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The third sector in Poland and in Germany

Abstract:

Using statistical data from multinational research the paper aims at the comparison between Polish and German third sector. After analyzing basic distinctions between social and civil traditions in both countries the paper shows most important differences among non-governmental organizations in both countries: different profiles of activities of the most important non-governmental organizations and discrepancies in the human and financial resources. The paper also describes what are the similarities and differences between environments of the third sectors in both countries. The analysis helps to formulate general guidelines for the development of the Polish third sector.

The aim of the paper is to compare the state of the third sector in Poland and in Germany. The paper presents the the outcome of the comparisons based on the analysis of statistical data that come from an international research¹.

The German third sector might be considered as a model for Polish non-governmental organizations. It seems to be competitive to dominating in Polish third sector's thought American, liberal solutions which proclaim that a social activity takes place outside the structure of the State. In the case of Poland, where the third sector has been reviving for fifteen years, it is worth to think what is the best way of a potential development. The analysis of the differences in size, form and ways of influence of non-

¹ The results from Comparative Nonprofit Sector Project research will be used to economic and organizational analyses. The research was conducted by Center for Civil Society Studies at John Hopkins University in Baltimore (<http://www.jhu.edu/cnp/>). The results from European Social Survey will be used to analyze the social involvement in the activity of the third sector. The research was coordinated by Center for Comparative Social Surveys at London University (<http://www.city.ac.uk/sociology/research/ccss/index.htm>). The third source that will be used to supplement the above mentioned studies and to find information on the environment of the third sector in the surveyed countries is Civil Society Index which was organized by CIVICUS (<http://www.civicus.org>).

governmental organizations in both countries might be helpful in reflecting on the development of third sector in Poland.

Differences in social and civil traditions

The Polish society was undergoing processes of modernization with some delay. Thus it was for a long time a typical, traditional, agricultural society where family ties were the most important. This state was well described by Stefan Nowak and his thesis on the existence of “sociological vacuum” (Nowak 1979) in the Polish society. This “sociological vacuum” means the empty gap between the state and the family. Moreover, the Polish Catholicism, especially its traditional and folk dimension, could have a harmful influence on the formation of a social activity. However, a civil activity was appearing. It is often stated that the tradition of associations and organizations goes back to the 15th century in Poland (Ziolkowski 2005:38). Still it is important to remember that these initiatives had a limited social range in Poland (before, during and after the partition of Poland in the 19th century).

The formation of the modern third sector was subjected to lots of disturbances – the development of the social activity was disturbed by the lack of a state, the subordination to different cultural and political influences during the partition, the Second World War and its consequences: migrations and the break in a settlement and tradition continuity. Authoritarian system and a strong state – People’s Republic of Poland that lasted for 45 years strongly and negatively inhibited the development of the Polish third sector.

After the democratic transition in Poland in 1989 there was a significant growth in the number of non-governmental organizations. However, it is often stated that the third sector in Poland is still poorly developed (Wyganski 2002:252, Szawiel 2001:148-149, Glinski 2002:246-247). Apart from the above mentioned historic considerations, there is also a specific state of the Polish society that is called “a social non-movement”. It is a individual strategy of facing reality that is popular within the Polish society and probably other Central and East European nations. The state of “a social non-movement” means the rejection of collective actions based on a traditional cooperation and a social self-organization, and the commitment to individual action connected with a low level of trust and a chronic lack of a sense of stability (Nowak, Nowosielski 2005:259).

In the German society a civil tradition was being formed in a bit different way. The Germans developed their own model that is based on three rules: self-government, a subsidiary rule, and a social economy (*Gemeinwirtschaft*) (Anheier, Seibel 1993: 2; Anheier, Seibel, Priller, Zimmer 1998).

The self-government rule was developed in the course of a struggle between the strong state and the middle class that had been deprived of political rights. The German state maintained the control over most spheres of political and social life – in Germany there was actually no anti-feudal revolution. While the power of the state was weakening, and the autonomy of society was increasing associations positioned themselves not in the opposition to the state, but within the structures of the state².

