

COOPERATION BETWEEN SELF-GOVERNMENT ADMINISTRATION AND NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS

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Abstract: *Territorial self-government is the main partner of non-governmental organizations. NGOs are becoming an important element of the system of institutions performing public tasks, particularly in the area of social services. The dynamic expansion of NGOs correlates with an increasing role of social activity in the local development. The flow of information between local authorities and the representatives of the third sector creates a good climate which helps to expand the areas of cooperation.*

Keywords: *Territorial self-government, non-governmental organizations (NGOs).*

1. Introduction

Cooperation with non-governmental organizations, operating in the area of a territorial unit, is extremely important for the formation of the civic society. All cooperation mechanisms, created by local governments, become the factors influencing the development of a local community. Since its beginning, re-activated territorial self-government has become the main partner for the sector of non-governmental organizations, developing based on the new rules

The sector of non-governmental organizations is made up of entities that have different organizational forms and different degrees of formalization. The most common organizational and legal forms for non-governmental organizations are associations and foundations. The former operate based on the Associations Act of 7 April 1989¹, the latter – the Foundations Act of 6 April 1984. The Foundations Act of 6 April 1984 was an important political event in the post-war history of Poland as well as other Central and Eastern European countries. It constituted an important step in the attempts to sanction the third sector organizations after a long period of time when the state suppressed grass-roots civic initiatives.

2. Cooperation standards

The Act on Public Benefit and Voluntary Activity regulates the situation in a clear and unambiguous way, as it defines the rules of cooperation between public administration and NGOs, its forms, and the way of commissioning or supporting public tasks.

Cooperation standards apply both to territorial self-government units and to non-governmental organizations. They require adequate conditions, “the climate of cooperation” and mutual understanding from both sides of partnership. NGOs are becoming an important part of the system of institutions performing public tasks, particularly in the area of social services. The standardization of cooperation is an element of this process.

¹ The Associations Act of 7 April 1989 (Journal of Laws 2001, No 79, item 855).

In Europe there are two main models of cooperation between public administration and NGOs in the area of public benefit (social benefit): the German model and the British model.²

The German model is characterized by:

- the implementation of the principle of subsidiarity, reflected in the legal system, as the principle of primacy of social entities in the area of performing social services using public funds,
- the corporate character of the relations between public administration and NGOs.

The corporate character of these relations results in the existence of the highly federalized third sector, which has developed the structures compatible with public administration structures that can actually negotiate the cooperation conditions on every level of the administrative division of the state. NGOs are suffering from increasing etatization. NGOs in Germany, by becoming professional, are also becoming similar to public institutions, adopting their standards and corporate culture.

On the other hand, the British model is characterized by:

- openness to competition between service providers, which, in turn, increases the role of market mechanisms in the system of commissioning public tasks,
- the lack of preferences for NGOs.

In the United Kingdom, the state cooperates with “the independent sector”, defined as all for-profit and non-profit entities interested in public tenders for public tasks. Rules for inter-sector cooperation are, to a larger extent, shaped by public-private partnership rather than public-social partnership. Orientation on effectiveness leads to reduced costs of maintaining the system of social services. The commercialization of the third sector in the UK means that NGOs are becoming more like companies, both in terms of management and working culture.

It can be said that the side effect of the German model is the etatization of social organizations, while the British model leads to the commercialization of the non-profit sector. Both countries have undertaken repair efforts: Great Britain is trying to “soften” the system of tenders for public tasks by popularizing the idea of the Compact on Relations between Government and the Voluntary and Community Sector, whereas Germany is introducing competition mechanisms into the social services system.

In Poland, since the democratic breakthrough, the main emphasis has been put mainly on the mutual independence between the state and the third sector. The time from 1989 and 2003, when the Act on Public Benefit and Voluntary Activity was adopted, was mostly the time of practical solutions. Initiatives focused on building relations rather than running actual cooperation and were based on such principles as subsidiarity, effectiveness and openness.

