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Social activity of Poles

Abstract

There is a clear link between the low level of active citizenship of Lubuskie Voivodship inhabitants and their low social capital and considerable exclusion, mainly due to unemployment and related poverty. The main sources of funding from the European Union Structural Funds are dedicated for increasing employment rates, improving the quality of jobs and improving labor market integration. The research conducted on the impact of the ESF on the effectiveness of activities undertaken within the social inclusion system in the Lubuskie voivodship show the importance of social support forms. The article mentions two of them, namely activation by Centers for Social Inclusion and transnational mobility, which are characterized by a high index of economic and social emancipation. The disadvantage of these two forms is the high cost of activation per person. The question arises whether, with such a large financial investment, the strategy of social activation will bring about the desired change, does it designate civil society, or rather is a positivist myth or a restriction of individualism? The aim of the article is to show the relationship between the activity of inhabitants of lubuskie voivodship and social capital and issues related to social exclusion. In addition, presenting the activities undertaken under the social inclusion system.

Keywords: social exclusion, social inclusion, social inclusion, unemployment, Centers for Social Inclusion, transnational mobility, social activation strategy.

JEL CODE: D02, D63, D71, E22.

Aktywność społeczna Polaków

Abstrakt

Istnieje wyraźny związek pomiędzy niską aktywnością obywatelską mieszkańców województwa lubuskiego a ich niskim kapitałem społecznym i znacznym wykluczeniem, głównie z powodu bezrobocia i powiązanego z nim ubóstwa. Istotnym źródłem finansowania zadań związanych z pomocą społeczną w zakresie działań na rzecz włączenia społecznego osób zagrożonych wykluczeniem społecznym oraz wykluczonych, zwiększenia stopy zatrudnienia, polepszenia jakości miejsc pracy a także poprawy integracji na rynku pracy są środki z funduszy strukturalnych Unii Europejskiej. Przeprowadzone badania wpływu EFS na

skuteczność działań podejmowanych w ramach systemu integracji społecznej w Województwie Lubuskim pokazują duże znaczenie społecznych form wsparcia. W artykule wymienia się dwie z nich a mianowicie aktywizację przez Centra Integracji Społecznej oraz mobilności ponadnarodowe, które cechują się wysokim wskaźnikiem usamodzielnienia ekonomicznego i społecznego. Minusem tych obu form jest wysoki koszt aktywizacji przypadający na jedną osobę. Rodzi się pytanie czy przy tak dużych nakładach finansowych strategia aktywizacji społecznej przyniesie pożądane zmiany, czy wyznacza społeczeństwo obywatelskie, czy raczej jest pozytywistycznym mitem lub ograniczeniem indywidualizmu? Celem artykułu jest ukazanie zależności pomiędzy aktywnością mieszkańców województwa lubuskiego a kapitałem społecznym oraz zagadnień związanych z wykluczeniem społecznym. Ponadto zaprezentowanie działań podejmowanych w ramach systemu integracji społecznej.

Słowa kluczowe: wykluczenie społeczne, integracja społeczna, włączenie społeczne, bezrobocie, Centra Integracji Społecznej, mobilność ponadnarodowa, strategia aktywizacji społecznej.

Low social activity of Poles

For the last few years social activity of Polish men and women has remained at a similar level: one third of the society is active, with 18% being involved in 'formal' voluntary service in 2013 (slightly more than in the preceding years), and 27% being engaged in work for people outside their family and acquaintances or for their neighbourhood (level similar to the preceding years) (Adamiak 2014, p. 7). The available reports point to several reasons for the low social activity of Poles, such as: the lack of time, knowledge, idea or faith in the effectiveness of such involvement. Some people give priority to solving their own problems and place it over social activity or do not wish to take on burdensome commitments. The 'own problems' were described in Social Diagnosis 2013 (Kotowska 2014), in which the human capital of Poles was measured according to the following indicators:

1. Education measured by the number of years of learning.
2. Civilizational competence, assumed to be reflected by the use of the Internet and the command of the English language.
3. Participation in lifelong learning and supplemental education; the measurement was based on the responses to two questions. The first one concerned improving professional qualifications or other skills over the last two years, the other referred to obtaining new

qualifications or acquiring new skills during the last year with a view to getting a better pay.