The subsidiary rule comes from a Catholic social thought. The belief that some issues (in this case mainly social issues) should only be supported by a state gave the grounds for the formation of powerful social organizations – a Catholic Caritas, and a Protestant *Diakonisches Werk*. This is the reason of strong orientation of non-governmental organizations' activities to social services in Germany. After the Second World War the subsidiary rule became one of the pillars of social policy in Federal Republic of Germany (by legacies in constitution).

*Gemeinwirtschaft*³ rule is a German attempt to develop “the third way” between a free-market economy and a socialist economy. The rule was proposed in the 19th century by that part of the working movement which was in opposition both to the free market and Marxism. Moreover, that economy was supposed to be a return to the tradition of a mutual aid and a rustic cooperative movement (Anheier, Seibel 1993: 7)⁴.

Differences in the profiles of activities of the most important non-governmental organizations.

As far as an economic and organizational point of view is concerned, in Germany the most important are organizations that deal with social services and health care. Meanwhile in Poland the most important organizations act in the field of culture and hobbies. However, it is important to remember that the German non-governmental

² Indirectly it expresses the philosophy of civil society by Hegel where “a state is not the opponent of civil society, but it is the condition of its existence. A state enables to overcome private interests that prevail in a society, and it helps to obtain an ethical universality” (Gawin 2004).

³ It is worth noticing that *Gemeinwirtschaftssektor* conception was ahead of Amitai Etzioni's idea – the third sector (Klute 2005: 100).

⁴ In the German economy *Gemeinwirtschaft* was most important 50s and 60s. This idea ended in the late 80s. At present, a modern term appears: *Sozialwirtschaft*; Socialnet, <http://www.socialnet.de>.

organizations which deal with social and health care form a separate part of the sector. They are wealthy and closely associated with the state.

As far as social dimension (participation) is concerned, in Germany the most popular are sports and recreation organizations, consumer organizations, automobile associations, religious and church organizations, cultural and hobby organizations. In Poland the most popular are religious organizations, trade unions, and sports and recreation organizations. Accordingly, the organized activity in Poland seems to be more traditional than in Germany where religion and the defense of employees' rights are not as popular as in Poland. What is more, those two fields are seldom considered as the activity within the bounds of the third sector.

Because of those characteristics in Germany the third sector is an vital social actor which fulfills important functions in a society (social care, health care, the defense of consumer rights). In Poland the third sector is often perceived as a weird hobby that has no social importance.

Differences in the human resources of the third sector in Poland and in Germany

In Germany about 77% of the surveyed declared that they supported the activities of non-governmental organizations. In Poland only 30% of the surveyed made such a declaration. People in Poland seldom belong to any organization. What is more, they seldom act as volunteers, and they seldom support any organization in any way. Despite efforts, the workforce of the third sector is not strong enough in Poland. However, it is worth mentioning that the German non-governmental organizations' needs are also insatiable despite the fact that the German organizations attract more people.

It is worth mentioning that inhabitants of the lands which belonged to GDR before 1990 are less involved. However, the differences are not significant. Accordingly, one of the main arguments used in discussions about social activity in post-soviet societies (Szawiel 2001; Ziolkowski 2005; Staniszki 2001) that a communist rule is a long-term barrier of the development of the social activity in states of a former communist block is not confirmed. Both the German third sector and the German state made every effort to level the differences. Those efforts seem to be successful. It means that the activity and a public spirit can be taught to some extent.

Differences in the financial resources of the third sector in Poland and in Germany

There are also significant differences between both sectors when financial resources are concerned. We can talk about the wealthy third sector in Germany, and the poor third sector in Poland. However, it is worth remembering that among the German organizations there are also significant differences. Organizations that deal with social work and health care are financed by the state and they possess important financial resources at their disposal. The other parts of the sector are poorer. However, their incomes are much higher than the Polish organizations which generally have low financial resources. That is why, they cannot fully promote their activities, involve in social issues and engage in a cooperation with the other organizations. Financial problems of the Polish third sector operates as a vicious circle. It will be difficult for the Polish organizations to wrench themselves free from this spiral.

