

Tomasz Kafel*

NON-GOVERNMENTAL SECTOR IN POLAND – OPPORTUNITIES AND THREATS IN THE CONTEXT OF CREATING THE CIVIL SOCIETY

Summary

The main purpose of the article is to present the current circumstances of non-government organizations development and the key opportunities and threats in the process of launching ngos into the process of Polish civic society building. In the first part of the paper the stages of non-governmental sector development in Poland are described. The traditions of the so-called Third Sector in Poland and two main causative factors forming its development in the transition time are shown next. The increasing role of non-government organizations in shaping the civic society in Poland as the result of SWOT analysis of civic society is considered in the further parts of the paper.

1. Introduction

Non-governmental sector, being an isolated part of the real and regulative market economy, has developed in the long process mainly due to insufficient realization of public and social tasks by the state as a remedy for negative consequences of spontaneously operating market mechanism, threatening, in various forms, the living conditions of large groups of people. The origin of non-governmental sector has been determined by human desire to help each other and by the civil society willingness to self-organize in order to provide basic goods and services to people in need and those underprivileged. Its origins and development may be explained by:

- historical determinants – people acted together in order to contribute to some work and to solve problems long before state institutions were established; it turned out that after establishment of state institutions citizens are willing to act within non-governmental structures;

* Ph.D., Department of Organization Methods and Management Cracow University of Economics..

- low effectiveness of the state in realizing its social policy, caused by limited financial possibilities and shortcomings in satisfying individualized needs of smaller social groups;
- certain deficiencies of market economy – market mechanism which regulates most economic phenomena cannot balance demand and supply in consumption of such common goods as clean air, undestroyed forests, clean water, etc.; therefore there is social demand for organizations which create and protect common goods;
- pluralism and freedom – non-governmental sector is a place where all the attempts and views blocked by state structures manifest themselves;
- human solidarity – non-governmental sector is a place where particular social units may express their desire to help other people and to provide support for each other [Limański, Drabik 2007, pp. 31-32]. The aim of this article is to present current determinants in the functioning and development of non-governmental organizations and to characterize key opportunities and threats connected with including them into the process of creating Polish civil society.

2. The development of non-governmental sector in Poland

The history of non-governmental sector in Poland shows that the animators of social activity (today we would call them social facilitators^[1]), were both rulers and church structures [Juros 2006, p. 14]. In Europe in Middle Ages, institutionalized social activity was initially run by the Church, parishes and orders, and concentrated on educational and charitable work among the poorest, who often chose the state of poverty as way to perfection and salvation. In the 11th and 12th centuries, the attitude of Western societies towards poverty changed, which resulted in development of private and institutionalized charity. The development of private and institutionalized charity was the effect of a number of factors, among which the change in social structure of population was the major one. The material situation differed (there were more poor and more rich people), so social conflicts had to be toned down and social attitude to poverty changed [Leś 2011].

In Poland, non-governmental organizations, foundations and associations appeared more or less in the same time as in the West. Initially, they dealt with charitable work, then they also took up cultural, educational and scientific activities and promoted ideas of social development and social solidarity.

¹ Social facilitation covers processes thanks to which presence of other people has intensified influence on behavior of an individual.

Some of them were religious, others totally lay^[2]. Similarly to the West, also in Poland the origin of social organizations is closely related to Christian tradition. According to the Christian doctrine of mercy, valid in Middle Ages, supporting the poor was the basic attribute of a good Christian, while the poor were treated with respect and kindness [Leś 2011].

However, fundamental significance for the evolution of social activity is attributed to periods of economic upturns and downturns, as they determined the social situation. Such economic crisis took place in the middle of the 15th century and was closely related to the changes in ownership structure in the country and decline of traditional feudal society structures in the West, which led to social declassing and pauperization. Pauperization was further aggravated by famine disasters and epidemics and war aftermath. The second half of the 18th century starts the new and the longest stage in history of organized social activity in Europe and America, which lasted for 200 years, till the outbreak of the Second World War. This stage incorporates the period of Enlightenment, era of Industrial Revolution and the crisis of liberal democracy. The industrialization of the 18th and 19th centuries brought unprecedented mass pauperization – which revived the idea of lay philanthropy in Europe and America and also lay bare the need for organized protective activities performed by the state. In the 18th and 19th centuries, philanthropic organizations established by lay founders developed, but not at the cost of various traditional forms of charitable activities. There were also public care institutions created at that time. This period witnessed different relations between philanthropic institutions and public authorities in various countries, which, in the 19th and 20th centuries contributed to the creation of different models of social policy and differentiated relations between the state and social organizations [Leś 2011].

