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CHARACTER OF THE ACTIONS UNDERTAKEN BY RURAL NGOS IN POLAND

Abstract:

The activity of non-governmental organizations based primarily on activities that are undertaken by them. These actions can be twofold of apparent actions or real action. Nevertheless, regardless of their nature, they are an important part of the activities of the organization, because they not only differentiate the third sector, but also sometimes decide about the existence of the organization. The reasons for this are many; one of them may be a goal of organizations' activities. Indeed, for some organizations is a priority to undertake actions that on the one hand implement previously established goals, on the other hand meet the expectations of the outside world. Others have consciously decided to implement a apparent actions that allow their initiators to "save face" in a given community or outside of it.

The situation described above implies the need for deeper reflection and a closer look at the efforts of rural NGOs in Poland. Characteristics of their activities will be made on the basis of research, which was carried out within the project "Good Start" and the theory of apparent and real actions of Jan Lutyński.

Keywords:

non-governmental organizations, the third sector, apparent actions, real actions

JEL Classification: D71

INTRODUCTION

The activity of non-governmental organizations is based primarily on activities that are undertaken by them. These actions can be twofold of apparent actions or real action. Nevertheless, regardless of their nature, they are an important part of the activities of the organization, because they not only differentiate the third sector, but also sometimes decide about the existence of the organization. The reasons for this are many; one of them may be a goal of organizations' activities. Indeed, for some organizations it is a priority to undertake actions that on the one hand implement previously established goals, and on the other hand meet the expectations of the outside world. Others have consciously decided to implement apparent actions that allow their initiators to "save face" inside or outside a given community.

The situation described above implies the need for deeper reflection and a closer look at the efforts of rural NGOs in Poland. Characteristics of their activities will be made on the basis of research, which was carried out within the project "Good Start"¹ and the theory of apparent and real actions of Jan Lutyński.

REAL AND APPARENT ACTIONS ACCORDING TO JAN LUTYŃSKI'S THEORY

The concept of apparent and real actions was developed in the 1970s by Jan Lutyński [Kojder 1998: 156]. Although, the theory has been developed on the observation and analysis of the socialist system, it is of profound importance for describing the current social reality.

Lutyński in his concept focused primarily on the characteristics of the apparent activities (characteristics, a contrario, the real action), by which he understood such activities, which are different than they look because they do not realize their immediate objectives [Lutyński, 1977: 69]. By this kind of activities NGOs (in this case) only pretend that the actions taken are important. Lutyński took these actions among

¹ The basis of this paper are the results of an empirical study, which has been carried out between 2011 and 2014 by the Polish Rural Forum and the Institute of Sociology of the Nicolaus Copernicus University under the project "Good Start – support and innovation centre for non-governmental organizations on rural areas", funded by the Human Capital Operational Programme.

others to be action: performed on the show, ceremonial, provocative, inept, substitute actions as well as actions against the interests of people to whom they should serve, etc. [Lutyński, 1977: 69].

Lutyński also singled out a number of conditions that must exist in order to measure apparent actions. According to him these actions are:

- officially considered essential to the objective;
- usefulness;
- known as a private knowledge;
- actions include an element of fiction, etc [Lutyński, 1977: 69-74].

Moreover, he believed that the apparent action may be caused by the following mechanisms:

- organizational and decision-making, for example based on the implementation of the measures that have been adopted elsewhere;
- axiological - consisting in maintaining the fiction realization of recognized objectives;
- pragmatic - relating to the implementation of measures to mask the real problems;
- and the mandatory exercise of life solutions [Stempień, 2009: 122].

According to the concept of Lutyński we see that underlying the apparent actions is any inconsistency, lack of compliance, especially between what the states or implies, and what actually is realized [Lutyński, 1977: 75].

On the basis of the theory presented above, the real action will be identified in this article with activities previously oriented on established target, which should be possible to achieve. These activities are in line with the expectations of the outside world and the persons to whom they are addressed. Moreover, actual implementation of actions may take place in two ways. Firstly, in accordance with applicable rules and regulations. Secondly, based on the experience gained and mutual dialogue.

Apparent activities, in turn, will be understood as actions that in no way lead to the realization of their objectives, do not play a greater significance. These are activities

that promote the creation and sustaining of human consciousness in the image of the world that is not real. In other words, they are aware of the actions that are aimed at maintaining the activity of the organization [Lutyński, 1977:75].

