership, because it will be the basis for any further form of cooperation that is to produce tangible results. Nowadays, business representatives are looking for entities capable of providing them with a sense of security. They are not looking for NGOs that will have to be steered from start to finish. Therefore, looking at the participation of NGOs in cross-sectoral cooperation, it is very important for them to quickly adapt to the new reality.

False stereotypes

Speaking of third sector organisations and institutions, the first thing that comes to mind is the statement that these entities are not ready to enter into various types of cooperation with business. They are viewed through the prism of poor organisation and low-skilled staff. This kind of thinking is wrong, because non-governmental organisations (associations, foundations) have been evolving towards professionalisation and adapting to new realities for a long time. One can get the impression that they themselves have noticed the necessity of changes that they must introduce if they want to

implement new projects, often going beyond their current forms of operation.

In the activities of NGOs, changes related to professionalisation have been noticeable for some time. People working in these structures more and more often have extensive experience, and they can also find themselves in the conditions dictated by the market. It is also noticed more and more often that third sector entities operate on the basis of strategic planning of their activities, and not ad hoc initiatives. Thanks to this approach, it is easier to define new areas of cooperation and integrate them into the daily activities of all parties involved. It is also noticeable that people with extensive business experience are looking for a new path of professional development in NGO structures. This is proof of social changes – people are beginning to combine professional activity with a passion for social work (the rigid division into the business and civic sectors is disappearing).

Examples of business synergy with NGOs

Earlier I raised the issue of business cooperation with NGOs purely theoretically. I would now like to present examples of several projects that testify to the developing cross-sectoral cooperation. Currently, there are many models of creating such partnerships on the market. They are created directly or are moderated and supported by external entities, designed under various target structures.

My attention was drawn to the Synergia – Business + NGO project, which approached the issue of cross-sectoral cooperation in an innovative way and created a kind of platform enabling and improving contact between interested entities, as well as facilitating the beginning of their cooperation. The main goal of this project was to create opportunities for dialogue, overcoming existing barriers and establishing cooperation between the business and non-governmental sectors. The completion of these tasks was necessary for successful coexistence bringing mutual benefits. As part of the project, in the course of work with interested entities, models of

cooperation were shaped, strategic issues were addressed, and educational projects were implemented, necessary for all participants working in new realities.

The entities to which the project was directed can be grouped into two categories. The first of them are businesses (both small as and large enterprises) who:

1. are convinced they should open up to social entities;
2. are looking for non-standard partners and innovative solutions;
3. express interest in using the experience and competence of non-business structures;
4. have or want to build a corporate responsibility (CSR) strategy;
5. are aware of their own values and also of potential actions that they would like to implement with the support of viable social partners;
6. express their readiness to develop employee volunteering within their own structures.

The second group is NGOs. In the Synergia – Business + NGO project, the profile of activity of a given NGO was not explicitly defined, but specific conditions were set that must be met. These include:

1. genuine willingness and readiness to develop;
2. having a clear idea for cooperation with a business partner;
3. having experience and competence in a particular field;
4. readiness to bear responsibility related to participation in the project, understood as participation in the process from the beginning to the end;
5. having the necessary resources: human and time;
6. desire for and looking towards long-term cooperation.

Only the fulfilment of the above-mentioned criteria by all interested participants made it possible to begin operations. Then, the next step was taken, i.e. the selection of partnerships that would best meet mutual expectations. Practitioners and experts in various fields are responsible for the selection. After the initial selection and selection of the most promising partnerships, tasks are carried out to help in the most effective completion of joint projects, the goals

and capabilities of each party are clarified, a strategy is built along with recommendations for all participants.

**EXAMPLE I. COOPERATION OF BUDIMEX S.A.
AND THE KONICZYŃKA INTENSIVE REHABILITATION CENTRE IN GDYNIA**

In this case, on the one hand, we have a nationwide, recognisable business brand, and on the other, a locally operating non-governmental organisation. Both the size of the entities, their importance and recognition were not a barrier to effective joint activity and achievement of mutual benefits (achievement of goals). As part of the cooperation, Budimex was responsible for renovating the infrastructure necessary to run the initiatives of the organisation, which was a subject of the social economy. These activities were carried out without transferring funds, but using only own resources and involvement in volunteer work by Budimex S.A. employees. The other party responded by providing rehabilitation benefits (in strictly specified quantity and variants) for employees of Budimex S.A. These benefits were previously purchased and provided to employees as part of company-wide benefits. In the case of this cooperation, it should be noted that the social entity carried out about 80% of the work on its own before starting the project. It was not until at the final stage that approached with a proposal to enter into partnership. Such conduct made it credible as an independent and, at the same time, goal-oriented partner.

EXAMPLE II. MIKROSTYK – CULTURAL CENTRE IN GNIEW

The cooperation of the above organisations is another example of intersectoral cooperation, undertaken without having to use financial benefits, and aimed at social issues. As part of the partnership formed with both parties, the workshop identified needs that should be met. On the business side, it was considered to be the strengthening of the positive perception of the company's daily (sometimes

burdensome) activities among the residents of Gniew, while on the non-business side, it was an area for cultural activities, events and meetings with residents. Mikrostyk company has made available on its premises a place where the Mikrostyk Station was established – a space for cultural events organised by the Cultural Centre. Thanks to this procedure, the inhabitants of Gniew gained not only a new educational and entertainment location on the map of their city, but they could also learn more about the rules of operation of the company located in the vicinity. For Mikrostyk, this action resulted in a positive perception of its activities, and also significantly contributed to reducing employee turnover. Mikrostyk Station has also become a place for seeking social innovations and building relationships – a place where both spheres of organisational culture penetrate and get to know each other, while creating a common space.

Stability in the functioning of partnerships

As can be seen in the examples above, cooperation involved entities that at a first glance might not be obvious matches. However, properly planned, thoughtful actions resulted in both parties benefiting from such cooperation. It is also worth emphasizing a certain stability of activity. Both of the described projects are carried out continuously, and they are even developed, e.g. by acquiring new partners, creating new ideas for functioning and constantly adapting to the volatility of the market and its needs. At this point, it is worth noting that all activities currently carried out by the entities are based on the initially developed model and original business assumptions. This shows that the decisions taken in the initial phase of work on business partnership with NGOs were correct in the described cases. They would not have been possible – of course – without the involvement of all participants, mutual learning and exchange of experiences. It is clear that institutions that are confident in their actions and show the same commitment will achieve their goals sooner or later.

The future of the social economy

When talking about any form of cooperation, not only its development, but also opportunities and threats should be taken into account. It is important to look at each cooperating entity separately and try to answer the question: what future awaits? While in the case of business a positive vision is relatively easy to define, in the case of third sector organisations their future operations cannot always be considered unthreatened. Many factors influence this. One of the key ones is the belief (still present, at least in Poland) that NGOs only work with social and welfare issues and support for socially excluded people. This is not entirely true, because non-governmental organisations have a great potential to undertake activities in other areas. This can be observed in various parts of the world, where social enterprises have a large impact on the formation of various branches of the economy, e.g. in the area of ecology.

When predicting the future of entities in the social economy, the role of legislative institutions and the way they perceive NGOs seems to be important. If the role of NGOs in the issued legal acts is limited only to the aforementioned social issues, their development will be hindered. Therefore, solutions are needed that will be a driving force for the development of the civic sector, i.e. they will enable non-governmental organisations to use innovative solutions and offer access to new technologies, which today are crucial in economic development and facilitate taking up new challenges. The role of the state, which should support this type of partnership by creating an appropriate tax system, is also significant in this context. It would make it possible to abandon the need to create grant or promotional funds. The possibility of obtaining tax relief could become a real incentive for business to initiate joint activities with social economy entities, and non-governmental organisations would gain the opportunity to become independent from the state. It is also necessary for the third sector to prove that it is becoming a self-sufficient entity, striving for development and transforming itself into an equivalent business partner.

Are CSR and ESG an opportunity for the social economy?

Today corporate social responsibility is becoming an increasingly popular trend among entrepreneurs. Since the 1990s, an increased interest of companies in this subject and active inclusion of it in their business operations strategy can be observed. This creates a situation in which representatives of the social economy have become visible and taken into account as partners in various projects.

Further opportunities to develop cross-sectoral cooperation may be created by the, planned from 2025, obligation to report ESG activities, (environment, social responsibility, governance) by Polish entrepreneurs. Thus, there will be a new opportunity for the social economy, because there is a high probability that the business sector will start looking for partners even more intensively in the third sector. Professional preparation of non-governmental organisations, skilful presentation of ongoing activities, implemented solutions and social services that can respond to business needs, as well as indicating their strengths and signalling readiness to cooperate, will undoubtedly create opportunities for establishing interesting and effective forms of cooperation.

Conclusion

In times of such a dynamically changing reality, we face the need to constantly adapt to ongoing transformations and new types of challenges. They require a constant search for elements that distinguish our institutions, and at the same time meeting new expectations of the market and consumers. This situation creates conditions for creating new partnerships and relations, including cross-sectoral cooperation, the potential of which is outlined in this article. Strengthening relations between business and third sector entities is a response to some of these expectations. However, it must be remembered that they will be a guarantee of success when a number of clearly defined conditions is met and mutual, equal involvement of all partners in the partnership is present. Cross-sectoral

cooperation should not be treated as a song of the future – because, as the reality shows, it is already of great importance today. Its skillful use will ensure stability in the operation of the organisation, as well as solid preparation for further changes facing business and the civil sector. So we can safely say that the future is now.



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How to study the third sector? New areas of empirical exploration

With the development of the third sector in Poland, issues related to the study of its operation and effectiveness have provoked journalistic opinion pieces, as well as generated methodological problems due to the difficulty of developing methods to valorise a variety of activities that are the direct or indirect result of entities classified as NGOs. The question of empirical validation of the decades-old balance sheet of foundations, associations and organisations remains an open question, especially the attempt to estimate stimulating effects, e.g. local capitals shaping civic democracy in Poland¹. The above suggests an answer to fundamental questions:

1. Can we talk about the so-called “empirical grey zone” in the case of phenomena related to the third sector?
2. Is the solution to the problem of quantifying the activities of people employed in the third sector the use of the so-called “replacement cost” method, i.e. treating the average salary of social workers as a reference point or references to the so-called opportunity cost, i.e. the income of a volunteer employed under a civil law contract?

¹ B. Lewenstein, *Spółeczeństwo rodzin czy obywateli – kapitał społeczny Polaków okresu transformacji*, “Societas/Communitas” 2006, No. 1, p. 172–190.

3. Does the problem of measuring the effects of third sector entities on local government multiply when trying to estimate the individual and social consequences of these activities?
4. Can the dynamic and multifaceted activities associated with the third sector be accurately “captured” with classical research instrumentation?
5. Is the dilemma of quantitative methods vs. qualitative methods really present in third sector research in Poland?

The problem of equivalence

The idea of civic society in Poland, particularly its constituent third sector, contains historical conditions that give it a fully authentic and imitation-free experience that must be subjected to a regime of empirical research. The activation of NGO entities in Poland was an act without which the managerial personalism of state institutions, civic subjectivity and participatory culture could not exist. Describing and interpreting civic society entities and, above all, the challenges they face, including the identification of forms of action of NGO towards the development and projection of cooperative networks (for example, according to the discussed pattern of consolidated governments), continues to be a knotty issue for analyses dedicated to third sector cooperation with local governments in order to reduce social transaction costs. The multiplicity of orientations and institutions that have set themselves the task of developing monetisation criteria, within the framework of a so-called national satellite account of third sector activities, testifies to the unflagging interest in this issue.

Significantly, for the data of public statistics dealing with the third sector, in the balance of national accounts, we identify indicator gaps including values characteristic of NGO and we observe real difficulties with the valorisation of activities undertaken by volunteers. This peculiar “empirical grey zone” includes, first of all, the parametrisation of data on the estimation of the financial components of public administration (third-party payments), the value

of financial transfers to the third sector from the household sector, the determination of the value of non-market production NGO or the calculation of voluntary activities. On the basis of standard descriptive indicators, it is extremely difficult to define the extent of the effects of activities resulting from cooperation between third sector entities and local government entities. Global dimensions in the form of the percentage structure of the third sector by type of activity undertaken, values related to employment measured by the Full Time Equivalents index and the percentage of people involved in voluntary activity, allow the identification of cooperation itself, but they ignore its monetisation and valorisation also in terms of systemic benefits. However, public statistics provide data allowing a range diagnosis of the activities belonging to public policies and carried out by third sector entities, captured in the form of a quotient of the total expenditure of local authorities on the achievement of the objectives of third sector organisations in a given area to the amount of total expenditure in this area. A certain solution to the problem of quantifying the activities of people employed in the third sector is to use the so-called “replacement cost” method, i.e. treating the average salary of social workers as a reference point or references to the so-called opportunity cost, i.e. the income of a volunteer employed under a civil law contract. Other indicators of the effectiveness of the activities of third sector organisations include the structure of the beneficiaries of these activities, presented in the form of statistical distributions, the intensity of involvement of beneficiaries, members of the organisation and volunteers in the activities of the organisation and the level of satisfaction of the beneficiaries. Mentioned proposals for valorisation of the effects of actions NGO proposed in the Johns Hopkins Comparative Non-profit Sector Project implemented by the UN Statistics Department.