In the period from the second half of the 18th century to the outbreak of the Second World War, Poland witnessed three stages of non-governmental organizations development: the times of King Stanislaus, the time of Poland's partition (1795-1918) and the years of the Second Republic of Poland. The first period, though it lasted only a couple of decades, was essential for the formation of views on the function of religious and lay philanthropy and public care in a modern state. The loss of independence in 1795 coincided with the crisis of manor and serfdom economy and development of industry in Poland. This process was accompanied with pauperization of population and an increased number of abandoned, neglected and demoralized children as well as noticeable growth of juvenile crimes. These two factors were the main catalysts of various philanthropic, educational, social, cultural, socio-economic and army-political associations. The development of non-governmental organizations was also

² Organizacje pozarządowe, http://www.poland.gov.pl/Organizacje_pozarządowe,128.html, (accessed on 28th February 2011).

continued in the Second Republic of Poland. In this period there was organizational and institutional complementarity of associations, foundations, unions and cooperatives to the activities of government and self-government. In 1947–1989, defining, administering and financing collective needs was dominated in Poland by the monopolist concept of a social state. Its result was drastic reduction of the role of social subjects (non-governmental). Many hospitals, schools, kindergartens, spas and other institutions of social infrastructure belonging to non-governmental organizations were eliminated, property and equipment was nationalized, and in 1952, all foundations with registered offices in Poland were dissolved. Unfortunately, organizations were compulsorily joined, cooperatives were incorporated to social sector and the status of private cooperative ownership was eliminated for the benefit of collective cooperative ownership. The already mentioned traditions from before the war and scanty experiences after the war led in the 1970s and 1980s to strong pressure exerted on the political and state apparatus. This brought about the Act on Foundations in 1984, which was the first legal sanctioning for the non-governmental organizations in Central and Eastern Europe. Such organizations obtained the status of a legal person. Unfortunately, in line with the spirit of those years, the initiative possibilities were fully controlled. Organizations could only be set up adopting the foundation form. The act also stipulated the necessity of obtaining permission from the ministry. Proper minister was the one whose jurisdiction covered the planned activities of a foundation [Leś 2011].

The interest in the concept of social economy as a social policy instrument grew in Poland after 1989 as a result of structural pressure caused by changed relations between the main participants of economic and social processes: the state, the enterprise and the households. The changes mainly consisted in withdrawal of the state from its role of an employer, reduction of its instruments of social inclusion (normative narrowing of the scope of social rights and limiting access to social allowances and services) and liquidation of the enterprise's social function. The effects of these transformations were mass and high unemployment, dramatic growth of poverty and social gap in the sphere of social allowances and services [Leś 2010]. After 1989, non-governmental organizations have been experiencing their revival, thanks to regained freedom to associate and to establish associations. In a sense, this is the effect of one thousand years of Polish philanthropy. Some organizations with traditions dating back before the war were restored and took up their statutory activities (for example Caritas Polska – pastoral charitable institution of Polish Episcopate, or YMCA³, an apolitical and lay organization working to satisfy the needs of local societies in cooperation with organizations, state offices and self-governments).

3 Young Men's Christian Association.

Many new foundations and associations have been established to meet the challenges and needs of modern society. We have also witnessed the appearance of many institutions (associations or foundations) which dealt with solving social problems: alcoholism, homelessness, drug-addictions, such as: Monar Association, Brother Albert Foundation. Non-governmental organizations expanded the scope of their activity, dealing not only with charitable work, but also promoting education among the youth, which is manifested by numerous scholarship funds and programs of supporting the most talented young people (for example Stefan Batory Foundation, Polish Foundation for Science Advancement). Universities have witnessed establishment of student organizations, international organizations supporting promotion of science set up their branches there. Apart from functioning in the philanthropic area, these organizations also dealt with cultural issues (for example Foundation of Culture, F. Chopin Foundation and numerous associations and foundations aiming at promotion and protection of historic buildings), human rights protection (for example the Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights, Polish section of Amnesty International), promoting natural environment protection (for example "Our Earth" Foundation, Foundation Supporting Ecological Initiatives).