OPINIONS OF THE REPRESENTATIVES OF RURAL NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATIONS ABOUT ACTIVITIES UNDERTAKEN BY THEM

Actions taken by non-governmental organizations in rural areas in Poland depend primarily on the functions that they perform, and the needs of the local environment in which organizations operate. Because - in the opinion of the representatives of the NGOs - the actions taken by non-governmental organizations must comply with the problem indicated by residents².

In addition, the opinion presented by the representatives of non-governmental organizations emerges a binary image. On the one hand, the caller attributed to taken actions in the context of the real nature of their institution, which stems from a desire to do something. On the other hand, they point to the organizations whose activity is confined exclusively to the senseless projects or implementation of measures which in no way correspond to the statutory purposes of the organization [Fraczak 2009].

Both the first and the second type of activity is associated with the occurrence of certain circumstances. Real activities - as emphasized by participants in the discussion - are undertaken by organizations that were created as a result of bottom-up initiatives or organizations that unite people with similar interests. Their work is based on the realization of the objectives and teamwork of many people. Apparent activities - according to participants of FGIs - are in turn taken by organizations that do not seek to implement the strategy set out in the directions. They can also result from external factors, such as bureaucracy, incompetence or of external funds. In this context, representatives of NGOs argued that it is common practice among many organizations, taking action only in order to obtain external financing in order to secure more funds. It was also noted that such organizations are more like for-profit companies, companies for which the public good is not the autotelic.

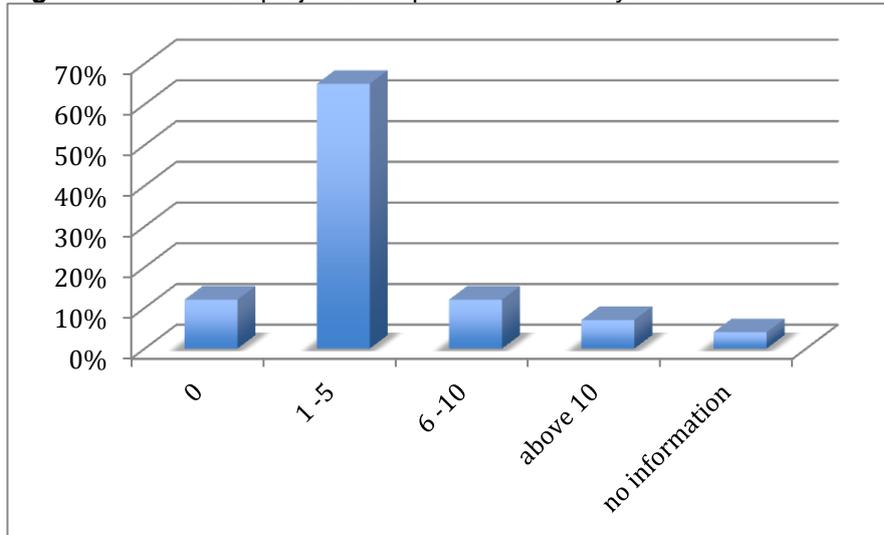
² FGI – Debrzno.

Another external factors leading to the apparent actions, as already mentioned, is a bureaucracy with which NGOs are faced every day. Participants in focus group interviews emphasized that it was excessive formalism (mainly in developing applications), complicated legal procedures for the establishment of the organization³ and extreme paper-work prevent the effective operation of, and sometimes even discouraging engagement in any activity. This issue was raised particularly by representatives of small organizations, which in their structures did not have people who have experience in writing proposals.

Qualitative research also shows that for many organizations the smooth functioning needs the support of local government. However, due to the incompetence of people (in the opinion of representatives of rural organizations), which are responsible for cooperation with NGOs at the municipal level, there is a lack of communication between the administration and the NGOs. Raised in fact, that the present form of cooperation is the nature of a claim. The reasons for this are many, it is the result, among others, filling these positions with random people who do not understand the idea of non-governmental organizations, mutual lack of willingness to cooperate and the lack of partnership relations, etc. The effect of this situation is one - the lack of real action.