In addition, the problem of measuring NGO activities multiplies when trying to estimate the individual and social consequences of activities. Of course, it is possible to interpret this cooperation as a transactional plane, within which a more or less symmetrical exchange takes place, assuming the following elements: territorial area as the subject of the transaction, operation according to

the laws of supply and demand, cyclical nature (actions in time horizons), involvement of public institutions and the rooting of transactions in the applicable legal norms and the rules of the social game. It should also be emphasised that the activities of NGOs can be considered in terms of the functions or dysfunctions they perform in the social system. The core values of the system's activities are social inclusion and the pursuit of efficiency in achieving goals. Civic subjectivity, important from the perspective of third sector organisations, is determined by intentional acts of social action which, by activating citizens, construct and sustain an awareness of a community of interests and values. Democracy and civic virtue (in the sense of local activation and social participation) are values that have appeared in the firmament of public and individual life as a result of, among other things, the development of the third sector.

Importantly, from the perspective of empirical third sector research, it is extremely troublesome to analyse precisely the social effects of foundations, associations and organisations. The fundamental problem is the recognition of the axiom of the rationality of the operation of third sector entities as only partly economic institutions, as investment (economic) rationality is determined in the case of foundations, associations or organisations by social factors, and thus equivalence is interpreted by the fact of achieving social effects as a consequence of the statutory objectives pursued, rather than the economic rate of return on investment. This is the antipode of a market-based view of the results of the actions of economic entities, which are by definition rational in an economic sense, since they are based on decisions that are the result of the choices of calculating decision-makers in the area of the market game. A good example is the analysis of NGOs initiatives during the global pandemic caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus, which is conditioned by two key ideas present in social economics – precisely the reduction of the monetarist valorisation of the social solidarity actions undertaken. On this occasion, it should be noted that, when describing and analysing projects carried out in the area of the third sector, it is obvious that initiatives whose real consequences

are characterised by the short- and long-term results of the activities carried out should be studied, which determines the choice of research approach.

The problem of instrumentation

The social and individual effects of NGOs, compared to studies of other types of organisations, represent, at least in part, a kind of “empirical grey area”. In the case of the dominant methodological orientations, this is a consequence of accepting traditional models for interpreting social processes and phenomena related to NGOs by referring to procedures of hypothesis construction with testing implications, which are then subject to empirical verification. Ideal research involves four stages: from the description of facts, through their classification, the generalisation of conclusions and the reintegration into a cycle of testing². The paradoxes of accepted theoretical approaches and methodological orientations are revealed in the subjective treatment of the third sector as a model of social participation. It seems that these opposing approaches converge in the dimension of research carried out outside public statistics, accepting the limited possibility of statistically examining the consequences of cooperation between third sector organisations and local government units. An attempt to circumvent the problems of statistical surveys of NGOs is to “saturate” range measurements with narrative data. For this reason, and in order to achieve consistency in the interpretation of difficult issues, the results of quantitative and qualitative research are based. This is not a triangulation of methods in the classical sense, but rather a consequence of accepting the limitations of individual research methods and techniques in identifying the effects of activities.

Traditional methods and techniques of social research, which are characteristic of them, represent classic instruments that allow us to

² See C.G. Hempel, *Filozofia nauk przyrodniczych*, trans. B. Stanosz, Aletheia, Warsaw 2001, p. 27 et seq.

know attitudes, opinions and evaluations towards actions of NGOs. Since a significant part of the activity of associations, organisations and foundations is moving to the Internet, a necessary supplement to traditional research is the use of Social Network Analysis (SNA). Social network analysis is a methodology for studying intersubjective relationships. It reflects the shift from individualism in the social sciences towards structural analysis. According to L.G. Miller and N.A. Christakis, network science is characterised by steady progression³. This is because social contacts enable the transfer of knowledge and social network analysis makes it possible to control the flow of knowledge with a high degree of precision, not least thanks to IT solutions designed for this purpose. This method suggests a redefinition of the basic units of analysis and the development of new analytical methods. Each type of social aggregation can be represented in terms of the units that make up that aggregation and the relationships between units. Social network analysis is a method of studying social structure and inter-subject relations, and it also allows for the study of the social consequences of structures in the form of resource allocation, information flows, change of views, etc. Social network analysts go beyond the specific attributes of entities to consider relationships and information exchange between social entities. The area of inquiry remains social life, but with a radical change in the research perspective, from an attributive analysis of the characteristics and properties of subjects, to an analysis of the specifics of networks of relationships. Observing the fact that Poles demonstrate significant activity in cyberspace, also in terms of the emergence of an online information reservoir, the use of SNA to study social media, for example, should be assumed. Social network analysis in the context of assessing the distribution of information about the activities of NGOs will enable:

- finding entities in the network who provide, search, integrate information;

³ See *Wykorzystanie potencjału sieci społecznych*, "Harvard Business Review Poland" 2012, No. 111.

- finding entities relevant to information and knowledge sharing (knowledge experts), opinion leaders;
- obtaining an image of connections (channels), and the flow of information or knowledge between entities.

Another intriguing field for the exploitation of empirical research in the area of reflection on third sector activities is the application of data mining methods. The multidimensionality of NGOs objectives and the multiplicity of issues involved, thanks to access to big data sets, enables the use of analytics including advanced statistical analysis, modelling, simulation and prediction. The essence of the issue addressed is only ostensibly based on the legitimacy of advanced computational techniques in third sector analysis, focusing primarily on the role of processing repositories of data collected within relational networks of massive volumes called big data for the ability to explore the complexity of social economy activities. Particularly in the field of problem fields related to social innovation, it is required to cross the boundary of statistical description towards the use of statistical-econometric predictions, a dynamic transition from a predefined model of data analysis to a posterior model. It should be noted that

the variety of data to be analysed is not limited to connecting multiple transaction systems. The stored collections can feed structured and unstructured data, internal and external, historical and current, both secondary, processed data from various types of documents, as well as data in the form of videos, images, audio files, geolocation data, network logins, text links, etc. Big data is about the combination of many types of data, so its collection and analysis require an environment that allows for the efficient processing of huge amounts of data⁴.

⁴ M. Kalińska-Kula, *Wykorzystanie big data w procesach decyzyjnych przedsiębiorstw*, „Marketing i Zarządzanie” 2017, No. 2(48), p. 145.

According to a 2020 study by International Data Corporation (IDC), the global economy “is focused on digital transformation. Over the next three years, IT spending will reach USD 6.8 trillion. The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic is pervasive and is driving change that business has not been sufficiently motivated to do so far”⁵. From the Global Data Market Size report of 2020.

we learn that although the health and economic crises are still ongoing, the Polish data market will record a record valuation. Polish spending on digital information will be as high as USD 32.1 million in 2020, an increase of 17.5% year-on-year. Compared to other European countries, this is a result that places us in the middle of the pack, between extremely restrained economies such as Romania (USD 4.0 million), Bulgaria (USD 0.2 million), or Hungary (USD 0.9 million), and information pioneers that include our western neighbours Germany (USD 826.3 million), the United Kingdom (USD 3,064.2 million), or France (USD 912.5 million), among others⁶.

The expansion of market-based websites, the radical shift in the types of social and inter-subjective interactions towards the dynamic use of virtual network resources, has revolutionised the study of social systems. An information society is a society that generates and uses data repositories within interactive ICT networks with volumes that exceed standard analytical capabilities based on traditional analytical methods. For example, the online model of NGOs already in place makes it possible to reach donors and beneficiaries with social messages through the absence of restrictions on limited spaces for publishing information; diversification

⁵ M. Laurisz, *Rekordowe wydatki na Big Data, w tym roku mimo trwającej pandemii firmy na całym świecie na Big Data przeznaczą rekordową kwotę ponad 41 mld USD, wynika z analizy Cloud Technologies* [online] <https://itreseller.com.pl/rynek-karmiony-pandemia-rekordowe-wydatki-na-big-data/> [accessed: 07.08.2022].

⁶ Ibidem.

of the content posted and media used: e.g. text, MP3 tracks, wav, video, photo, links to YouTube and additional campaign material; the inclusion of the blog in marketing activities as a primary medium for social contact; the spread of the Internet through mobile devices (iPods, Palm tops, mobile phones, netbooks, etc.), the possibility of creating a thematic vortal (vertical portal), i.e. a specialised portal publishing information on the activities carried out by associations, organisations and foundations; the microblogging of virtual meetings, comments and, above all, the construction of a real third sector entity in cyber-space. As a consequence of big data harvesting, we obtain matrices for data mining analyses. Big data volumes allow sequential stages of data processing and analysis to be carried out, which offer the possibility of arranging the individual stages that make up the data analysis process (using nodes) into logical sequences, starting with the pre-processing of the input data, through appropriate transformations and transformations, leading to the correct form of analytical data suitable for data mining techniques, up to the creation of output data that can be stored in external database systems.

Due to the systematic nature of the data collection process, the information obtained allows the construction of time series and the construction of formal related descriptive and predictive data from unstructured sources. Of course, CRISP-DM conversion techniques require dedicated analysis software, with an indication of ALOHA products, PS Clementine PRO packages, IBM PS Imago, together with the SAS, GNU R or STATA family of programs.

The main problem of processing data related to the third sector is the use of multiple data sources to create a unified data file. High quality data mining analysis can be achieved through exploratory data analysis, graphical data mining methods and pattern and trend search. In the case of estimation, statistical analysis provides several tools. They include point and confidence interval estimation, simple linear regression and correlation and multiple regression. In contrast, all methods and techniques used for estimation can be used for prediction. These include traditional point and confidence interval estimation methods, simple linear regression and

correlation and multiple regression, data mining and knowledge discovery methods, e.g. neural networks, decision trees and the k-nearest neighbour method. Classifications are provided by the k-nearest-neighbour algorithm, decision trees or neural networks. Grouping means grouping records or even observations or cases into classes of similar objects. A group is a set of records that are similar to each other and dissimilar to records in other groups. Grouping differs from classification in that, in the case of grouping, there is no target variable. We can use a two-stage cluster analysis to identify natural (non-predefined) segments. It is used when it is necessary to distinguish a group of similar objects when these objects are described by more than one characteristic⁷.

At the same time, the increase in the amount of digital data available means that conventional techniques for processing and storing it are proving to be inadequate, necessitating the search for new methods of managing vast data resources⁸.

The use of data mining analytics provides an opportunity to gather valuable information about the third sector. Analysis on big data volumes

[...] combine operations on large data sets with advanced analytical tools that create models not only of a descriptive nature, but above all of a predictive nature, thus making it possible to find hitherto unknown trends and facts⁹.

⁷ See D.T. Larose, *Discovering knowledge in data. Introduction to Data Mining*, translated by A. Wilbik, PWN, Warsaw 2006, p. 10-24.

⁸ M. Kalińska-Kula, *Wykorzystanie big data w procesach decyzyjnych przedsiębiorstw*, „Marketing i Zarządzanie” 2017, No. 2(48), p. 142.

⁹ Ibidem.

The problem of prediction methods

In contemporary sociology, statistical instruments provide important analytical support for multidimensional processes and phenomena in the third sector area. Particularly with regard to problem fields related to the effects of NGOs, crossing the boundary of statistical description towards the use of statistical-econometric forecasts seems innovative and necessary. Quantifiable methods using large-scale multi-sectoral models to produce a comprehensive overview of the impact of the activities of associations, organisations and foundations on social change are commonly proposed in the literature¹⁰. Forecasting dedicated to the social sciences uses a triangulation of research methods and techniques, including formal (statistical) and non-formal (qualitative) methods. For quantified data collection techniques in building predictive models, we distinguish between extrapolation-based techniques, econometric and behavioural models, etc. Non-quantified techniques include the Delphi technique, *case studies*, etc.¹¹ The mechanisms used allow the creation of explanatory and predictive models at different levels of spatial, sectoral and any other combinations corresponding to the demand. The typology of forecasting systems, which includes the models we can build in NGOs, allows us to distinguish three theoretical orientations: a top-down approach, a bottom-up approach and a so-called hybrid system. Forecasting in a top-down approach is based on using an overall model, such as a general equilibrium model, and then building forecasts incrementally. A bottom-up approach, on the other hand, is applied to a variable determined at an aggregate level, e.g. territorially (national), and is additionally characterised by a high degree of differentiation towards the regional/local variables that constitute its components. The bottom-up approach uses

¹⁰ R. Wilson, *Forecasting skill requirements at national and company levels*, in: *Training in Europe*, ed. P. Descy, M. Tessaring, Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, Luxembourg 2001, p. 561-592.

¹¹ See *Towards European skill needs forecasting*, CEDEFOP Panorama series 137, ed. A. Zukersteinova, O. Strietska-Illina, Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, Luxembourg 2007.

sub-models for forecasting. Both bottom-up and top-down forecasting are referred to as a “hybrid system”¹².

According to the classification of A. Zeliaś, B. Pawełek and S. Wanat, we divide forecasting methods into statistical-mathematical and non-mathematical ones¹³. Mathematical methods include deterministic models and econometric models. The latter enable forecasts based on single- and multi-equation econometric models. Forecasting methods based on single equation econometric models include classical trend models, adaptive trend models, causal descriptive models and autoregressive models. Multi-equation forecasting models include simple models, recursive models and models with jointly interdependent equations. Non-mathematical methods include forecasting methods based on expert knowledge, using analogies and qualitative survey techniques, intuitive analyses, successive approximations, the Delphi method or reflection¹⁴. The original classification of data collection methods for forecasting includes Suchecki’s project, who distinguished the following groups of methods: surveys, expert techniques, extrapolation methods, econometric models and bootstrap methods (non-parametric estimation of distributions)¹⁵.

Leaving aside the complexity of research processes in the field of NGOs – regardless of their multivariate nature – one of the biggest challenges is the quality of input data for third sector activities. The creation of the research logic must rely on multiple data sources. This raises standard issues of consistency and reliability of the information underpinning the analyses. On a garbage in – garbage out basis, it is to be expected that a lack of diligence in the collection of

¹² F. Cörvers, J. Meriküll, *Classifications, data and models for European skill needs forecasting*, in: *Towards European skill needs forecasting*, CEDEFOP Panorama series 137, p. 27-40.