The most problematic area is the inefficiency of the communication between the partners – there is no flow of information between the sectors, including the signals from the organizations important for the system of cooperation (eg for determining the future directions of activity). In a vast majority of cases, the rules and mechanisms were determined only by public institutions without the contribution from NGOs, including the area of social needs and problems, where NGOs did not participate in the decision-making procedures.

The rules adopted in the Act of Public Benefit and Voluntary Activity mainly regulate the way how partnership is organized by the public institution:

- subsidiarity – supporting or assigning tasks,

² Rymśza M., Frączak P., Skrzypiec R., Wejman Z.: Standards of cooperation between public administration and the non-governmental sector. ISP, Warszawa 2007, pp. 9 - 10.

- sovereignty – concluding the agreement to perform the task,
- partnership – an organization may submit its proposal,
- effectiveness – a beauty contest as the way to choose the best offer,
- fair competition – competing within beauty contests for the performance of tasks with the units subordinate to public administration,
- transparency – this applies to the way of announcing the contest, evaluating the offers submitted, controlling and assessing the tasks performed.

3. Non-governmental organizations in the management of a local community

The effective management of a local community is based on civic participation and institutionalized cooperation between the public sector, the sector of NGOs and the business sector. In this partnership NGOs play a number of roles, for example, they are the institutions capable of providing services important for a community – services that are both completely autonomous and informal services and state-supported specialist services delivered by non-commercial organizations. A dynamic growth of NGOs is connected with an increasing significance of social activity in the local development.

In a democratic society NGOs form a perfect platform for the development of local communities, as they attract these citizens of a local community that are the most active and sensitive to social issues affecting this particular community. It becomes necessary to incorporate non-governmental entities into the system of local governments as equal partners.

The constitutional principle of subsidiarity and the powers of territorial self-government units which are granted by other acts form the basis of the relations between public administration and NGOs. The main objective of the Act on Public Benefit and Voluntary Activity was to promote cooperation, involving particularly the commissioning of public tasks to NGOs. The Act states that public administration bodies conduct activity in the sphere of public tasks defined by the Act “in cooperation with non-governmental organizations”. Moreover, it also defines the forms of this cooperation and its rules.

The Act clearly specifies the rules for commissioning public tasks to NGOs, where local communities are free to choose the other forms of cooperation, namely:

- the exchange of information on planned directions of activity and cooperation in order to synchronize these directions;
- the consultation of draft normative acts with NGOs, with respect to their area of operations, in the fields covered by the statutory activity of these organizations;
- the formation of joint teams of consultative and initiative character, the members of the teams being the representatives of NGOs and public administration bodies.

An important instrument which helps to define how the cooperation rules should be implemented is an annual cooperation programme, obligatorily created by the authorities of territorial self-government. However, the research conducted by the Foundation for the Development of Local Democracy³ showed that not all local governments complied with the obligation imposed on them to adopt annual cooperation programmes. Furthermore, these resolutions are often copied automatically in a number of communes, often without the participation of the interested parties. Their adoption itself does not necessarily lead to a

³ Good practice. Examples of successful cooperation between self-governments and non-governmental organizations, ed. S. Mandes, FRDL, Warszawa 2004

change in the forms of cooperation, especially that research shows that the partners have a very different understanding of particular entries in the Act.

Self-government manifests the strongest cooperative attitude towards non-governmental organizations. The most common form of cooperation is the exchange of information and financing the operations of an organization by the administration. A less common form is establishing joint teams.

The principle of subsidiarity is often reduced to a criterion which helps to identify unstable forms of relations (cooperation rules and forms) between public administration and NGOs, with an emphasis on the arbitrary, on the side of public administration, formula for the participation of NGOs in the processes of defining social problems, identifying the best solutions and performing the relevant tasks in the most effective way.⁴

4. The aims of PR communication

The flow of information and cooperation between local governments and the representatives of the third sector create a good climate for mutual education and, as a consequence, increased areas of partnership.