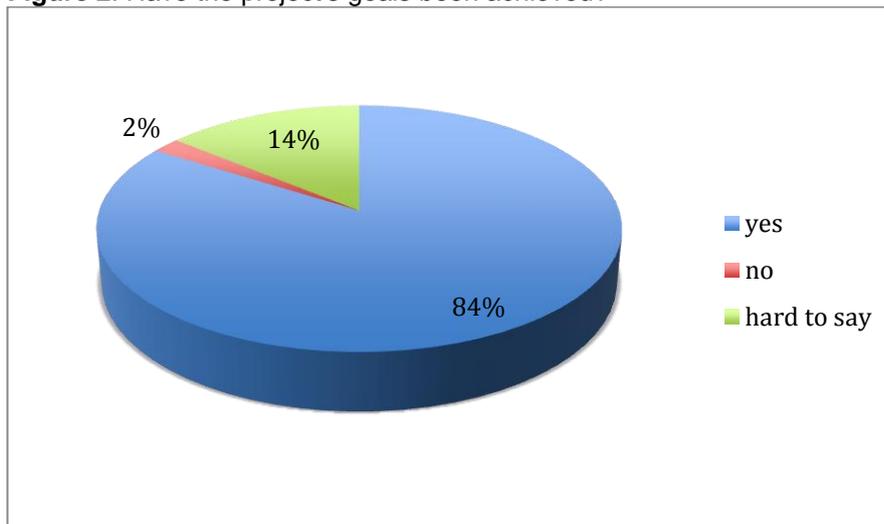
The activity of non-governmental organizations is also reflected in the number of projects implemented annually, which are without doubt one of the main forms of activity. According to national data, in 10 years of Polish membership in the European Union, non-governmental organizations have carried out 12 500 projects thanks to EU funds. Unfortunately, there are no data on the total number of projects carried out by NGOs. Nevertheless, the opinion presented by the representatives of rural NGOs in the research conducted under the project "Good Start", shows that NGOs carry an average of 5 projects per year (mean = 4,872). Nearly two thirds of the surveyed organizations indicated that in the last year realized from 1 to 5 projects. A large group (12% of tested NGOs) were also those who did not do any project, which may indicate their apparent activity – look at figure 1.

³ FGI – Legnica.

Figure 1: Number of projects completed in the last year.

Source: Own analysis based on the results of quantitative research carried out in the framework of the project "Good Start".

However, projects in which implementation of the respondents indicated the vast majority were of real action - emphasize that for John Lutyński implementation of previously established objectives indicates the true nature of the taken action. This answer was given by 84% of all respondents. Only 2% of the representatives of NGOs felt that the projects have had failure - see figure 2. The main causes of failure in their opinions were financial problems, limited access to information and insufficient recognition of the target group.

Figure 2: Have the project's goals been achieved?

Source: Own analysis based on the results of quantitative research carried out in the framework of the project "Good Start".

John Lutyński in his theory indicated in the context of the real actions also the number of people involved in the implementation of the task. He emphasized that we have to deal with them generally in a situation where their performance involves a lot of people. Therefore, in the context of the characteristics of the activities undertaken by non-governmental organizations from rural areas in Poland we should also pay attention to the relationship which exists between the percentage of people involved in the activities of the organization and the number of projects implemented each year.

The research data obtained shows that among the surveyed organizations with an increase in the percentage of people active in NGOs, there were increases the number of annually realized projects. In the case of non-governmental organizations, in which actively work up to 25% of people, 90% of the NGO carries up to 5 projects, and only 10% of them six or more. These proportions change with the increase in the proportion of people involved, and in the case of NGOs, in which over 75% of people operate, there are 80% of organizations which carry over 5 project. Exceptions are organizations in which the activity manifests from 26 to 50% of people, because 25% of the NGOs in this group perform more than 5 projects.

SUMMARY

Looking at the surveyed non-governmental organizations, it can be said that the representatives of the organizations positively evaluate their activities, which are undertaken by their organizations. They consider that these activities are effective and play an important role within their community. Nevertheless, we need to remember that according to national data, except the members of organization themselves just a few people recognize the actions taken by them⁴.

Respondents also pointed to several barriers such as bureaucracy and complicated procedures that hinder the realization of its objectives. However, from their statements emerge also some solutions, such as: adequate training, mutual cooperation organization based on the exchange of experience and establishment of information points for NGOs, which can be helpful in overcoming these problems.

⁴ Przewłocka, Jadwiga. 2011. Zaangażowanie społeczne Polaków w roku 2011: wolontariat, filantropia, 1%. Raport z badań. Warsaw: Klon/Jawor Association.

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