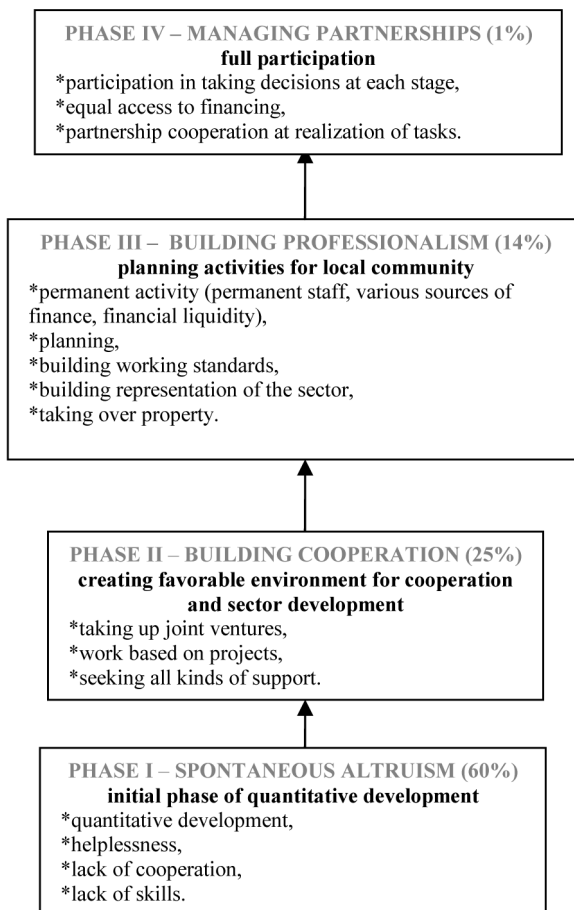
The Polish non-governmental sector was shaped in the transformation period mostly by two decisive factors: mechanism of self-development and self-education, characteristic for many social and civic movements, and a broadly understood foreign aid. The first factor consisted in "work at the basics" performed by part of the society interested in community work, who, due to various reasons, continuing solidarity or intellectual elite ethos and realizing counter-culture ethos, but also driven by their own interest and necessity of self-defending their life situation, decided to shape the framework of social self-organization on their own. The second development factor – foreign aid – covers at least four dimensions: financial, educational (mostly know-how organizations), cultural (restoring the community activist ethos) and political. We could certainly say that although many institutions of Polish democracy were designed and imposed top-down, Polish civil society was actually built at grass-roots level, with help of foreign subjects, by a small part of our nation, often against its elites. Therefore it is mostly limited to some enclaves [Gliński 2006, p.31].

In Poland in recent years we have seen dynamic development of non-governmental organizations, which can be attributed to better public awareness of the population who understand that one should not limit their actions and behaviors only to those which serve the purpose of satisfying own needs and the needs of one's family [Kantyka...2005,p. 9]. In the past twenty years the number of non-governmental organizations has grown significantly, and the scope of their activities has widened, too. They are involved in almost every aspect of human aspirations all over the world.

The development of non-governmental sector in Poland since the beginning of economic transformation in 1989 has taken place, according to Jerzy Boczoń (Chairman of the SPLOT Network of Supporting Non-Governmental Organizations, Head of the Regional Information Center and Support for Non-Governmental Organization Foundation in Gdańsk), in the phases presented in Figure 1 below [Boczoń 2005].

Non-governmental organizations cannot be perceived only as performing some marginal activities of doubtful value. They play an important role in nearly every society, helping provide health care, develop education and social welfare [Sargeant 2004, p. 20].

Figure 1. Phases of non-governmental sector development in Poland



Source: A. Dawidowska, J. Boczoń, *Absorpcja funduszy europejskich przez organizacje pozarządowe w latach 2004–2006*, Trzeci Sektor No 7 – fall 2006, p. 29.

However, in spite of tremendous potential of ideas, organizational and intellectual efforts that have been made in the past 20 years in the activities of non-governmental organizations, they are not fully prepared to utilize this potential and to take advantage of the opportunities resulting, for example, from our membership in the EU [Boczoń 2005]. According to J. Boczoń, probably 60% of organizations are still in the first phase, 25% in the second phase, while only 14% in the third one, that is in the phase of being ready to become a professional organization with possibilities of cooperating with other sectors and building what we could call professional, full participation. This phase of full participation in social life has been entered by around 1% of non-governmental organizations.

3. Growing importance of non-governmental organizations in building the civil society in Poland

Recent years have increased chances of full participation in social life for non-governmental organizations. We would like to draw the reader's attention to *The strategy of supporting development of the civil society in 2007-2013*, adopted by the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy in 2005. It indicates the key elements of the civil society, its mission, objectives, priorities and strategic operations which will be performed in order to develop the civic society in Poland. The principle of the civil society is one of axiological foundations on which the system of the Republic of Poland is based according to the Constitution of 1997. Its constitutional reference is an absolutely new idea in Poland. Of course, the term "civil society" has long been used in sociology, political science or philosophy of law. It is defined as "all institutions and organizations independent of the state, which do not oppose the state in its efforts to provide security and order, but they want to control the actions of the state authorities, influence them and defend their own interests" [Sześciło 2007, p. 74-75]. In definitions adopted in the Strategy, it was assumed that "civil society in general, covers two areas in Poland: civil group activity – manifested in activities of various communities, mostly in activities of non-governmental organizations of civil type, local and self-government communities, and informal groups and social movements (neighborhood communities, subcultures, etc.), as well as individual civil activities comprising attitudes and civil awareness of Poles" [Strategia... 2005, p. 7].