The achievements of a few years following the reform of 1990 prove that the foundations laid out for territorial self-government are strong. The establishment of self-government in a commune launched the process of forming self-government awareness in the society. The growth of self-government institutions is accompanied by increased social activity leading to the creation of the civic society.

Communication is the foundation on which the existence of the society as a community is based. Effective communication between citizens and authorities should lead to an increased sense of responsibility among citizens, reduced barriers between the individual and authorities, which, in turn, has a positive impact on the formation of a civic society.

“The primary aim of self-government is activating citizens by promoting the ideas of a civic society. External communication in its different forms should encourage a local community to participate in public life. Moreover, no strategic decisions may be taken without social consultation.”⁵

Evaluating the social attitude and taking into account the changeability of expectations and preferences within the groups of the public, PR sets the directions for communication activity. The major goal is communication, providing knowledge and a comprehensive offer stemming from the development strategy. The ability to transfer information to the environment is directly linked with information acquisition and analysis and the dialogue with the groups in the environment. Understanding the needs and opinion of a community and their analysis in terms of threats and opportunities are the key to effective PR.

Each organization should try to provide information to its public as regularly and consistently as it is possible, making use of the latest technological development. In return, it can expect better access to feedback, which will allow it to improve its next initiatives and operations. This way, public relations becomes “a strategic policy, based on thorough filed research, carefully planned and implemented with the use of communication tools in order to win wide social circles.”⁶

⁴ The Strategy for Supporting the Development of the Civic Society for the years 2007 – 2012. Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, Warszawa 2007

⁵ Academy of self-government image, ed. D. Tworzydło. Publishing Group Infor, Warszawa 2005, p. 72.

⁶ Public Relations, relations between entities of social life, ed. H. Przybylski. AE Publishing, Katowice 1999, p.

Territorial self-government, not being an entity of a civic society itself, has probably achieved more than any other institution in the area of building the institutional infrastructure which allows to express, negotiate and pursue group interests and social activity of citizens. Nowadays, local and regional authorities have access to a wide range of means to conduct public relations, which uses a number of communication tools to influence the degree of activity of local communities. Its task is to develop a strategy to influence and maintain contact with the environment by increasing activity of different local entities.

Pursuant to the provisions of the Territorial Self-Government Act, citizens are entitled to decide about their commune by exercising their right to directly decide in local government elections or referenda, their right to information and participation in social consultation, their right of social control and protection of individual or group interests. The participation of citizens in executing power in the way defined above is determined by the level of their activity.

More and more organizations operating on local and regional level show a great interest in public affairs and undertake active initiatives to represent the interests of their members in order to solve existing problems and take part in joint projects.

It is important to implement partnership in management. Frequently, a local community does not spontaneously generate the partner representation, therefore "it is necessary to encourage the formation of such social partner using modern techniques of social communication when social problems arise or social projects are launched."⁷ The process of modernizing the public management system requires the transfer of the most effective management solutions, including public relations, in order to communicate with non-governmental organizations, which constitute one of the most important public groups for territorial self-government.

5. Conclusion

Effective communication with the society, with different social and occupational groups, which involves constant public relations activity, is an inherent element of territorial self-government. Local and regional authorities cannot only play a conventional role of social services provider, but they have to encourage increased activity of the whole community, contributing to the emergence of the civic society.

A special role of territorial self-government as an entity inspiring civic activity stems from its position in the mission of creating the social order based on social bonds, creativity and initiative of local communities. It should become the main motivation for achieving collective goals.

PR plays an ancillary role in the society. It provides the public opinion with necessary information. A professional approach requires permanent social dialogue, involving the authorities in acquiring knowledge about the needs, social values, opinions and attitudes of different publics.

Local, cultural, economic, political conditions, in which people live and work, to a large extent determine the development of the civic society.

⁷ Self-government – Development – Integration, ed. M. Barański. University of Silesia Publishing. Katowice 2003, p. 28.

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