4. Health; measured according to a person's satisfaction with his or her health condition.

The conclusions were as follows: women showed a lower level of human capital than men, as did the elderly when compared with younger people, or people from smaller localities in comparison with residents of bigger towns or cities. In terms of the labour market, the groups worst affected by the human capital deficit are retirees and pensioners, followed by the unemployed and the professionally inactive. As regards the quality of life, taking into account such indicators as: human capital, psychological, physical, social and material well-being, the level of civilizational advancement, life stress, and pathologies, Lubusz Voivodeship ranked 15th in the country (*Diagnoza społeczna...*).

Basing on data reported in *the National Program For the Prevention of Poverty and Social Exclusion 2020* one can learn that in 2011 the indicator of poverty risk or social exclusion risk reached their highest values in the following voivodeships: Lublin Voivodeship (40.6%), Lubusz Voivodeship (37.1%) and Świętokrzyskie Voivodeship (34.3%) (MPiPS 2014, p. 7).

Poverty is also a non-economic problem, causing deficit in such domains of life as: the level of education, living conditions, cultural needs, and most importantly, social activity, the subject matter of this paper. Therefore, one of the objectives of the Development Strategy For Lubusz Voivodeship promoting professional and social inclusion, a policy aimed at ensuring social cohesion, which is implemented by developing effective instruments for the prevention and combating the current and new forms of social exclusion. New forms of social exclusion are recognized in the Strategy, including: digital exclusion, energy exclusion, exclusion due to health condition, exclusion in education, and transmission of poverty. As regards Lubusz Voivodeship it is essential that measures be taken aimed at increasing the professional activation of its inhabitants (*Strategia rozwoju...* 2012).

One may notice from the provided analysis that in Lubusz Voivodeship there is a relation between the low level of active citizenship and the low level of social capital and considerable extent of exclusion, resulting mainly from unemployment and unemployment-related poverty.

Effective tools for active integration

EU's structural funds resources, within the framework of Axis VII 'Social Balance', are an essential source of financing of tasks related to social welfare aimed at the social inclusion

of people threatened with social exclusion and those already excluded, increasing the employment rate, improving the quality of work places, as well as increased integration on the labour market.

In the evaluation study *'The impact of EFS on the effectiveness of measures taken within the system of social integration in Lubusz Voivodeship'* an assessment was made of the support provided to date by the European Social Fund in the area of assistance and social integration of, amongst others, social welfare recipients (Wpływ EFS... 2013). Based on the gathered data it was established that it was the social forms of support that proved most effective. Thanks to the use of EFS funds several effective methods of activation and social inclusion have been developed. This paper will discuss a few of them. They have been selected according to the degree of effectiveness; they all proved to be highly effective, which was confirmed by evaluation studies conducted not only in Poland but also in Europe. The most essential methods of social activation are the activity of Social Integration Centres and transnational mobility.

Social Integration Centres

The legal basis for the operation of Social Integration Centres (CIS) is *The Social Employment Act*. The centres can be established by local government units but also by non-governmental organizations. Their main aim is to combine the processes of professional and social integration of the unemployed. Therefore a reintegration block is being established including both components mentioned above (Dz.U. 2016, poz. 1828.) [(Journal of Laws of 2016, item 1828)].

The beneficiaries of CIS can be persons who have remained unemployed for a period of minimum 12 months and are not entitled to the unemployment benefit. These are therefore people situated on the margins of society, unable to undertake appropriate steps to re-enter the labour market. There are various reasons for the marginalisation of potential CIS participants, the most important being: addictions, sometimes homelessness, long-term unemployment, social environment, family problems, health problems, as well as low education, the lack of professional qualifications, mental or physical disability. CIS centres also provide care to persons who ran afoul of the law, including former inmates. In accordance with the provisions of the amendment to the law, the assistance can also be extended to patients being treated for addictions.

The re-entry into the labour market and participation in 'regular' life consists, above all, in learning the skills allowing one to perform social roles, as do the non-excluded. An important

part of the process is the acquisition of professional skills and apprenticeship, retraining or improving one's professional qualifications, life planning and self-reliance. The ability to earn one's own income through employment or self-employment and to manage one's financial resources in a rational way proves crucial to developing a sense of 'normality' in the beneficiaries and has a significant impact on their self-esteem. This, in turn, strengthens the process of reintegration by increasing the participants' motivation.