¹³ A. Zeliaś, B. Pawełek, S. Wanat, *Prognozowanie ekonomiczne. Teoria, przykłady, zadania*, PWN, Warsaw 2003.

¹⁴ Ibidem.

¹⁵ B. Suchecki, *Propozycje wariantowych zastosowań modeli ekonometrycznych i procedur prognostycznych w systemie prognozowania popytu na pracę w Polsce*, in: *Rynek pracy i popyt na pracę w modelach gospodarki narodowej*, “Studia i Materiały”, vol. 1, RCSS, Warsaw 1999.

empirical data and a failure to combine it with administrative data (e.g. Central Statistical Office's SOF reporting) can be sources of contamination in research processes. However, increasing the effectiveness of associations, organisations and foundations requires real diagnosis and prediction, which is determined, among other things, by access to innovative data collection and processing techniques.

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Civil society – two visions

Two visions of “civil society” are clashing in the public sphere. I would call them the “narrowing one” and the “broadening one”. To illustrate this phenomenon, I will use the example of social trends we have seen in recent years.

A narrowing vision and its paradoxes

In autumn 2020, after the ruling of the Constitutional Tribunal, a wave of demonstrations organised by feminist organisations, led by the National Women’s Strike, swept through Poland. These organisations claim to represent all women and fight for their rights (under the red zigzag sign). However, they define these rights according to their vision of society. According to these feminist organisations, they have a monopoly on representing all women and defending their rights.

One of the slogans of the “red zigzag [thunderbolt]” demonstration was “fuck Godek”, chanted by the participants. It is, of course, a reference to Kaja Godek, the leader of the Życie i Rodzina [Life and Family] Foundation. It is interesting that organisations fighting for the dignity of women have made one of their flagship mottoes a call for hatred and physical (and perhaps even sexual) violence against a woman, the leader of a group with the same lofty goals. The

fundamental problem, however, is that Kaja Godek derives women's rights and their dignity from axiological foundations different from those of feminists, and from an anthropology different from theirs. As it turned out, this fact is unacceptable to a certain group of female activists.

International organisations, the European Union and its institutions have no doubt that the National Women's Strike is representative of "civil society". This perception of NGOs means that they are, in practice, guaranteed grants from both European Union institutions and, for example, under the so-called Norwegian funds. One might ask at this point whether the same bodies also consider the aforementioned Kaja Godek to be a representative of "civil society". And following this thought, do people defending churches, people praying the rosary in public during the same demonstrations, stand a chance of being recognised as fully-fledged representatives of "civil society", just like demonstrators chanting aggressive slogans and painting red zigzags on the walls of churches?

The broadening vision – its origins and consequences

The "narrowing" definition of civil society outlined above was common in Poland until 2015. Organisations addressing issues other than those reserved for "genuine civil society organisations" or those that represented a worldview different from that adhered to by progressive and liberal groups in the West could only function on the margins of public life. While they were able to receive small grants, e.g. from local government sources (usually such a grant did not cover all costs and the organisation did not come out stronger after the project), their chances of receiving a large, pro-development grant were slim. Representatives of this type of organisation were not likely to be invited to bodies shaping public policy, discussing NGO problems (e.g. the Third Sector Road Map). Therefore, many small civic entities were focused solely on day-to-day operations, on survival, without time for strategic reflection, nor did they have the resources and knowledge necessary to create larger, umbrella

structures. Thus, a kind of vicious circle was created: many organisations could not, due to their institutional weakness, become partners for local government or state administration, and this in turn resulted in both local government and state administration not inviting these organisations to cooperate. The weakness of these organisations and the apathy and undervaluing of their leaders has deepened.

After 2015, the state adopted a vision of civil society that can be described as the “broadening” vision – a successive enrolment of new groups of organisations, including those that had hitherto been marginalised, began. This opening up concerned, for example, organisations involved in the cultivation and preservation of national heritage, not only in the country, but also abroad. The potential of pro-defence organisations was recognised and their members later began to join – as volunteers – the ranks of the Territorial Defence Forces. The numerous Rural Women’s Associations and Voluntary Fire Brigades, which are strongly rooted in the Polish tradition of social involvement, were supported with specially dedicated programmes.

The Public Benefit Committee was established and the Public Benefit Council (previously a departmental body affiliated to the Minister of Family, Labour and Social Policy) became an advisory body to the Chairman of the Public Benefit Committee. In 2017, the National Freedom Institute – Centre for Civil Society Development was established and tasked with administering two horizontal civil society support programmes. Noting the richness and diversity of civic activity, several so-called thematic programmes have been developed, targeting specific types of organisations with sometimes specific forms of action and needs (e.g. scouts). Finally, it has been recognised that activities falling within the concept of “civil society” are being undertaken by organisations hitherto not associated with this phenomenon. The opportunity to apply for institutional development funds for small, locally-based entities has been opened up. The important role of church organisations and structures (parishes, religious houses, parish organisations) in the creation and operation of “civil society”, especially in small communities outside of large

urban areas, was recognised, as well as the role played by schools and Volunteer Fire Brigades, where much non-formalised civic activity is concentrated, aimed at, for example, protecting the common good and solving social problems, often involving older, less mobile, excluded people. I think that thanks to the support of their initiatives, at least some of the people who have treated rosary circles or Radio Maryja Circles (so often ridiculed in the mainstream media) as those that do not fit into the “civil society” will change their minds.

Two visions of civil society and attitudes towards the state

The differences between the two visions of “civil society” manifested themselves forcefully on the occasion of the crisis on the eastern border of the Republic of Poland. They highlighted the attitude of NGOs and their members towards our country, towards the common good, which is an independent and democratic Polish state. In 2021, there was a hybrid attack on the stability of our border with Belarus. People transported to this border by the Belarusian authorities were used as weapons. Some organisations used aid for immigrants as a pretext for conflict with the Polish state and for an attack (also carried out internationally) on the democratically elected authorities. Border Guard officers and Territorial Defence soldiers, who are volunteers and thus can be considered an integral part of civil society (as I wrote above), have become victims of hate speech. Most organisations, however, sought to bring aid to those in need in consultation with the Polish authorities, putting humanitarian considerations on a par with concerns for the safety of fellow citizens.

In turn, after 24 February 2022 and the Russian aggression against Ukraine, a wave of several million refugees came to Poland. A vigorous and spontaneous response to help those in need was immediately apparent. Volunteers appeared at border crossings, railway stations and other locations to support Ukrainians fleeing the war. Overnight, hundreds of thousands of homes opened up, welcoming women with children. After a while, a narrative emerged

that only NGOs provided support and the Polish state did nothing. Once again, a section of NGOs privileged before 2015 used the difficult situation as a pretext to attack the government, doing so on behalf of the entire third sector. Meanwhile, most organisations carried out relief operations in cooperation with both local authorities and the government administration and its subordinate services. It can be concluded that the entities enshrined in the “broadening” vision of civil society have the common good of the security of the Republic in mind.

Such actions have been met with the accusation that “PiS is creating a new civil society from top-down”. The problem is that the entities considered to be part of the “new” civil society already existed and were active before. However, until 2015, they were not represented in any way – the voice of the community was considered to be entities representing a relatively small group of organisations with *de facto* long-term monopoly on contacts with the authorities and international organisations. This monopoly manifested itself in wide access to large grants, both domestic and foreign, guaranteeing stability to their operations and the possibility of development. Moreover, organisations typical of the “narrowing vision” identified topics that they thought were worthy of being civic.

The changes introduced after 2015 have certainly had an impact on the financial situation of many organisations (more competition in accessing public funding), as well as the fact that the hitherto obvious monopoly of representation of the entire non-governmental sector in relation to the institutions of power has been undermined. The Public Benefit Council has become more pluralistic, with new activists coming from hitherto marginalised organisations. Many small and recently established organisations have been given the opportunity to strengthen themselves and develop their activities through the possibility of applying for new support programmes. Further networking structures have also emerged: national, regional and sectoral.

In order to change the situation and implement the “broadening vision” of civil society, it was crucial to see the full spectrum of civic activities of Poles. Several manifestations of this diversity

of objectives, methods and fields of action have already been mentioned above. It is also worth mentioning at this point the rapid and spectacular development of initiatives consistent with the state's interest in the area of identity, i.e. nurturing Polish history and cultural heritage. Examples include the activity of re-enactment groups and the emergence of many initiatives discovering the so-called "blank spots" in Polish history (the subject of the Cursed Soldiers being the most striking example). Such trends are most beneficial both for strengthening the potential of NGOs and for increasing the efficiency of the state, which can more easily find partners in a pluralised civic sector to improve and enhance its image, for example. In this time of globalisation crisis, such initiatives are particularly valuable and necessary. State support for new initiatives and organisations is therefore understandable.

The National Freedom Institute and support for an expanding vision of civil society

Summarising the above considerations, it can be said that 2015 was a breakthrough in terms of building a civil society in Poland. This is because, for the first time in the history of the Third Republic of Poland, the conditions for institutional development were created for the entire non-governmental sector – every entity operating in the civic domain, embodying the constitutional right to freedom of association and activity by associations, foundations and other entities defined by law. Pioneering programmes have been implemented to support the development of all spheres of public benefit. The creation in 2017 of a specialised government agency, the National Freedom Institute – Centre for Civil Society Development, was another important development for this breakthrough. It was the activities of the NFI-CCSD that made it possible to implement programmes of a sometimes pioneering nature, adapted to the rapidly changing realities of social life in Poland. Being the current standard, "institutional development expenditure" was introduced first in the CIF Programme and then in the Civic Organisation

Development Programme, which was the idea of the NFI. New thematic programmes have been opened up to organisations and fields of activity hitherto outside the area of interest of government and local authorities. People’s high schools, counselling organisations and vibrant youth organisations, which are important for Poland’s future, should be mentioned here. With the development of forms of support in the form of small grants, there has also been a real opportunity to help small informal groups and local ad hoc activities.

In a few years, the NFI-CCSD should also become a place for “reflection on the civil sector” as a centre for meetings, debate and exchange of experiences between NGOs and as an institution to inspire and coordinate in-depth research on the whole sector, on the two visions of civil society described here. Such an institution – judging by the emotionally charged discussions about the state of the civic sector and the still unresolved (but key research topics for the future of the sector) – is clearly lacking.



Przemysław Jaśkiewicz – graduated in history from the Catholic University of Lublin. Involved in the activities of many non-governmental organisations (e.g. Independent Students’ Association, Independence Foundation, BKS Lublin, “Trzy Kropki” Association). In 2016, he was awarded the “Pro Patria” medal. In February 2017, he became president of the Union of Associations Confederation of Non-Governmental Initiatives of the Republic of Poland (KIPR). Member of the Public Benefit Council of the fifth and sixth terms of office. From 2017 to 2020, member of the Steering and Monitoring Committee of the Civic Initiatives Fund Programme for the years 2014-2020. Deputy Director of the National Freedom Institute – Centre for Civil Society Development since 2021.



Photo 31. Przemysław Jaskiewicz – Deputy Director of the NFI-CCSD since 2021.



Photo 32. Michał Rulski – Deputy Director of the NFI-CCSD since 2021.



Photo 33. Member of Sejm of RP Jacek Kurzępa, Piotr Ciężkowski from the Jagiellonian Club and Andrzej Rybus-Tołoczko – Chairman of the Convention of Provincial Public Benefit Councils, participating in the seminar “Financial security of civic organisations through the construction of endowments” (13 October 2021)



Photo 34. NFI-CCSD staff and representatives of regional NEW CIF operators during a study visit to the UK (13 September 2022)



Photo 35. NFI-CCSD staff during the National NGO-EXPO Fair in Kielce (28 October 2022)



Photo 36. Editor Marcin Wikłó – Solidarity Corps Ambassador



Photo 37. Priority 2a beneficiaries of the Civil Society Organisations Development Programme (COP 2a) attending an endowment capital seminar (14 July 2022)



Photo 38. Wojciech Kaczmarczyk (Director of NFI-CCSD) participating in the conference 'The Civic Initiatives Fund: 15 years of experience, prospects to the year 2030' (12 October 2021)

IV.

THE DEBATE

PIOTR MAZUREK, BOHDAN ROŻNOWSKI, MACIEJ KUNYSZ,
KAROL HANDZEL, ŁUKASZ SAMBORSKI, MARCIN WIKŁO

<https://doi.org/10.54253/9788396380166.ppt.398-429>

The civic sector after the crisis – opportunities and dangers

Warszawa, on 25 November 2021.

Marcin Wikło: Ladies and Gentlemen, we are opening today's primary debate – *The civic sector after the crisis* – that is the pandemic (because this is what we call this crisis) – opportunities and threats. The threats seem obvious and about the opportunities we will soon hear from our guests.

So, our guests: Bohdan Rożnowski, PhD, the Catholic University of Lublin, Minister Piotr Mazurek, Secretary of State, Chancellery of the Prime Minister, Government Plenipotentiary for Youth Politics, Vice Chairman of the Public Benefit Committee, Maciej Kunysz, PhD, Board for Public Benefit Activity, the EKOSKOP Association, Karol Handzel, Polish Non-Governmental Initiatives Confederation, Łukasz Samborski, Board for Public Benefit Activity. Dear Sir/Madam, I am very happy that we meet at this place and first I would like us to elaborate on the title of our debate – we discuss opportunities and threats.

Doctor, perhaps we start with you. Does the pandemic bring more opportunities or threats? I think this question is not obvious, because we may know about the threats, but after almost two years, do we know something about the opportunities that this situation may bring?