The SWOT analysis of civil society in Poland (Table 1) allowed to adopt the following strategic goals in the Strategy:

- Achieving the optimum level of citizens' participation in public life – as a necessary condition for creating stable foundations for subject activity

of citizens and their communities in shaping the social development, economic growth and political culture;

- Quantitative and qualitative development of civil society institutions – as an expression of objective necessity of strengthening non-governmental organizations, social integration and social economy subjects and forms and ways in which they function;
- Creating the foundations for proper functioning of the state – as the consequence of principles of subsidiarity, participation, partnership and civil dialogue between efficient public administration and citizens, which crowns the construction of the civil society.

Table 1. SWOT analysis of the civic society in Poland

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • sector performs two functions in the society: integrating (strengthens the feeling of social cohesion) and expressive (advocating) • performs niche task/services for the society • increasing number of organizations professionalize their activities basing on developing staff (employing people working for non-governmental organizations) • there is specialist infrastructure supporting non-governmental organizations and local civil activeness 	<p>Individual civil activeness:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • low civil awareness characterized by lack of activeness and responsibility for the community • lack of broad civil education • civil passiveness • limited “openness” of state institutions for citizens as regards: participative legislation; functioning of state institutions in relation to citizens • low level of social capital measured by declared social trust in state institutions, mutual trust between public institutions and civil institutions <p>Non-governmental civil activeness:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • small number and often low quality of non-governmental organizations in relation to the potential of Poland • poor financial situation – small share of public means in budgets of organizations • poor internal differentiation of the sector • difficulties in creating a joint non-governmental representation • cases of violating self-regulatory and ethical standards by organizations • low corporate culture of the sector reflected in lack of strategic planning of the sector, lack of knowledge in issues affecting its operations, for example finance and taxes, cooperation with volunteers • problems with building modern membership base • lack of transparent and fair rules of access of civil groups to public money • lack of easy access to infrastructure services (advisory services, trainings, etc.).

Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • quite a high number of people interested in voluntary service • gradual growth of the number of non-governmental organizations • attempt at institutional change concerning the place and role of non-governmental sector in the state and society through introducing new institutions of social dialogue, development of legislature laying foundations for Polish “social economics” and passing the Act on Public Benefit and Volunteer Work • systemic change of the method of allocating public means as regards access to them by non-governmental organizations – Civil Initiatives Fund • the way the sector functions in the institutional environment of the EU • a chance of major contribution from European funds for the sector • participation of the sector in the National Development Plan for 2007-2013. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • attitude of many self-governments reflected in unwillingness to accept non-governmental organizations as equal partners in the process of managing local and regional communities • the status of a client the sector has in relations with public administration representatives • anti-participative characteristics of democratic institutions of the state • a phenomenon of sector ‘oligarchy’ • poorly developed institutional and legislative structure for development of participative democracy, characterized by low participation of civil groups and communities in the process of preparing, taking and controlling political decisions, reflecting their rights and interests • weaker controlling function of social organizations towards public authority, resulting directly from lack of partnership balance and overdependence of non-governmental organizations from various levels of authorities.

Source: Strategia wspierania rozwoju społeczeństwa obywatelskiego na lata 2007-2013, Ministerstwo Polityki Społecznej, Warszawa 2005, pp.17-18.

What attracts our attention (in Strategy...) is the fact that the *strong non-governmental organizations* priority was placed among priorities and activities serving the purpose of realizing the listed strategic objectives. Among other priorities we have:

- *active, conscious citizens, active local communities,*
- *social integration,*
- *social economy.*

Priority : *strong non-governmental organizations* is realized through the following activities:

1. Strengthening the potential of the non-governmental sector,
2. Providing equal opportunities for organizations – supporting development of third sector infrastructure,
3. Quality of management in modern public administration,
4. Promoting civil dialogue as a form of civil participation.