The participants are recruited to CIS by referral from PUP (District Labour Office) or OPS (Social Welfare Centre) as well as on the beneficiary's own initiative. The first stage of recruitment is the future participant's needs assessment, based, amongst others, on a community interview conducted by OPS employees. Then, an individual path of social and professional reintegration is developed. Once started, the process is subject to constant monitoring. It is essential that a social worker and a psychologist be engaged in the process.

In order to create the best possible environment for the social and professional reintegration a combination of factors must be considered and addressed. Social reintegration is achieved through a combination of workshops, therapies, and training courses, in which CIS beneficiaries participate once a week, 6-8 hours per session. Group and individual activities are conducted by social workers, psychologists, therapists and specialists in various domains of social life, including lawyers, doctors, dieticians, addiction specialists etc.

The path of professional reintegration requires a higher degree of organization. It is a kind of internship done by a person without appropriate qualifications and unable to work in an intense and organized way. CIS centres follow two schemes: they either organize the internship in the form of social employment at CIS and executing external orders or refer a person to do an internship at an enterprise. In both cases, what the beneficiary has 'on offer' is their work, but appropriate measures must be taken to draw the employer's attention. There are tangible benefits for the potential employer: the social employment of the participant does not impose any additional burden on the employer: the employee receives a reintegration benefit from the labour fund, contributions to ZUS (the Social Insurance Institution) are partly covered by the labour office and partly from the Social Welfare Centre funds. CIS covers the costs of medical examinations, occupational health and safety training, and supplies the participant with cleaning products, protective clothing and even work tools. The participants work 6-8 hours a day, 4 days a week. Undoubtedly, it is a social microstructure that creates jobs for the participants but also one that offers incentives to employers. The internship is

complemented by meetings with careers adviser and care/supervision of the workstation instructor.

In addition, the participants have travel and child care expenses reimbursed, and are ensured one warm meal a day. However, CIS regulations impose certain limitations on the participants, and their skillful application is 'educationally' beneficial. One is obliged to be sober at work and during activities and any infringement of this rule results in the reduction or complete loss of the reintegration benefit in a given month. The participant may also be referred to take part in various forms of addiction therapy and treatment.

As follows from the above description, CIS is a social venture with a specific microstructure, which focuses various elements of the local community, various local entities, from the local government (Social Welfare Centres, District Labour Offices, local government units) through local business (workplaces, enterprises) to non-governmental organizations. Activation through CIS participation has many advantages. One of them is the high rate of economic self-reliance – in 2014 the national average was 35%, another is the high rate of employment with an employer -78,50% (Trzeciecki 2015). In terms of community life in microregions CIS centres integrate entities representing three basic sectors: self-governmental, non-governmental and business ones. Activation through CIS centres has also its weak points: it does not produce financial results quickly and places a burden on the central budget as the average annual maintenance cost of a single CIS ranges between 100,000 and 500,000 PLN. CIS centres stand no chance of surviving without subsidies and they hardly ever generate profits (Koral 2008). Limited knowledge of this method of funding and of its legal framework, as well as the lack of professional staff are the major barriers to the functioning of CIS centres.

Activation through transnational mobility

In Germany various methods of social and professional activation have been developed and a well-functioning support system has been built for socially excluded groups, especially the young and immigrants. In 2000 the IDA concept was finalized, which includes people from the NEET group, i.e. persons who are inactive either professionally or educationally. The representatives of this group are especially threatened with social exclusion as they remain outside the system of institutions which help one with the acquisition or developing of skills and qualifications essential on the labour market, as well as social and civic competence. To avoid permanent social exclusion of the people it is important that the period of unemployment or other forms of inactivity should be minimized.

Addressing the NEET phenomenon is therefore one of the serious challenges faced by the system of education and the labour market in Poland. The preliminary results of the International Assessment of Adult Competencies in OECD countries, presented in the *Better Skills, Better Jobs, Better Lifesstrategy*, clearly indicate that in the group of young people who remain within the domain of education or in employment, their competences increase with age due to the formal, non-formal or informal (for example, in the workplace) process of learning. Within the NEET group, on the other hand, one can observe regression in the possessed competences with age (OECD 2012).