Bohdan Rożnowski, the Catholic University of Lublin: Ladies and Gentlemen, every crisis, every difficulty on the one hand requires

undertaking some adaptation activities that are difficult, tiresome and costly, but on the other side it always includes the aspect of adaptation, that is adjustment to new conditions and improvement of the functioning to overcome the new challenge. The likely directions for this adaptation seem clear: remote work, hybrid work, use of different communication technologies for contact and task completion. This is clearly a development component for non-governmental organisations and symptom of these organisations to the 21st century.

Marcin Wikło: Thank you very much. Minister, opportunities or threats? What do we know about the opportunities and threats after almost two years of the pandemic worldwide, but thinking primarily about Poland?

Minister Piotr Mazurek, Secretary of State, Chancellery of the Prime Minister, Government Plenipotentiary for Youth Politics, Vice Chairmant of the Public Benefit Committee: I think this is primarily a question to the representatives of non-governmental organisations. We, however, rely on the research and our dialogue with the community. Clearly, the matter is not obvious, because while the pandemic will have multiple negative consequences, much revealed by the study findings of the Klon/Jawor Association – as far as restricted activities and reduced numbers of employees, associates and volunteers in non-governmental organisations are concerned – I still think that we also see very specific examples of the positive side of this tragic, dramatic situation that the world is facing. For example, a significant improvement of the digital competencies of non-governmental organisations clearly resulted from necessity, but now we already cannot imagine non-governmental organisations – even those operated by the members of older generations – not using new technologies, like remote project management, remote case processing, remote communication between organisations. At present, I operate remote consultations attended more than 20,000 people. And I must say that I am convinced that the remote form has many advantages, because for example in reaching large groups to conduct dialogue

with, it is definitely better in terms of reach. Without the pandemic, we would certainly hold in-person meetings, resulting in the sample we communicate with being less representative. Certainly, fewer people would choose to come, sacrifice their time, probably sacrifice some money to drive to another location just to attend a meeting at specific time and place. I think this aspect is really worth considering. I encourage using new technologies, because the remote format has numerous advantages. In fact, we are using it today too, albeit in the hybrid version, but many people are with us via the Internet, which enables us to meet. Not all of us must squish in the confines of the cellar, but instead they may sit comfortably in front of their computers, still be with us and participate in these meetings.

Marcin Wikło: I feel that the pandemic will go away one day, but this hybrid or online form will simply stay and many conferences and meetings will be organised this way. Maciej Kunysz. All this bad with the pandemic, is it all only bad, or is there some good in it too – of course except for the evil that is danger to the human life and health, because this seems clear? Let us go deeper.

Maciej Kunysz, Ph.D., Board for Public Benefit Activity, the EKOSKOP Association: I agree with the Professor that every crisis situation shows new values, what forms are more flexible and what entities are more flexible in their activities. At the beginning of the pandemic, when the state started acting with some delay, organisations were much faster in action, like delivering food to infected people or helping the elderly. Here I must disagree with the Minister, because I see opportunities, I see good that is in the digital format, but in Poland we have many areas, where Internet connections are not good and not widely available enough to enable the people of Bieszczady Mountains, Low Beskid, Subcarpathia, where I come from – to participate directly in this conference, for example. There are many challenges remaining for the local governments, for the government, in the distribution of funds from the European Union or the national budget. The Professor addresses the well-being of the employees and, sadly, their well-being has significantly deteriorated, as far as

non-governmental organisations are concerned. The instability of funding has caused many people, who must support their families, to quit non-governmental organisations for public administration, but primarily business, in which they can earn far more. Thank you.

Marcin Wikło: Thank you very much. Karol Handzel. Karol, is it all bad or is there something good to this pandemic? What are the opportunities for us?

Karol Handzel, Polish Non-Governmental Initiatives Confederation: It is difficult for me to talk about the opportunities at the moment, I would like to focus more on the dangers, including the primary one that we can get used to this covid too much and be tempted to always do everything digital, everything hybrid. This way, we may neglect one of the most important things that we do in community organisations, that is simply neglect relations. An online event is easy to attend, easy to organise, it only requires us to act for a moment, to connect, to connect the webcam, to launch the application, but let us be honest, we will not build any relationships this way. Before entering this room, I managed to talk to nine or ten people. If I joined online, I would talk to nobody, I would not have met Dr Kunysz, whom I have seen like twenty times, but always online format. So this is the main danger related to our becoming increasingly digital. We will somehow know one another, but only as faces in webcams, we will not know one another as real people and this may slowly kill the civic sector.

Marcin Wikło: It is true that the hybrid format, the online format, is the lesser evil or maybe the lesser good, but it actually is some good, because we can reach the audience with this content. Łukasz, what do you think about these dangers and opportunities?

Łukasz Samborski, Board for Public Benefit Activity, the RC Foundation: I have the somewhat ungrateful task to speak at the end, when much things have already been said that I agree with. At the beginning, I would like to address the title, as it includes the civic sector after the

crisis, after the pandemic. We are stuck in this crisis at the moment, perhaps better prepared, adapted in some way, as Karol Handzel said before. We are getting used to this hybrid mode, to the online mode of some meetings, actually still adapting and adjusting to the situation. We are still facing a major threat in terms of stability and it is difficult for many organisations to plan for the next year, because we really do not know how long today's circumstances will last. We still have a very high infection rate, albeit mainly among the unvaccinated at the moment, but this is a threat for many organisations, in particular small organisations, which as Maciej Kunysz said, sometimes fail to reach smaller social groups in smaller towns and do not have the hardware. That is, even according to the studies by Klon/Jawor, most of the hardware used by non-governmental organisations is private. Of course, the programmes like the ones operated by the National Freedom Institute, enable providing the organisations with additional hardware or increasing their capacity for remote work, but many organisations still do not have operable hardware. In addition, for an extended time this hardware was shared with children in e-learning. Now, many adolescents are in quarantine again. I also work at a university. I recently conducted hybrid classes, because twelve people (of the 25-person group) are under quarantine. So, opportunities or threats? Sure, I see a lot of dangers, but perhaps I will say more about the opportunities. I think that a major challenge for the entire sector, which has always been a problem, is management. That is management skills, which are always a big problem in organisations, because at some point many activists become president or director without this academic background. This is not taught anywhere else. Now, managing a dispersed team, working remotely, is an even greater challenge. This is also an opportunity to develop the management skills, because according to the studies the organisation management board or leaders are evaluated positively in terms of adaptation of the organisation to the changing conditions. And I think that the hybrid format enables easier decision-making, for example with larger management boards in associations. If the management board includes five or six people, it is much easier to meet remotely.

Marcin Wikło: At this point I certainly agree with Doctor Kunysz that the digital Poland is not the Poland of our dreams yet, but on the other hand, we may not know what this digital Poland would look like without the necessity to improve the level of digitalisation. The situation simply forced us to make certain very specific moves. On the other hand, it is true that the activity of a non-governmental organisation is primarily an outcome of the self-denial of many people. These people are very strongly driven to what they came up with, to what they want to organise. Let me ask Professor Rożnowski, how is the backbone of the civic associations and organisations? Are we losing with the certain physicality of the situation, with the coronavirus violence, with the mundane inability to plan, to pay for this and that, or to draft the budget? Or does the character of the people working in the third sector prove essential, show and provide chances to overcome this situation?

Bohdan Rożnowski: Speaking in terms of providing chances is very difficult, but this is a real problem. As early as in the 1960s, it was noticed that how we feel, how we act, how healthy we are, depends on how many stress situation or crisis situations we meet. If crisis situations in life are numerous, we are at risk of disease, heart attacks, we make a cost-benefit analysis before undertaking any activity. When I think of an average person that I would like to invite to become a volunteer, the person asks “what is in it for me, what will I have to do or what costs will I have to bear”? The pandemic increased the costs very high and this “contact” is always connected with a sense of risk: will I become infected, will I infect my nearest and dearest, will I infect that 80-year old I visit, who is a customer of my organisation and whom I have been helping for years? This analysis we make, thinking about the costs related to the activity, which is not essential, since it is an additional activity, makes it more difficult to act and get involved. And, sadly, the decision to volunteer is influenced by the entire climate created by all the news about the pandemic. They increase the stress level, which makes the decision to get socially involved even more difficult. Already before the pandemic it was visible, for example in the studies by

Klon/Jawor, that the numbers of volunteers in non-governmental organisations is dropping and that less and less people are ready for such involvement. When I studied adolescent volunteers, they were clearly predominantly driven by some benefits for their future career. I am not doing this to serve others, but to gather experience, build my cv, which lead me to a better place later in life. They are young people and I can understand this matters to them. Perhaps in volunteers at an older age the service aspect is more important, but the cost side includes the above-mentioned risk to friends and family, which could prevent the involvement.

Marcin Wikło: Judging by what you have said, if I understood you correctly, you are paraphrasing the classic quote: “what does not kill you makes you stronger”. So, firstly, certain difficult situations impose requirements, and secondly, what you have said is somewhat depressing. It is less and less about the cause, and more and more about benefits, supposed to result in funds. Are the funds still predominant in this thinking?

Bohdan Rożnowski: Not necessarily funds, not necessarily funds. But prestige, social importance.

Marcin Wikło: Ah, yes, but perhaps funds may result from prestige and social significance. Hence, my question, how much of it is thinking only about the money, mundane benefits, or is there some cause left?

Bohdan Rożnowski: As I have said, I think that for young people the aspect of investment in future career and capital will be prominent. In people at an older age, there will be much more of the service, much more of the cause, because they are mature and experienced enough to have a more crystallised view of what matters in life and then the service will be more prominent.

Marcin Wikło: Minister, Deputy Prime Minister Gliński spoke here about your work with Minister Małąg, about how you – in brief – provided money for the civic sector to survive the crisis moments.

But would it not be an oversimplification to say that if we add money, everything will be sustained, everything will be fine and we will make it through unscathed?

Minister Piotr Mazurek: Of course, the problem is quite multi-dimensional. Firstly, I think that the Solidarity Senior Support Corps and many other initiatives proved that for young people, despite all the dangers, the need to become involved was powerful and showed how great is the energy and capital in these young Poles. Of course, the real art is to properly stimulate them, so as to encourage the members of the young generation. But of course, in Poland we also noticed a very high support involvement of other generations. As far as the support aspect is concerned, it is of course indispensable and necessary, hence much work was done to help the third sector in the pandemic. And this applies both to the financial support and different facilitating provisions, like moving the reporting deadlines, moving an entire series of different deadlines related not only to the reports, but also to tax issues. Of course, I am thinking about the matters related to the inclusion of non-governmental organisations in the subsequent anti-crisis shields. And here, thanks to the great involvement of Deputy Prime Minister Gliński, practically every subsequent shield included new facilitating provisions for non-governmental organisations. Of course, they were mainly issues that the organisations asked for themselves, that they requested, because undoubtedly the sector knows best, what solutions should be introduced. And a large part of their requests were then implemented, also in collaboration with the Ministry of Finance, with a series of institutions that determined specific components. An additional programme was launched, the so-called covid programme, PLN 10M for non-governmental organisations. It should be also said that thanks to the reform introduced in 2017 on the initiative of Professor Gliński, with the establishment of the Public Benefit Committee and the National Freedom Institute, as well as the launch of new programmes, the non-governmental sector was in a far better situation. Please imagine that money was not available, the COVID programme was not implemented, the entire series of previous

programmes was not introduced. They were launched at a perfect moment to slightly compensate the non-governmental organisations for the pandemic attack, while at the same time last year the budget of the CIF fund was increased. The previous multi-year programme ended, so when creating the new CIF fund, its budget was increased from PLN 60M to 80M per year. Of course, we had difficult conversations with the Ministry of Finance, which I was part of, but also there – as Deputy Prime Minister Gliński rightly noted – we have allies, including Minister Patkowski, also from the civic sector, who perfectly understands the needs of non-governmental organisations. In addition, new programmes were launched, like Polish Craft Incubator and Development Support for International Meeting Centres program, prepared with the advisory organisations programme. The entire series of government activities is conducted in this and other areas. For example, in the Ministry of Culture the Patriotic Fund programme was launched, of course dedicated to organisations conducting a certain type of activities in the area of national memory, tradition, remembrance of heroes and independence action. This is a new programme, launched in the pandemic year, which is also great financial support, at least for a part of the sector. With these activities, planned and implemented earlier and implemented in parallel, as well as special action in the Covid situation, the state, I think, helped the non-governmental organisations to get through the pandemic period in a definitely better condition. On the other hand, we fully agree that it is not all and there are still many needs that we must try and fulfil. Fulfil by continuing the dialogue and discussing the way to act to achieve the optimum solutions.

Marcin Wikło: I see that Doctor Kunysz would like to respond. Have you received what you expected, do you know about other organisations that received what they expected? Because you can always say it is too late for something, something is not enough and so on. The pandemic, we may agree, is a situation that surprised the world and countries far more powerful than Poland were not prepared for it. Perhaps let us relate to your area of activity. What does it look like in Subcarpathia?