The realization of the first two activities is of particular importance for non-governmental organizations. Thus, strengthening the potential of the non-governmental sector is conducted through:

- supporting development of social base of non-governmental organizations, professional development of both the staff and membership and volunteer base,
- supporting self-regulatory initiatives of the third sector concerning transparency of their activities,
- strengthening financial and organizational stability of non-governmental organizations, especially as regards financing civil initiatives,
- supporting development of research and expert base of civil society organizations.

The activity: *providing equal opportunities for organizations – supporting development of third sector infrastructure* encourages the activities aiming at obtaining the following results:

- developing national systems of support for the third sector in areas of advice, consultation, services (including financial ones), trainings and technical assistance,
- strengthening the system of supporting organizations in regions with poorer access to infrastructure services which provide equal access to services on the regional level,
- strengthening the sector integration processes, including federalization of non-governmental organizations.

The implementation of the Social Economy priority offers great opportunities for non-governmental organizations. One of the activities within this priority is strengthening the role of the third sector as an employer. The social dimension of employment as the domain of non-governmental sector and other institutions and forms of social economy is supposed to improve significantly the situation in labor market, especially as regards particular groups of social risk. The perspective of changes concerning the role of non-governmental organizations as employers calls for such activities as:

- supporting education of social leaders who are real or potential employers,
- creating conditions for realizing programs of supporting employment in non-governmental organizations,
- developing social employment programs within the activities of the non-governmental sector.

The outline of the Strategy of Support of Civil Society Development is a document inaugurating the process of determining ideas and program supporting development of a good, that is efficient, transparent and fair, state. States with civil orientation are those in which universal and superior values, accepted by everybody and intended for everybody, should constitute criteria for social dreams of good life and ways of its realization. A good starting point in strategic thinking in this area was the government program – Civic

Initiatives Fund, which was created to stimulate and support development of civic initiatives with participation of the non-governmental organizations sector, and the Civil Society Operational Program which is being developed.

4. Conclusions

Non-governmental organizations which did not have any systemic support, in order to survive had to adjust to extremely unfavorable conditions. Constant search for new areas of intervention and innovative methods of working as well as taking up the most challenging tasks (often neglected by other subjects), coupled with lack of regular financing and constant threat to their functioning, forced them to use the project method and to adjust to the existing possibilities of financing. Compiling the budget from various sources, multitask jobs, replacing paid employees with professional volunteers and seeking supporters for the cause in various communities strengthened organization leaders and made their attitudes more flexible. However, we can discern a very troubling phenomenon which may be of great significance for the future development of civil society. We can observe some stratification in the non-governmental sector. Organizations which are fully prepared to use the EU funds will accumulate their resources entering next well-paid projects. Those who cannot deal with complicated procedures or managing their own structure themselves, without external support will never be able to reach the critical mass and become ready to apply for those resources and therefore will be doomed to regress. Another, more fundamental problem facing non-governmental organizations (unfortunately in Poland as well) has been brought to our attention by third sector experts. "We dreamt of civil society, and what we have is loads of non-governmental organizations", says Janos Kis, one of the key figures in democratic transformation in Hungary [Graff 2010, p. 18]. B. Einhorn, British sociologist, claims that after 1989, Eastern Europe fell into the "trap of civil society", and instead of building movements for systemic social changes, non-governmental organizations deal with filling the gaps left by the state retreating from many spheres of life. According to A.Graff, non-governmental organizations are no longer subjects of political transformations, but became a cog in the machine of neo-liberalism. Similar opinions on the development of civil society in Poland are expressed by many frustrated representatives of non-governmental organizations in our country. Such opinions are not voiced loud enough to be heard and often turned into a joke. We can also sometimes hear opinions of some politicians that civil society is foreign to Polish national culture, characterized by lack of trust (with the exception of one's family), passivity and proneness to conflicts. A.Graff rejects such assumptions and points at excessively institutionalized

operational methods of non-governmental organizations as the main reason why people who would like to realize their values and ideas are alienated. It takes a special skill to balance between “amateur” activity and extreme professionalism and to manage the organization without losing the values and ideas which lay at its foundation. It does not consist in adopting certain formulas of professional operation from commercial enterprises and increasing market orientation of some areas of activities of non-governmental organizations. It does not consist, either, in adopting operational standards of public institutions and creating a lot of posts or “governmentalizing” non-governmental organizations. As M. Rymśa, editor in chief of the “Trzeci Sektor” quarterly, points out, “professionalization of activities performed by such organizations should acquire its own, unique, ‘third sector’, civic profile, whose essence is orientation at public benefit and public wealth” [Rymśa 2010, p. 11-12]. We can state that dealing with the above threats should become a priority objective for the non-governmental sector. This battle will determine the shape of Polish civil society.

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