The sources of financing the third sector

There are different sources of financing the Polish and German third sector. The German non-governmental organizations are mainly financed by the state. Fees and offerings are far less important sources. In Poland the main source of financing are fees. State subsidies and offerings are supplementary. Accordingly, the third sector in Poland is more self-maintaining than in Germany. This should be a positive feature of the Polish third sector. Theoretically, it should guarantee more independence. However, in practice it means a worse financial situation and as a result weak position in relation with the state .

What is more, it should be remembered that financial support of non-governmental organizations by the German state concerns only selected spheres. In Poland, the situation is similar but on a smaller scale.

The environment of the third sector

The conclusions about the institutional environment of the third sector are ambiguous. Paradoxically, despite common beliefs, the biggest problems of Polish non-governmental organizations appear within the bounds of the sector itself. Institutional and non-institutional relations between non-governmental organizations, and the existence and the effectiveness of umbrella organizations raise concerns. It seems that the sources of some problems worrying the Polish third sector are an immanent feature of the sector itself, not the external conditions. First and foremost, the inability or even the reluctance to cooperation that is caused by the low level of trust is

the biggest problem. The German organizations can be an example of an effective cooperation which supports the strength of the whole sector. The third sector that is internally cohesive and united can be an equal partner for both the state and business representatives. In Germany the third sector is not only a significant economic power but also an important lobby because it can speak with one voice, if necessary. Thanks to it, umbrella organizations can act in an enterprising way. If there is no stronger formal and informal cooperation between organizations in Poland, the third sector will stay weak and it will be underestimated by the other actors from a social scene.

The second aspect of the environment that is inferior in comparison to Germany is a cooperation with business. The representatives of the second sector in Poland in contrast to their colleagues from Germany often do not have a developed awareness of social responsibility, ethical principles or even simply a sense of compassion.

As far as the sphere of the relations between a state and the third sector is concerned, it is developed in both countries in a similar way. Of course, it is important to remember that some part of solutions in Poland is rather new. However, in some cases it seems to be a chance, not a threat. The support of the German state for the third sector, especially the financial support, is more developed than in Poland. However, in other spheres (legal regulations, control, tax reliefs) Poland and Germany are on a comparable level. Of course it is important to remember that the process of institutionalization of the third sector in Poland was long-lasting and laborious. Still a lot of things have to be done – the most important is the development of social involvement as well as the improvement of communication and cooperation within the sector.

Conclusions

In summary, the comparison between the Polish and German third sector shows that in Poland the most undeveloped issues are those which concern financial and human resources. The activities of the sector are inhibited by the under-investment of these two spheres. The potential resources of finances are the state administration or local-government administration. They can finance non-governmental organizations by transferring the part of their responsibilities. However, the tendency to the centralization of power by administration has to be changed.

Human resources seem to be more accessible. However, more effort to promote an active social attitude is needed.

To obtain the resources that are necessary for the development, the Polish third sector has to overcome lots of unfavorable external conditions. What is more, it has to take care of its own inner discrepancies that concern the lack of willingness and ability to cooperation. Only a strong and internally cohesive sector can play an important social role. The German example shows that the state treats the third sector as an equal partner due to ability of cooperation between organizations.

The German non-governmental organizations are not only a positive example. Their experiences enable to form some warnings. Firstly, as far as the above mentioned cooperation with a state is concerned, the German experiences show that administration cannot be the most important source of financing because of autonomy limitations, and financial problems which came from welfare state crisis.

Secondly, statistical data show “the aging” of the German non-governmental sector. The process poses a threat to the activity of the Germans in non-governmental organizations. It is probably connected with an excessive institutionalization of the sector which becomes less attractive to young people who are looking for more non-conformist ways of acting. The young Polish third sector should learn a lesson from the German experiences. What is more, it should remember and cultivate its activistic roots – this seems to be the only way to remain attractive to young Polish people.

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