Maciej Kunysz, PhD: It is not just Subcarpathia, because I have been involved in the Public Benefit Activity Council for years, both at the national and the Subcarpathian level, as well as in the European Economic and Social Committee. So, I will enter the meta level, by speaking that I do not trust and I do not believe Facebook politicians. I do not trust and I do not believe the politicians, who say: “it cannot be done”, “we do not have money for this, we are helpless”. I do not trust and I do not believe the politicians and officials, who hand out public money and say: “this is our money”. I am afraid to imagine, and I am imaginative, what would happen without Prime Minister Gliński and Wojciech Kaczmarek, the director of the National Freedom Institute, without funds for the support of the non-governmental organisations. I do not know what the pandemic would look like then. Definitely, it would be much worse. I remember, how the first, second and third shield was prepared, mentioned several times by the Minister, because the Public Benefit Activity Council was the author of some provisions in that act. The famous article 15ZZZZE and one more Z that all of the organisations benefited from by obtaining funds. And this is the answer to your question. So, probably every organisation that received funds in 2020 benefited from this article. However, in Poland our tradition is that not all regulations are adopted everywhere and not all regulations are enforced in local governments or central entities in the region.. For example: today a public official called me to ask for help, because the legal counsels at the public office claimed that an organisation that submitted on time a report on activities for several thousand zlotys was late with the explanations, because a person was absent, because they were ill or away. About PLN 30. Explanations about PLN 30. The lawyers came up with the idea that the organisation must return the entire subsidy. Such anomalies, sadly, are very common in Poland. Here I would like to ask the Minister, the Prime Minister that for public benefit the law on non-governmental organisations be clear – the interventions of the Public Benefit Committee and the Board for Public Benefit Activity should be more frequent so that the law is applied equally. Because the law is mostly good, but

due to the application practice or the lack of application practice, the situation is difficult.

Marcin Wikło: I only ask for one thing: we should be aware that we are at war with the coronavirus and the situation is really unusual and sometimes the law must be made, on an ongoing basis, so to speak, and correcting certain imperfections should be just demanded.

Maciej Kunysz, Ph.D.: It is good, but not adopted.

Marcin Wikło: So, let us adopt it and correct it. Gentlemen, let me ask you, as practitioners, for clarification. This summer, the news said that there was a shortage of waiters in Italy. All restaurants were open, but there were no waiters, because they simply changed sectors. How can this situation be translated to the voluntary service sector, for example? Because some institutions had to suspend their activities. Have they returned to what they were before or has the temporary suspension proved lethal? What does it look like in this sector?

Łukasz Samborski: Here, we should distinguish between volunteers and employees. The research shows that while the persons on employment contracts mostly remained in these organisations, the staff base very often shrank due to the reduced or transformed activities. What was the direction, in particular in the first wave, of transformation of the activities of the organisation? Mainly for the benefit of the elderly, as mentioned here already. According to the report I mentioned, one year after the pandemic 60% of transformations, or reorganisations, were made for the benefit of the elderly, as needed. In particular in the first wave, say to the middle of the year. I think that as far as volunteers are concerned, many of them could not find their place in the organisations for a long time, because actually, simply put, there was nothing to do. In particular, the organisations in the culture and sport sector organised events. I remember when we announced we need volunteers in Gdańsk, where there were practically no voluntary service offers last year, Then we had a lot of volunteers and, as the talks revealed,

they wanted to do something, but there was no specific offers for them. Here too, many activities were moved to the online voluntary service. Of course, not all could be moved. It seems to me that this base, in terms of associations, members in general, is shrinking due to the pandemic and because of the pandemic, this is accelerating. Also the volunteers: there was a threat that their involvement could entail high costs, for example with direct help, in particular in the first wave of the coronavirus. And here, one may see instability in organisations, because many of them, for example, have no multi-year task plans to complete and thus no financial strength. Or, no permanent base or even premises. This lowers the employment rate, since many organisations in smaller towns never returned to their tasks. Especially last year we had situations, in which for example already closed competitions in different local governments, small local governments, were cancelled. It meant that local governments decided they needed the funds for their own purposes and would not fulfil tasks, for example, by activities of organisations. By consequence, many organisations simply did not obtain funds for their tasks, even the ones they fulfil every year. So, I think that there could be some threat of reduced continuous intake of new volunteers or new employees to the sector due to instability. Since, as said before, people started to switch to work in public offices, business, maybe to restaurants now. As you have said about waiters, some of them moved to the food service sector, which started to grow after the re-opening. I think that until organisations have sure and stable funding due to the programmes that we also mentioned before, the Civic Organisations Development Programme or external funds, they will have a hard time supporting themselves during the pandemic, even permanent associates or permanent volunteers. And here we try to adapt, but the continual problem is that many tasks that the organisations used to fulfil before, such as in the above-mentioned culture or direct contact, that is environmental activities in local communities, still encounter some barriers related to the continuing pandemic.

Marcin Wikło: Karol, what about the non-governmental initiatives, what strength do they have to protect themselves in this difficult situation?

Karol Handzel: Let me say, referring to what Łukasz Samborski said, it was actually easier to retrain volunteers than to use them in online activities. Then, it is very easy to recruit them, but very difficult to keep them. For a certain reason: if we do not talk to them, they don't meet us, the organisation members, they won't then get hooked on it. They can perform different activities, prepare graphics, publish posts on Facebook, on the website, but for them, it will not be the same as involvement in the Senior Support Corps, in which they would visit an elderly person, deliver the shopping and feel they have completed a mission. In online activities, it is somewhat more difficult to pursue the mission. Going back to the question, I think that the sector to a large extent passed the test, because new initiatives kept appearing during the covid period. Although we were restricted, although it was a very stressful period, the period in which creativity mattered a lot, and if we can adjust to the changing situation...

Marcin Wikło: So, are you talking about the situations caused by COVID?

Karol Handzel: Of course. Many organisations responded to it very quickly. The leaders knew what they had to do. For example, farmer's wives associations very quickly started to produce masks, thus responding to the shortages in the local community. These were huge activities. There were also organisations that went one step further and even produced visors. Very quickly, as early as in March and April, we witnessed such an explosion of organisation activities. I think that the sector definitely passed this pandemic test.

Marcin Wikło: Łukasz, what about you.

Łukasz Samborski: Just a brief response on the subject, because we mentioned volunteer workers. An increasingly common problem,

due to the continued stress in the crisis situation, are the continuously changing working conditions. Because we work for a moment in office and then, again, for example in our workplace, quarantine is introduced and the team is dispersed, we return again. We experience the lack of contact with those who receive our services directly, through the webcam or none at all, because the person cannot meet us online. All that leads to many disorders in terms of burnout in activists or in terms of mental health. Because the fact that workers quit is often compensated by the fact that those remaining undertake more activities and initiatives. To some extent, they undertake the activities to sustain them and the new initiatives Karol Hendzel talked about. I am seeing this too and I see that more and more initiatives appear by other organisations for the well-being that we mentioned before, the well-being of the organisation's staff, but also volunteers. Because with the stress, with the workload, as well as continuous adjustment to changing conditions, this is a major challenge to organisations. In particular the organisations that employ many people, as well as organisations working with people with disabilities, working with the people particularly threatened by the pandemic. This is a certain challenge for the further pandemic time: how to deal with it, how to compensate for it, how to respond to it. So, I think that from the perspective of the employees, volunteers, this is a subject that will be important in the next year and the following years as well.

Marcin Wikło: The phrase “burnout” was mentioned, so the Professor is welcome to take the floor.

Bohdan Rożnowski: Burnout is a syndrome that requires a really extended work overload and the emergence of some other important features. I would only like to refer to the results showing that in 54% of organisations the employees complain about the increase in responsibilities, as mentioned before, and taking over the tasks from others who had quit. At the same time, 63% of the respondents say their stress levels related to working for the organisation are significantly higher. In addition to organising the work for themselves,

there is another problem: the risk of infection and the risk of additional complications. This significantly, exponentially, increased the occupational stress level. The studies also showed that in 43% of organisations, the satisfaction levels dropped. Since the satisfaction is lower, the stress is higher and the workload is higher, a seemingly natural consequence is the emergence of burnout, expressed by the sense of powerlessness and lack of energy to work. However, there are also other symptoms that consist in treating the clients more cynically, more like an object and less like a human being. The person is gradually losing their self-esteem and thinking that what they do is senseless. This is a very bad mechanism that propels itself and causes human well-being to deteriorate increasingly. Hence, burnout is something I encourage all non-governmental organisation leaders to protect their employees from.

Marcin Wikło: Kunysz?

Maciej Kunysz, Ph.D.: I agree with the Professor on this. Sadly, in Poland we have yet another syndrome, the “organisation poverty”. As a member of many selection boards, at the regional and local level, I often hear public officials, but sadly also organisations, saying “an organisation member should not earn money”. Now, I am wondering, if that active organisation member has a family, how is he supposed to support it and pay their bills? Recently, at EESC, we had such a debate on the condition of employment and quality of employment, also in non-governmental organisations. I was horrified, when I found out that the worst earnings in non-governmental organisations in Europe are found in Poland, Romania and Bulgaria. This, to some extent, explains, why the people who join organisations, earn great experience – because as the Professor said, as Łukasz Samborski said, we must act in highly varied areas from media to accounts, to drafting projects – these people very quickly find jobs paying several times more in business or administration. This is the first thing. Reporting I do not know if you know this, but different organisations may find 85 places, where they must file a report. Eighty five places! God forbid the organisation have anything to

do with health and have its own premises. Then, it would have to file a report at 62 places. We, the Public Benefit Activity Council of the previous term, managed to initiate the reporting act creation process, to remove this stigma. Because we want to act, not file reports. An example from Lower Silesia. Sport organisations like to have multi-person management boards, the largest of them consisting of 50 people. A financial report, when it has to be signed by 50 people, often elderly, is unfeasible. This year, thanks to Alicja Gabinek, Justyna Ochędzan, Wojciech Jachimowicz and Wojciech Kaczmarczyk, we managed to get in touch with the Ministry of Finance. Here, I would like to cordially thank Mrs. Bułhakow, who was our good spirit at the Ministry of Finance. And effective next year, only one signature will be required under a financial report. Now, Minister, we are waiting for the response related to the reporting act, because we really need it to file reports at one place only and not on everything. Thank you.

Minister Piotr Mazurek: I am waiting too, Dr Kunysz. This matter is very involved and complicated. The agreement and consultation process involves many stakeholders with divergent perspectives and to reconcile all these arguments and propositions is not easy. I would like to thank Mr. Wojciech Kaczmarczyk for undertaking the very difficult task of coordinating this process and for his great engagement in working out the optimum solutions.

Marcin Wikło: Ladies and Gentlemen, I have the least knowledge of the third sector, of all of us sitting here of course, so please forgive the naivety of my questions, but I think that a person must simply be able to afford some voluntary or unusual, unproductive, non-manufacturing activity. If they are supposed to be involved full-time, they really should receive a fair salary. Minister, in view of the data that the number of individuals in an average association dropped by more than 15% from 2010 to 2018 and that the number of active association members dropped by more than 30% from 2015, what is really missing in this sector? I do not believe that it is just the money. What else is missing, what incentives, what opportunities, what working

conditions, for people to join it, not quit it? Or, is this, perhaps, a general civilisation decline? Some talk about children and adolescents stolen by mobiles, by the Internet, that the activity is shifted somewhere. What should we offer to get them to join, not quit?

Minister Piotr Mazurek: In this question, you touched upon several subjects. I hope that I can remember all of them. First, I absolutely disagree with what you said, but also some of the other speakers, who depreciate the importance of the new media. The new media are why many civic communities can operate at all. With the new media, non-governmental organisations have been raising funds for their activities for years, with the new media they reach their audiences, often across hundreds or thousands kilometers, with the new media the non-governmental organisations can operate on an international level. Now, I am talking about smaller, poorer organisations that were not always able to afford, in particular when the co-funding programmes for different things were not as plentiful as now, to fly around the world and build relations, interact with different partner organisations in different countries, for example. Let me remind you that at present, of course, some media are criticised, but before 2016 an absolute majority of the media absolutely had the same, single, purely ideological direction, more than 90%. And a great part of non-governmental organisations that conducted any activities and had this ideological and axiological aspect, for example historical politics or pro-family, actually had no access to media with any sensible reach. I think that Marcin Wiko is perfectly aware of what I am talking about. And with the Internet, with the new media, many of these communities, for example pro-family, pro-independence, patriotic, the entire remembrance of the cursed soldiers, to a large extent reached young people thanks to the Internet. Then, the Internet enabled gathering people physically for marches. Because they did not learn about it on tv or in newspapers, but mainly on Facebook. Of course, I do see dangers and problems, this is not black and white, but there are many advantages to the fact that young people, and not only young people, use new technologies. This is another great opportunity for non-governmental organisations,

in particular for smaller entities, because not everyone can have any amount of broadcast time to promote their activities, unlike the TVN Foundation or Polsat Foundation, right? Well, this disproportion is clear. While the disproportion remains great, of course, with Facebook smaller organisations obtained some channels to communicate on an unprecedented scale. I agree with Dr Kunysz about the public official mentality, so to speak. I understand that the problem you diagnosed is absolutely serious and that it is a problem to overcome, that we are trying to overcome. Of course, solving this problem is far more difficult than amending an act or regulation. Because this is often a matter of established practices that some public officials in different places, on different levels and under different political parties adopted. I think that with the action taken by all these institutions under Deputy Prime Minister Gliński, this is changing. Of course, I always fully agree with Dr Kunysz, many people, who are in direct contact with non-governmental organisations in a variety of institutions, sadly, maintain this style and this, of course, perhaps, generational changes, many years of work, continued talking about this, reaching the public debate with such propositions. We will fight and we fight for the voluntary service, social activism, above all among young people, because here we have several options for gratification, should be more rewarded. Because it is often the case that a person, who gets involved in public benefit causes instead of learning, winning competition diplomas or earning certificates, is discriminated in various ways later on. We are already changing it, for example with the ongoing reform of the Prime Minister's scholarship. There will be additional points for voluntary service, there will be additional points for social involvement. We will try and breach this bureaucratic wall with regards to recruitment, because very often, sadly, although we already had some success, this is a very difficult fight. I think, like Deputy Prime Minister Gliński and many people we talk with about this, that the people serving in, for example, coordination and management roles in non-governmental organisations should not only not be discriminated against, if they have no employment contact, in relation to the people with an employment contract, but who serve no such

management roles, but that they should be even preferred, right? In recruitment processes, for example in public administration, this is often completely upside down, but we are slowly trying to turn it around. Because this requires formal changes on one side, but above all changes in thinking on the other hand. I think that this process will progress all the time. Once more, I would like to emphasise that for example with such debates, like the one we are having now, we can fight for more space for the third sector in the public space, in the public debate, fight for more openness towards it. I think, as I said before, which is absolutely justified, that together we are trying to change this reality, in different places, wherever we can. On one hand, it requires money and there is more money, much more than just a few years ago. Of course, we would like there to be even more money and we are fighting for it. I also think that much has been achieved, as far as simplification is concerned, for example the whole achievement related to the submission of applications, the settling of projects at the National Freedom Institute, led results-based settlement. These are also the solutions that help non-governmental organisations. At the National Freedom Institute, due to the engagement of community representation, due to the favor of the management of the National Freedom Institute, but also due to the political pressure of Deputy Prime Minister Gliński, we have really managed to bring it to a sensible and fair level. And this should be done in all institutions, in government and local government institutions. Sadly, this is still not yet the case. But this is still a challenge that we can pursue together, I think, to the happy ending, happy for all of us. Because the support of strong non-governmental organisations is also in best interest of political officials and politicians. Non-governmental organisations were often the first to engage, for example to help during the pandemic. This is how it should be, because non-governmental organisations, often for obvious reasons, can be more efficient in reaching various places, where help is necessary, or complementary to the activities of the state. So, supporting the civic sector is in best interest of the state and public authorities.