In Lubusz Voivodeship, two projects were carried out that were aimed at developing professional and key competences of young people with the use of programs of transnational mobility. As part of the projects young people from Lubusz Voivodeship who are threatened with social exclusion pursued their own personalized plan of action and development, which involved improving their competences in diagnosed areas, such as language, psychological and cultural preparation. In this way they gained experience necessary to undertake employment during a two-month stay with the transnational partner. The internship at a foreign employer also contributed to the development of soft skills and social competences, including self-reliance, teamwork, communication skills, work organization, workday and leisure time planning, budget planning. This, in turn, built up the persons' self-esteem and self-confidence – the characteristics necessary to succeed on the labour market and be able to overcome difficulties. As part of the internship, each group implemented an undertaking that served the local community, carrying out work for such institutions as schools, kindergartens or hospices. Importantly, the participants were free to choose the method of implementation of the task. The strengths and weaknesses of the project can be assessed on the basis of interviews with the participants¹. The educational value of the mobility method is supported by the fact that following the two-month internship abroad, 80% of all participants showed readiness to undertake employment. The employment rate examined within 3 months of the completion of the project was 40%. One could also observe a significant rise in the social activity of people participating in the mobilities, 50% of the people having contacted social institutions with the view to re-entering the labour market.

The main weakness of the method is the high cost of activation, exceeding 30,000 PLN per person. It must also be noticed that the project necessitates employing highly qualified, well-paid staff. It also turned out that due to the high risks involved in the stay of a NEET

¹ Wywiad osobisty z koordynatorami projektu IDA i MASZ, przeprowadzony w grudniu 2015 roku.

participant abroad, this method must be limited to the most motivated groups. The project implementers made a tremendous effort to recruit the participants and then sustain high levels of motivation necessary for the process of reintegration to succeed. It should also be noted that in Lubusz Voivodeship there is a shortage of staff qualified for such an undertaking.

The strategy of social activation

Is the strategy of social activation a positivist myth, a limitation to individuality, a measure of civic society?

To answer this question, one must analyze its component parts. What is the exact meaning of 'social activation'? The word 'strategy' comes from ancient Greece and means 'the art of military command'. In other words, strategy stands for an approach aimed at solving problems. It follows that the strategy of social activation is an approach whose aim is to activate a certain group of people socially. Therefore, a more relevant question would be whether devising plans for the activation of society is a positivist myth? Proceeding with the analysis, a further question must be posed, namely 'What is a myth'?

A myth is a metaphorical, unfounded opinion of someone or something, a story describing a person, a fact or an event with additional fictitious details.

How is 'a positivist myth' to be interpreted then? The encyclopaedic entry for 'positivism' explains that the basic premise of positivism is that the only source of true knowledge is scientific knowledge, which was acquired through positive empirical verification of a theory. In Poland, initially, positivism was reflected mainly in literature. In a partitioned country, which Poland was at that time, positivism stood in opposition to literary romanticism, proclaiming faith in the idea of progress and scientific achievements, and postulated cultural and economic restoration through grassroots work (<https://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pozytywizm>). The phrase 'positivist myth' suggests that the central premises of Polish positivism, i.e. that organic work and grassroots work will ensure the reconstruction of Polish society and the preservation of Polish identity as a slow but sure way to Poland's independence, were unfounded and false. Should one therefore presume that the strategy of social activation is by definition unfounded and false, and thus futile?

The Development Strategy For Lubusz Voivodeship (2012), which is the most important document by Lubusz local government, determining the directions of the region's development, indicating areas requiring particular intervention as well as the diagnosis of the region's current status, future challenges and the residents' aspirations, includes Objective 4.3

‘Strengthening the potential for social capital and forming the regional identity’: ‘The key role of ‘little homelands’ in the modern world, with their sense of common identity, traditional ties, and shared values, will be deepened and complemented with the people’s capacity for partnership cooperation for local and regional development. In this context, the support provided to organized forms of active citizenship and ensuring increased levels of trust in regional institutions is of particular importance. The development of the cultural and creative capital will be supported, as it plays an increasingly important role in the economy based on knowledge and ensures its innovative character, which is a key mechanism for change and development. A very important role in the development of citizens’ organizations will be played by the increased engagement of public institutions. The process of regional development that will also contribute to the formation of lasting regional identity, which, for historical reasons, is not as strong as in other Polish voivodeships, must include non-governmental organizations, entrepreneurs, representatives of various, sometimes informal social groups. Cultivating Polish traditions and the raising of national, civic and cultural consciousness, will also be essential for the building of social capital. Apart from creating an adequate material and organizational setting, the forming and strengthening of regional identity as well as the promoting of the broadly understood heritage of the region will also require making most of the most eminent people associated with Lubusz Voivodeship’.

