

Polish ngos and cooperation

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Cooperation

- Coming together of institutions acting to achieve the same goal (like ending homelessness) in an organized manner (at least regular meetings of prescribed representatives of each institution).
- Publishing common statements, organized reactions to new problems.
- Good understanding of the positive trade of between benefits from cooperation (long term effectiveness, continuity of care) and its costs (time that has to be invested).
- Producing some results that can be attributed to cooperation.

Cooperation
is not the greatest asset
of Polish homelessness ngos

Facts ...

- Five biggest national or regional homelessness networks have never since 1989 formed any common official statement addressing issues of homelessness
- Needs covered/problems solved rather through individual/personal activities than by common institutional pressure of multi-ngo platforms
- No National Homelessness Policy
- 2007/8 Winter meetings at the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy to coordinate crisis intervention in homelessness included no ngos and no ngo contested it (80% of crisis intervention is provided by ngos).

...more facts ...

- „Networking” within one network – networks concentrate on their own chapters like MONAR, TPBA, CARITAS overseeing the need to cooperate with other bodies e.g. active in the same locality
- Besides Pomerania there are no local platforms that would include stakeholders from across the sectors cooperating because of having common goal and acting on the same territory:
 - Warsaw Council for the Homeless – ngo and municipality fighting against each other), the President has just announced his resignation
 - Barka Foundation in Poznan creating its own support system which is rather next to the State then in cooperation with it.
 - Pomerania (Region of Gdańsk) good cooperation of ngos local government academics and business bodies.

misleading statistics

- Overall good numbers in research on cooperation of ngos and local govt (Barometr 2006/7)
 - 60% consider local govt as major partner
 - local government (besides Warsaw) is the most frequently mentioned partner by ngos
 - 60% of ngos cooperate financially with lg,

Reasons?/barriers?

1. Personal factors regarding ngo staff and local officials;
2. Misunderstood independence of ngos;
3. Local officials tend to see ngos as mission driven rather than professional service providers;
4. Concentration on short term goals;
5. Lack of funding mechanisms facilitating cooperation.

(1) Personal factors regarding
ngo staff and local officials

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- Negative attitudes towards those working for the other sector (amateurs/activists vs. bureaucrats).
- Elderly and low qualified staff of many ngos supporting the homeless (Warsaw)
- Researchers seen as theory oriented academics with out of the blue ideas

(2) Misunderstood
independence of ngos

(2) misunderstood independence

- Polish ngos consider independence as their defining feature:
 - established by people who after 1989 finally wanted to do what they thought was important and were previously unable to do, due to the omnipotent state suppressing citizen's activities.
- Newly gained independence understood as
 - freedom **from** the State (negative independence) and
 - freedom **to implement** own missions (positive independence).

„Negative” independence

- Natural/historical burdens to independence were:
 - legal regulations
 - the government (..)
- Nowadays organizations seem to feel the need to oppose both burdens to confirm their ngo identity even though political system has changed:
 - still feel excused to brake „stupid” regulations without feeling responsible to influence their change
 - consider local government to be a threat to their ngo identity and as such must be opposed

„Positive” independence

- Freedom to set own rules regarding own organization (quality of the service, number of beds, staff qualifications, resident’s rights, etc.)
 - resistance to standards for services
- *„My ngo is my castle” (Warsaw).*
- State should not interfere because it would be against democratic ethos.

(3) Local officials tend to see ngos as mission driven

(3) Missions

- (Still) Local officials tend to see ngos as mission driven bodies implementing private goals of their leaders rather than professional service providers fulfilling public tasks.
- Such ngos are not considered to be legitimate partners for local government as its duty is to support „all” citizens not private interests.

(4) Concentration on
short term goals;

(4) Short term goals

- Major goal of average homelessness ngo is to secure funding/resources for next year.
- It is easier to achieve individual goals through individual cooperation then through investing resources (mostly time) in creating networks/platforms.
- They play „the best student in a class game” (labelled long term favourites and bad boys) which does not facilitate common activities.

5. Lack of funding mechanisms
facilitating cooperation;

(5) Funding

- Still granted for projects not for provision of standardized services (subsidies vs. contracts for services).
- Such funding is available anyway so, no cooperation and networking are required to get it.
- No funding programme that has criterias facilitating cooperation to provide broader range of services (on national as well as local level).

Evidence

- Why Pomerania has effective cooperation? – no problem with **misunderstood independence and personal prejudices** as many of local government officials used to be ngo activists, and by local ngos are still recognized as „own people”.
- (2008) Once cooperation became necessary **to get funding** (Human Capital; stream for Local Standards for Ending Homelessness) all five major networks sat at one table and drafted long term project titled „*Five ways - one goal*”.
- EQUAL funding facilitated some cross sectoral and multi- agency cooperation because only Partnerships of different institutions were allowed to apply for it.

Consequences

- Only basic services provided based on public funding (night shelters, shelters, soupkitchens, some supported apartments).
- Any innovative programmes (supported housing, monitoring programmes for people newly housed) implemented on ad hoc basis.
- No continuity of care: programmes addressing homelessness separated from housing programmes.
- Policies are not evidence based.

Final remarks

- Many years behind but undergoing much faster development.
- Good legislative basis already established: The 2003 Act on Public Benefit and Volunteering requires each local community to draft Annual Programmes of Cooperation with Ngos.