Marcin Wikło: Professor, would you like to respond?

Bohdan Rożnowski: I have a short comment, when I hear about different mechanisms, ideas and methods of developing mechanism of promoting and rewarding leaders. It should be remembered that these should not be mechanisms causing the leaders to quit, because they have additional points in recruitment for a public office and that is a higher security, better job. However, this mechanisms will cause people to quit the sector, the experienced ones, the ones that could achieve the most in the sector. And this should be considered.

Marcin Wikło: Professor, let us return to the simplest question: what should we do to make people join, not quit? At this point, we can even make a wish list, what to do, where to start, from what idea, from what thought should we start?

Bohdan Rożnowski: Ladies and Gentlemen, ideally, non-governmental organisations should be places, where people engage to pursue a cause. So, for me, as a psychologist, this is intrinsic motivation, not extrinsic or financial motivation, when people do things because they see them as important. On the other hand, I am aware this is possible. Maslow, a famous psychologist, once said that higher level needs do not activate, until lower level needs are satisfied. So, people must have a place to sleep, a place to live, food to eat, clothes to wear, to be able to think about social activity etc. When they already are in social groups, then they can think they want to develop, learn and continue education. In that case, for me the most important thing is to make people need to see the needs of other people and common good. It is not only “me” and “for me”, but doing something for someone also increases one’s safety level.

Marcin Wikło: However, it is not the case that the pandemic highlights such needs. It even shows that there are less volunteers or employees in non-governmental organisations, for example. So, this is an elite activity we undertake. We are few. Are we doing something special?

Bohdan Rożnowski: Well, yes, we are doing something special, but the costs are high and we are just doing this and we are always afraid this will end badly.

Marcin Wikło: So, we are transferring the costs to the state and still doing it...

Bohdan Rożnowski: I am talking about psychological costs: the fear, the fatigue, difficulties in coordinating our activities. Because when children do not go to school, they must be taken care of and less time is available. These are the costs that I would like to talk about.

Marcin Wikło: Kunysz?

Maciej Kunysz, Ph.D.: Yes, I agree with the Professor on this. I will paraphrase Maslow, with an example for easier comprehension. One lawyer worked in non-governmental organisations very intensively, just for the cause. But the problems Maslow talked about appeared, the everyday problems expressed by friend's wife – the wife has clearly set a boundary: “you must take care of the family, not the organisation”. And we often face this choice. This choice is the family, but also health and time. Because when the team shrinks, the time, despite Einstein's idea, does not work like this for us in Warsaw, in Poland. And when I start working eighteen, twenty hours a day, I may not burn out quickly, but I am losing my health, which I can no longer do.

Bohdan Rożnowski: You are burning out. You are burning out, even if you do not know it, you are burning out very quickly.

Karol Handzel: Let me relate to this question, from which we started the first part of the debate, that is people are less active in associations, less engaged, we have new media. At this point, I would like to note that an association is not the only way to associate. It is a formal

way, but the new media caused people to act more informally. Facebook groups, for example, local or national groups, connecting people with certain views and interests.

Marcin Wikło: This is much easier.

Karol Handzel: It requires no contact with a public office, no reports.

Marcin Wikło: One click and we are associated.

Karol Handzel: A few clicks and we have some authority in the form of admin, albeit dictatorial, but some. And these people come there, sometimes meet and talk. For example, I am part of a Tolkien fan group and next week this group is going out for a beer in Kraków. So, certain relationships are built between these people, some literature promotion is in the group. Everything is happening, people are active. So, we often simply do not notice that the association is simply becoming less formal.

Marcin Wikło: And how to encourage to these associations, to different ways of associating?

Maciej Kunysz, Ph.D.: Be together. Perhaps this is the most important, because at work we earn money, in politics we find fulfilment, we pursue our passions and our goals, and in organisations we meet. Perhaps this dialogue between us, as Buber said, is the most important.

Marcin Wikło: Łukasz, I am sorry, you are the last person to speak again, but what is your idea to encourage people to associate?

Łukasz Samborski: I think not only to associate, but to any work in organisations and engagement. It was claimed some time ago and it is practiced now in many organisations that the voluntary service coordinator position must be salaried. Because when the voluntary service coordinator is a volunteer, a problem appears, because this

Position carries a lot of responsibility and deserves recognition. Because that person must have many different skills and something that can help not only associations, but also foundations, is simply stabilisation of the organisation. As I said, now the pandemic is a danger. It reinforces instability, difficulties in telling what the next year will be like and if the pursuit of the tasks will be possible. For multi-year tasks, for example, because local governments are still resisting entrusting multi-year tasks with non-governmental organisations with might and main. Happily, in 2010, a provision on multi-year cooperation programmes was added to the act on public benefit activity. But still, many local governments are not doing it. I think that the public sector is increasingly open to buying services from organisations. It means that many tasks can be fulfilled like businesses do it. So, even social services can be bought from organisations, which increases their stability, because it enables to keep something and not report on every penny. And this helps strengthen the organisation. It is enough, for example, to buy the hardware that is necessary. Now, when we talk a lot about the hybrid format, about remote work, this hardware is much more important. Not only a notebook, but maybe a microphone or software too, which is helpful. And stability should be increased not only by funding, but also by certain changes in thinking. Because I see, in particular in this approach, that many local governments could help the organisations by opening to working with them through this change in thinking. For example, at our rc Foundation in Gdynia, a therapeutic group of Fighting Cancer Academy was meeting for a long time. Earlier, they were working with medical units, now, they cannot because a prohibition has been issued and everything has been adjusted to Covid. Due to our openness, organisations have some stability, can also support informal groups or other organisations, because they are usually the most flexible and greatly capable of adjusting to the situation. For example, already at this point, you cannot meet at many public offices, where many organisations used to rent rooms for meetings. Now, they are losing the place of activities. So, as long as there are no umbrella organisations, which could somehow support other organisations, or organisations have no stable place (or

funding options) at all, they will not be an attractive place for volunteer work. A volunteer could prove unnecessary next year, because of no activity due to the forced cessation of activities. I think this is a great challenge, in addition to the well-being of the sector in terms of mental health in this increasing stress and changing conditions, but also stabilisation of the organisation, this is the starting point for building not only the staff base, but also the employee base. This is the greatest value for all non-governmental organisations. The employees that acquire experience, that are multi-disciplinary, that often know five or six fields of activity: from media to accounting, to settlements. As a sector, we cannot let the people, who acquired this great experience and fulfil different tasks perfectly, quit the sector, or we must do our best to compensate for it.

Marcin Wikło: Doctor Kunysz?

Maciej Kunysz, Ph.D.: The pandemic is not only a crisis, because we focused on the crisis, but also opportunities and missed chances. I am sure that everyone here on stage has been vaccinated and I hope that everyone in the room has been vaccinated. But in Poland, unfortunately, it is only about sixty percent. This is tragic for the Poles, many people, who die every day. And now we forget that non-governmental organisations, parishes, voluntary fire services, farmers' wives' associations, right in the areas that the vaccines have not reached yet, have a very strong trust base. In this area, the cooperation between the government, the local government and these organisations can contribute to saving many human lives. And this is an opportunity, Minister, Professor, colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen. We must act to use the opportunities resulting from this crisis and future crises.

Marcin Wikło: Minister, I will start the last subject to address in this debate with a question to you. Has the pandemic not resulted in you, as the Chancellery of the Prime Minister, having a slightly better map of non-governmental organisations? I mean, the organisations are forced to contact local government and government bodies. Maybe until now, please tell me if I am wrong, they filed some claim once

a year, received some grant and then the organisation could disappear from the radar of the administration and simply act in silence. Now, however, please correct me or confirm, are the relations between the administration and organisations closer?

Minister Piotr Mazurek: Surely, the pandemic and all those initiatives that we are talking about resulted in closer cooperation between the public sector and the third sector. This is very good, because I support this cooperation between these sectors. Of course, also the private sector, in particular in the crisis situation. Then, all hands on deck. Then, with the engagement of individual units of different sectors, we can help everyone in need quickly enough and at a sufficient scale. The Solidarity Senior Support Corps is a great example, because it actually, as far as I know, despite the initial concerns, it turned out that everyone in need received help at appropriate places. An this was happening across Poland, because the people involved came partially from major cities and partially from small towns that are hard to reach. But due to the cooperation between public institutions, volunteers and non-governmental organisations, different types of entities of the civic sector, we succeeded and fully achieved the objectives of the entire initiative. Of course, these initiatives were many and organised by different communities, also on a local or regional scale. We remember all that. We remember the engagement of Territorial Defence Forces, scouts, many different communities and I hope that the positive lesson from the pandemic will be just that conviction, even if not everyone was convinced, even certainly, in some places, that cooperation is something reasonable, optimal, sensible, logical and efforts should be made to engage civic communities as much as possible. Absolutely, I fully agree with what Doctor Kunysz said about supporting the vaccination programme, which is to some extent happening and certainly should be reinforced, as far as cooperation is concerned. In different matters, when crisis situations occur, but not only then, because also in the so-called ongoing activity, in numerous areas non-governmental organisations can act better, more efficiently and effectively than public officials. Since they are dispersed across Poland, since they area

also partially associated, when pursuing they objectives they can frequently contact one another. This is a very valuable asset necessary for the fulfilment of different public policies. I am convinced that the experience of the pandemic will make the decision-makers closer to different places, because they also make decisions at different levels, in different areas. Here, we have a very large group of people, who make these decisions to maintain fixed cooperation with the third sector in a permanent, systemic and regular manner.

Marcin Wikło: I address this question about the cooperation between the third sector and the government and local government sector to other speakers as well. I cannot let Łukasz be the last person to speak, so now, please answer first. How is this cooperation and are there any fields, instead of the obvious ones like promoting vaccinations, in which this cooperation could be closer?

Łukasz Samborski: I think there are always some areas in which cooperation can be closer, but not only at the central level, but also at the local level.

Marcin Wikło: Is this really happening, or do these areas only exist?

Łukasz Samborski: Yes, this is happening. Of course, sometimes this depends on the local government and on the level. In Pomorskie Voivodeship, for example, as far as the voivodeship level is concerned, this cooperation is fine, in view of the Covid year, for instance, when we managed to support the community by competition and PLN 200,000 was spent on Covid support for organisations. Something like a programme that was established by the National Freedom Institute. It was an anti-covid shield, right? I think it was PLN 10M. Also the Marshal of the Pomorskie Voivodeship issued a package of approx. PLN 200,000. As the Pomeranian Network of NGO Centers, we were requested it and it happened. Perhaps the crisis situation enabled closer cooperation and more frequent dialogue on some problems that take place in the sector. In Pomerania, we conducted such studies as Pomeranian Workshop for Civic Research,

for positive *case studies* on organisations that responded during the pandemic. In most situations, cooperation with the local government appeared. Usually, these were local initiatives, involving commune or district local governments. I think that based on this study and experience, one of the recommendations could be to appoint members of these organisations, regardless of the moment or mode, to crisis management teams, local or central, in which these people could somehow respond, share their diagnoses. Because, as we said before, organisations are the closest to the citizens. The citizens create them, in particular associations, and this could, in my opinion, help the administration and become another area for cooperation in crisis management teams. These opportunities were highlighted by the pandemic, but not only, because other crisis situations are possible. This may require some legislative changes to enable closer cooperation, in particular in crisis situations. I also think that there are many things to do at this lowest level. Now, speaking from the central level, I am also member of the Central National Board, but even in Pomorskie Voivodeship, there are very little Boards for Public Benefit Activity at the lowest level. This is a platform for initiating cooperation with public administration. In Pomerania, there are about ten of them, at the local, district and commune level, so this is the field and the easiest platform for developing this cooperation. This board includes the local government and the non-governmental part, so the board enables frequent sharing views on local or strategic subjects, for example consulting strategic documents of the commune or district. I think that at this level there is a lot to do in the development of organisation awareness towards higher engagement. Perhaps also the bottom-up pressure for these cooperation platforms to be created and to increase the number of places, where local governments and non-governmental organisations, or simply citizens, could communicate.

Marcin Wikło: Karol, is it not the case that this cooperation is now close, forced, necessary, is it not obvious?