Several conclusions can be drawn from the above. Firstly, the key mechanism for change and development is the development of cultural and creative capital. Secondly, the building of regional identity, which is still not strong enough in Lubusz Voivodeship, accompanied by the residents’ capacity for cooperation, will require the inclusion of citizens’ organizations in the process of development. Therefore, I cannot see the premises of positivism being continued with regard to grassroots work, where the education and enlightenment of lower social strata was achieved through the activity of higher strata. Nowadays we talk about the whole society being active through participation in public and social life, and about the development of organized forms of active citizenship. Even if one assumes the existence of social classes within the society, no differentiation is made between them with regard to the above activity; every person is free to be active in the area.

Some agreement can be said to exist between the contents of the document and the assumptions of positivism in the domain of organic work, where society is regarded as one organism; some analogy can be observed here to the concept of social capital. ‘Social capital regards interpersonal relationships as a potential source of useful resources, which can be

used by individuals or groups as means for achieving various objectives. Sociologists have shown interest in this issue as part of their search for the factors allowing and facilitating activities aimed at solving common problems of social groups, local communities and whole societies (...). Social relations and networks of relations between social units can be treated as resources allowing one to derive certain benefits.' (Kwiatkowski 2015).

However, the question arises whether this concept is a myth? Can the strategy of social activation impose a limitation to individuality? Will the implementation of activation measures aimed at solving common problems limit individuality?

According to D. Bazuń and M. Kwiatkowski (2015) there are three types of social capital:

1. bonding social capital – close relationships among members of small social groups (esp. family, friends, cliques, small groups);
2. bridging social capital – relationships among people belonging to different social groups;
3. linking social capital – relationships among people belonging to groups at different levels of societal power hierarchy.

The types of capital enumerated above serve different functions, but each of them stresses an individual person, whose development is based on the values derived from the established relationships. It can be concluded therefore that the strategy of activation does not limit individuality.

Is the strategy of social activation a measure of civic society? Civic society is characterized by active citizenship and the capacity for self-organization, one that is able to define and achieve aims without impetus from the state authorities. Civic society acts independently of state institutions. This independence does not have to mean competition between the society and authorities, which usually occurs in countries where the political system is contrary to the will of a majority of citizens. One of the fundamental characteristics of civic society is the fact that its members are aware of the needs of the society and strive to satisfy them, i.e. they show interest in matters concerning the whole society (community) and accept responsibility for its well-being (https://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Społeczeństwo_obywatelskie).

The studies conducted for the purposes of various strategies indicate a gradual return of interest in matters concerning the society, collective actions and institutions, which combine social causes with economic and/or political functions (such as organizations of economic self-government, social economy projects, local self-governments). The participation of citizens' organizations in the political and economic life is expected to increase. The multiannual

regional action plan for the promotion and dissemination of social economy and for the development of the social economy sector and its environment in Lubusz Voivodeship for the years 2013-2020 (Regionalny Ośrodek Polityki Społecznej 2013) stipulates the development of citizens' organizations, their dissemination and economic strengthening, points to the need for supporting local initiatives on the basis of the development of social economy. The social economy entities currently existing in Lubusz Voivodeship are spontaneous bottom-up initiatives, acting independently of state institutions and solving problems of local communities. At this stage it cannot be clearly stated that the strategy of social activation is a measure of civic society and does not limit individuality, but is it a myth resembling that known from positivism? Time will tell.

Conclusions

The conducted research shows that active citizenship of Poles is closely related to their social capital and the level of social inclusion. When planning measures aimed at increasing active citizenship of the society one should therefore take into consideration the process of complex activation, which in Lubusz Voivodeship must especially include dealing with the transmission of unemployment and combating unemployment-related poverty. The high effectiveness of the mentioned methods of activation, i.e. Social Integration Centres and transnational mobility, may indicate the direction in which the process of social inclusion should be oriented in its broad context, with the use of ample financial means offered by the European Social Fund. For Lubusz Voivodeship, better utilisation of the local potential and EU resources is a great opportunity to discard the concept of positivist myths.

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