Karol Handzel: I think this is obvious, that it must always happen and it works best, when the other party, that is the public officials, is represented by a person with experience in non-governmental organisations. Then, it is the easiest to reach an agreement.

Łukasz Samborski: I agree, in Pomerania this is very valuable as well.

Marcin Wikło: Thank you very much.

Karol Handzel: Often we can simply see the attitude of “this is impossible” among public officials, failure to understand that there is a pandemic, we must introduce changes to a project that we are pursuing. There is a greater power that makes something impossible and the public official shows resistance, which is often absurd and, even worse, cannot be overcome. My dream is that the public officials starting work, in which they will deal with non-governmental organisations, be first assigned an internship in such organisation, to understand the specifics of their activity, because it is completely different from working at a public office. In the end, I would like to praise today’s birthday child, the National Freedom Institute, because the cooperation in the covid time has been absolutely flawless. With one application, I could send a lot of appendixes, apply for changes and always meet full understanding, help in expediting the procedure, so that we could best pursue our activities. Here, the institute deserves a *chapeau bas*.

Marcin Wikło: Minister, your thoughts, please?

Minister Piotr Mazurek: I would like to say what my colleague has said already. This is just the reason, why there is little people with NGO experience in public administration and we must fight to increase this percentage.

Marcin Wikło: Doctor Knysz?

Maciej Kunysz, PhD: Since the colleagues have already noticed many aspects of this matter, I will focus on the ones related to the new EU perspective, because it affects the local government, the government, the European Commission and the European Parliament. At this point, what this dialogue really looks like is only becoming apparent and that we are still learning to do so. In response to what Karol said: yes, the dialogue, the cooperation should be obvious, but we are still learning it. Some public officials, as well as politicians at the government, local government and European Commission level, often assume that they know better what the citizens need, they will solve the problems and connect the money for it. And here, with Minister Buda and Minister Jarosińska, this dialogue is improving. However, there have been some stumbles. Thanks to the government, we have negotiated minimum 0.25% for building the potential of non-governmental organisations in Poland. We hope that the government will change their attitude and that this support will be available at the regional level as well. We continue the dialogue all the time, as far as employment support is concerned. I think that the Professor will agree with me that when public officials undertake employment support, the efficiency of such action is very low. I do not know, why the government, and the European Commission too, insist that these funds should be spent on labor offices. Of course, they are necessary, but the most efficient, as far as employment and fighting unemployment are concerned, non-governmental organisations are the most effective and they should be supported. We are also learning this dialogue on the non-governmental side, but often the sin of a non-governmental organisation is that, like public officials, it thinks it knows better and will not listen to the other side. In the meantime, you should keep your mouth and ears open to speak and listen, but never at the same time. Thank you.

Marcin Wikło: Professor, please conclude our discussion. But also, looking back to the title of the entire conference, Challenges faced by the non-governmental sector in the changing reality, let me ask about that changing reality. Should we accept it or resist it, defend against it or even attack it, what means do we have to use?

Bohdan Rożnowski: It is a pity that I got a question, because I wanted to start from another side... **Marcin Wikło:** So please, start from another side, but let us move towards the conclusion.

Bohdan Rożnowski: Ladies and Gentlemen, a table. A table is a simple object, right? Physics says it is the most stable, when it has, what do you think, how many legs? Three legs. Hence the idea of three sectors, three segments: the NGOs, the public sector and the business sector, which seeks to make money. I am afraid that people are still not aware that the three legs are necessary. Public officials often think: We can do it. We can do it alone. Why do we need someone else, why do we need the NGOs? Perhaps we will buy something, we will give money to someone, but we can do it. This seems to undermine the whole idea. If we are not aware that the three legs are necessary for stability, we will always say: maybe two legs are enough. We will try two legs, right? Until we start treating the NGOs as a normal, real leg that the society stands on, we will keep switching to the kind of relationship where we say: we will buy something, we will pay you this year, but we will not tell you, if we will pay you next year, because maybe we will not. This causes a serious anxiety. So, a challenge for the non-governmental sector is to prove, to show their key, in my opinion, importance in keeping the entire system stable. The situation is changing, the entire reality is changing and it is changing quicker than ever in human history. We have technological changes, political changes, ideological changes. Everything is simply changing and people, in my opinion, are starting to lose their breath. They cannot keep up with the changes. They are starting to lose themselves increasingly, hence the increasing numbers of mental illnesses and disorders that appear in our cultural circle, that is in highly developed countries, because we cannot keep up with adaptation processes. Ladies and Gentlemen, it is not the case that if we have managed to adapt until now, then we can adapt in the future too. No. Perhaps we are slowly reaching the end of our adaptation capacity and we should try and slow down the changes, so that we can keep up. These are my two ideas, so to speak: let us show, prove and convince that the third sector is a necessary component

for the stability of the entire system. So, let us try and do something to make adaptation easier for people.

Marcin Wikło: Thank you very much. In these discussions, I am always worried about one thing, that is the time and that we will not even be able to fully discuss the thesis in the title, that is the civic sector after the pandemic crisis, after the crisis, which I stress, does not actually fully correspond to reality, opportunities and dangers. I would like to thank you for the discussion. Doctor Bohdan Rożnowski, Minister Piotr Mazurek, Doctor Maciej Kunysz, Mr. Karol Handzel and Mr. Łukasz Samborski. I'm Marcin Wikło. Thank you.

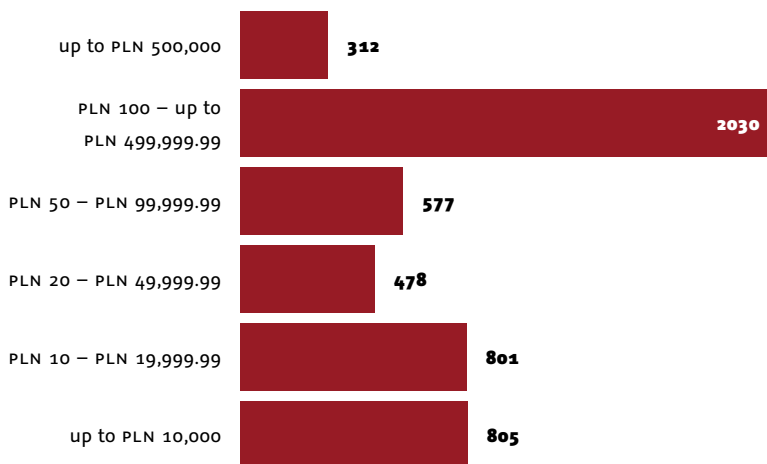
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Subsidies under select programmes completed by NFI-CCSD

Structure of the subsidies granted by NFI-CCSD in 2018–2022



National Freedom Institute
- Centre for Civil Society Development

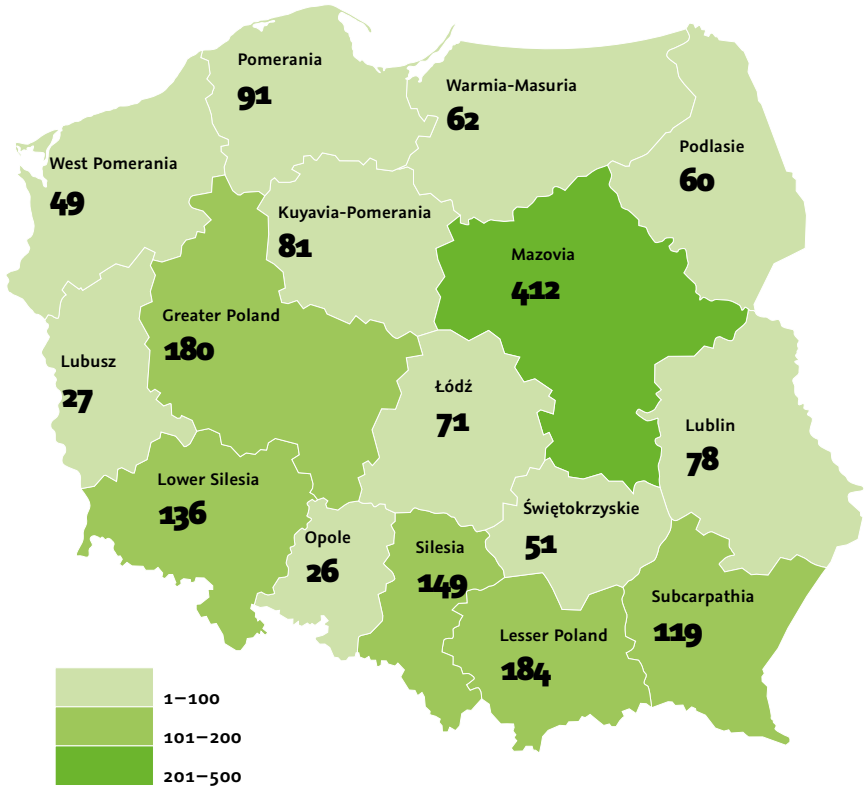


Source: The NFI-CCSD subsidies system

As of: 21 October 2022.

Since 2018, NFI-CCSD granted non-governmental organisations 5,003 subsidies for the total amount of **PLN 850,374,855**

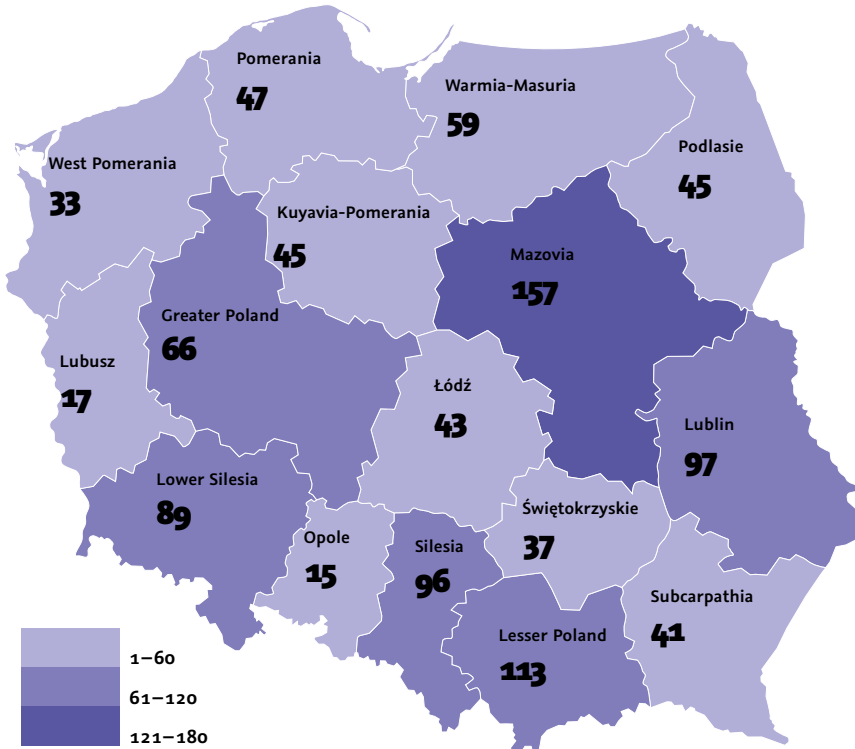
Number of subsidies granted
under Government Civic Organisations
Development Programme for 2018–2030



Source: The NFI-CCSD subsidies system
As of: 21 October 2022.

Since 2018, NFI-CCSD, under the Government Civic Organisation Development Programme, granted 1,776 subsidies for the total amount of **PLN 265,035,566**

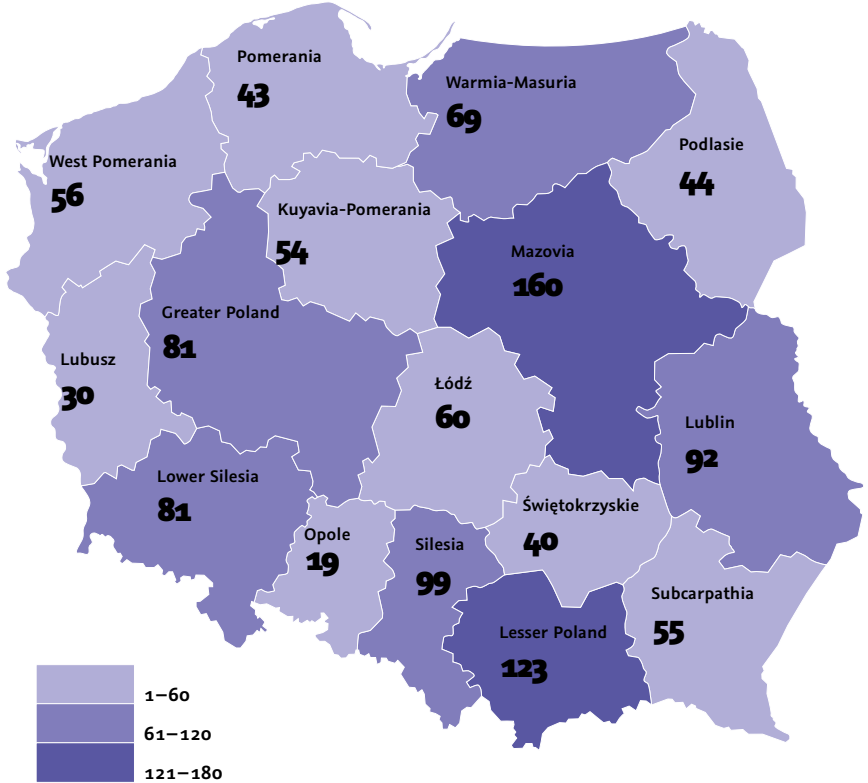
Number of subsidies granted under the Government Programme Fundusz Inicjatyw Obywatelskich (Civic Initiatives Fund) NOWEFIO for 2021–2030



Source: The NFI-CCSD subsidies system
As of: 21 October 2022.

Since 2021, NFI-CCSD, under the Government Civic Initiatives Fund Programme NOWEFIO, granted 1,000 subsidies for the total amount of **PLN 240,597,904**

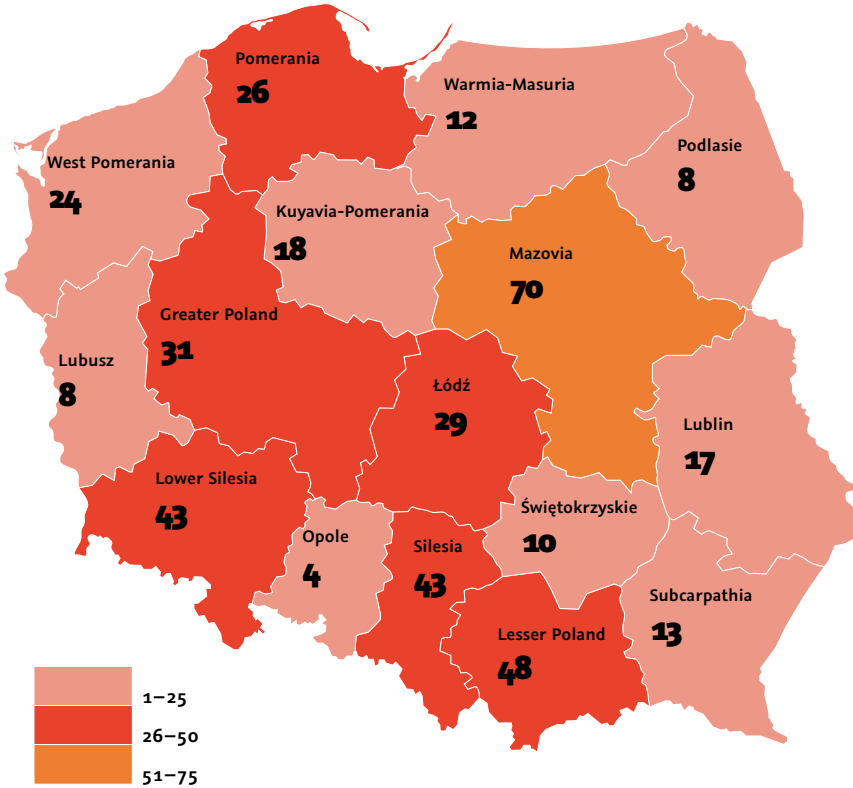
Number of subsidies granted since 2018
under the Civic Initiatives Fund Programme
for 2014–2020



Source: The NFI-CCSD subsidies system
As of: 21 October 2022.

Since 2018, NFI-CCSD, under the Government Civic Initiatives Fund Programme, granted 1,106 subsidies for the total amount of **PLN 172,538,715**

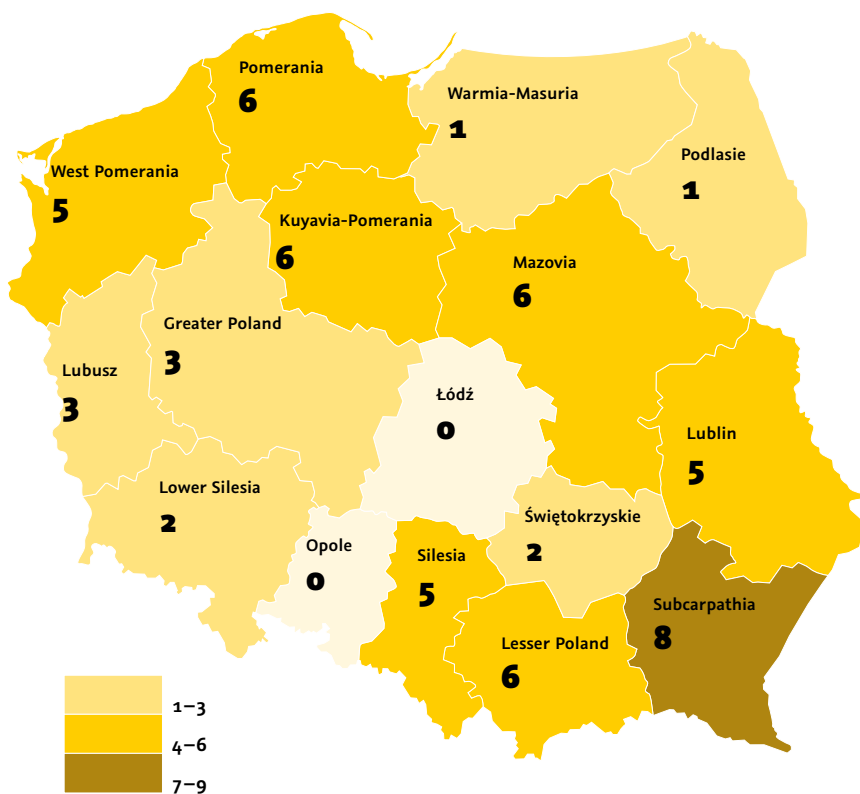
Number of subsidies granted under the Non-Governmental Organisations Interim Support Programme for preventing the impact of COVID-19



Source: The NFI-CCSD subsidies system
As of: 21 October 2022.

In 2020, NFI-CCSD granted 404 subsidies under the Non-Governmental Organisations Interim Support Programme for preventing the impact of COVID-19 for the total amount of **PLN 9,845,739**

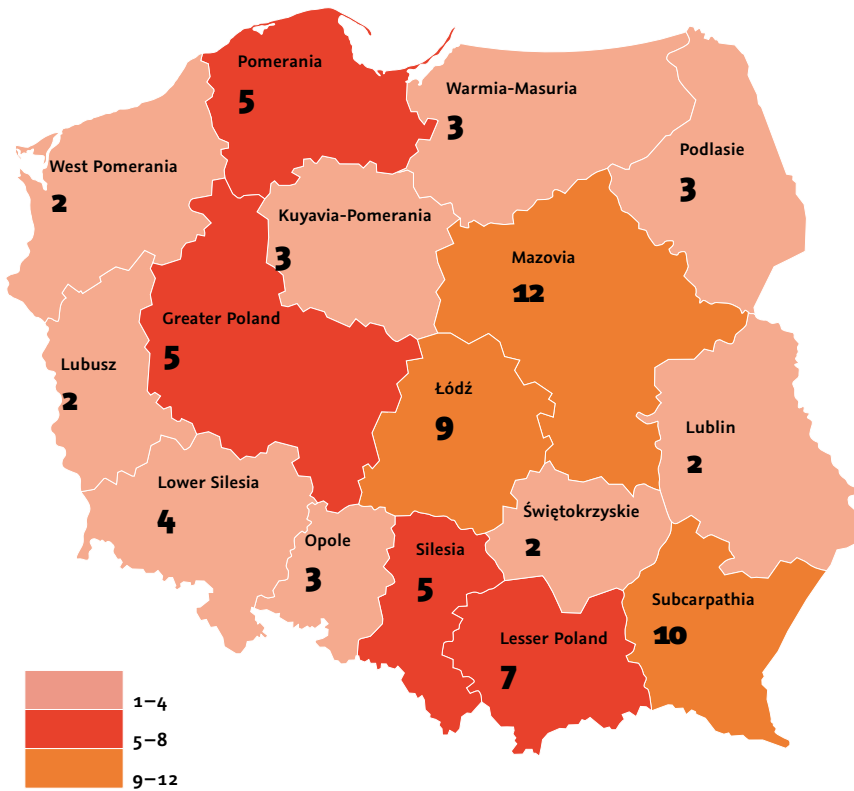
Number of subsidies granted under Government
People's Universities Support Programme
for 2020–2030



Source: The NFI-CCSD subsidies system
As of: 21 October 2022.

Since 2020, NFI-CCSD, under the Government People's Universities Development Support Programme, granted 59 subsidies for the total amount of **PLN 29,850,822**

Number of subsidies granted under the Public Benefit Organisations Support Fund

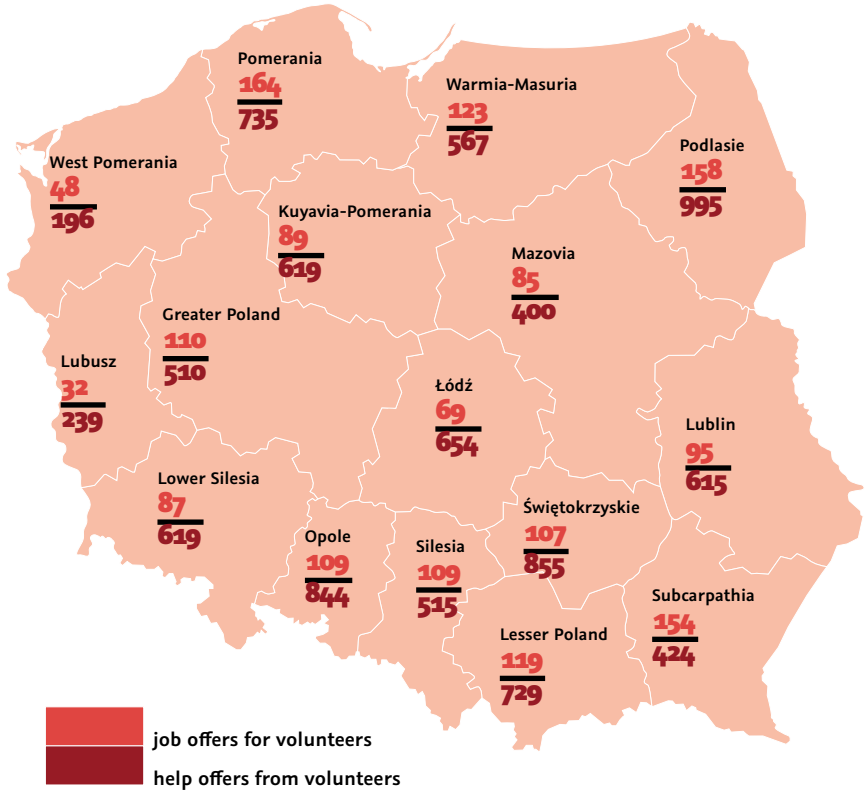


Source: The NFI-CCSD subsidies system

As of: 21 October 2022.

In 2021, NFI-CCSD, as part of the first edition of the competition under the Public Benefit Organisations Support Fund, granted 77 subsidies for the total amount of **PLN 689,290**

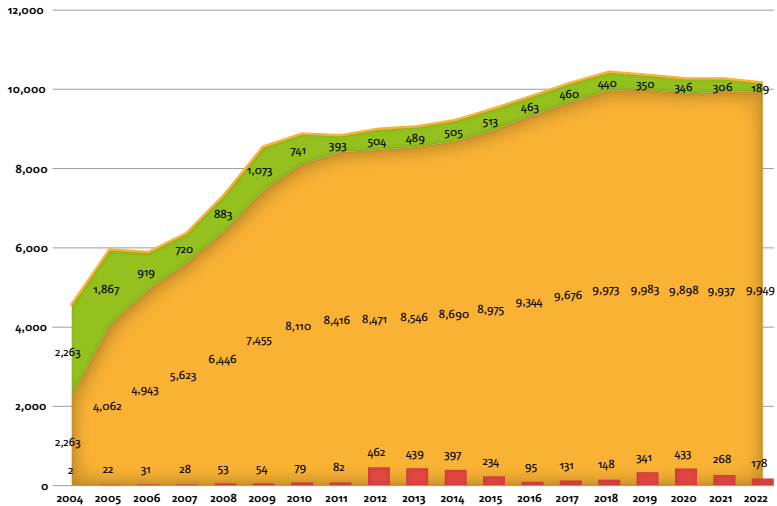
Activity of volunteers and organisations included in the NFI-CCSD Voluntary Service System



Source: The Voluntary Service System
As of: 30 September 2022.

- 3909  volunteers included in sow
- 45,923  voluntary work hours
- 1012  organisations included in sow

Change in the number of non-governmental organisations with public benefit organisation status



- Number of public benefit organisations that received public benefit organisation status in the given year
- Number of public benefit organisations at the end of the year
- Number of public organisations that lost public benefit organisation status in the given year

Source: Ministry of Justice
As of: 30 September 2022.



Both the historical-theoretical texts and those relating to the implementation of civil society - despite their diversity and multifaceted nature - form a coherent whole, which is, as it were, summed up by the record of the debate: „The post-crisis (pandemic) civic sector - opportunities and threats“ [...]. It is noteworthy that the Authors of the studies also propose themes that have so far been absent or rarely addressed in the context of civil society, concerning e.g. citizen diplomacy or the need to apply innovative methodologies in the study of the third sector [...]. The publication - due to its thematic diversity and the presence of the names of many respected Authors - will be a valuable item in the literature for all those interested in the title issues.

From a review by Prof. dr hab. Izabella Bukraba-Rylska
Collegium Civitas



The volume brings together texts by eminent scholars and people directly involved in activities for the benefit of civil society [...]. The book has a clear guiding idea, which is to build the civil society by referring to the ideals of solidarity, the one written with a small and capital letter. The articles included in the volume have a clear character of occasional literature, which is in line with the nature of a publication summarising five years of NFI-CCFD activities. Therefore, they have very different stylistic forms from reports and presentations, through scientific analyses, to literary mature essays [...]. They constitute an interesting collection of various reflections on the nature of civil society and, at the same time, are testimony to the state of development of the civil society in Poland and the impact on its shape of the initiatives undertaken by NFI-CCFD.

From a review by dr hab. Arkadiusz Jablonski, professor at KUL
The John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin (KUL)

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ISBN 978-83-963801-6-6

