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Non-governmental organizations (Sub-table No. 4)

The organizers and participants of the meeting of the thematic group „Non-Governmental Organizations” set themselves the goal of presenting both individual research on non-governmental organizations, as well as conducting a discussion on the ways of capturing social initiatives and recognizing their role in the shaping of social change. It was no less important, by reconstructing various research approaches and reflecting on them together, to answer the question of whether and to what extent the specificity of grassroots social movements supporting education is an area of potential cooperation with pedagogical universities and, in particular, with social pedagogues researching various areas of social activity.

The discussion was opened by Dr. Bohdan Skrzypczak with a question which at the same time constitutes a basis for joint reflection on whether many approaches assuming the educational dimension of social activity (pedagogies) and the laws governing the sub-discipline called social pedagogy constitute one common pedagogical world or are different „worlds” of pedagogy and commitment to social and educational change.

In addition to his statement, Agnieszka Naumiuk also recalled the ongoing challenges related to the pedagogical profession, including in particular the role of social pedagogue in the context of functions performed in the local environment and cooperation with various social partners in initiating, supporting, analyzing and evaluating various social initiatives. The reflection

on this issue was presented in the question about the role of the pedagogue as a creator and facilitator of social changes, as well as about the diagnostic, prognostic and evaluative tasks of contemporary researchers dealing with broadening dimensions of environmental education.

In the tone of such initiated discussion, subsequent opinions of the participants presented various, often different reflections on the role of social pedagogy and non-governmental practice within the framework of specific fields and research methodologies. At the same time, they were important voices of joint reflection on how the cooperation with the non-governmental sector could and should look like, what are the good or difficult experiences of researchers representing a broader theoretical view, being at the same time deeply involved in the modernization of social reality. Most of our participants performed a dual role: as social pedagogues – researchers/scientists as well as people working in or active in social organizations.

That is why these two perspectives were very strongly connected and made the discussion interesting in terms of content and presented the practical aspects of the discussed issue. The participants of the meeting shared their knowledge and insights, among others, about the strengths and weaknesses of both universities and social organizations, what in their opinion should be done to make this important area a platform for greater interest in research and practical cooperation aimed at improving social living conditions.

The presented individual research fields have become an inspiring opportunity for our group to discuss the social role of non-governmental organizations and pedagogical universities.

Anna Dudak presented the concept of creating an educational center formula based on the example of the National Center of Fatherhood (Narodowe Centrum Ojcostwa) in Warsaw. This example inspired us to state that non-governmental organizations as a social movement are becoming structured and professional, create centers of good practice, have more and more knowledge and professional skills. Pedagogues, on the other hand, in order to become more of a social movement committed to social change, need to go beyond the rigid framework of their institutional research boundaries, so that we can meet at the crossroads of theory and practice as experienced, collaborative social partners.

Barbara Kromolicka showed a number of good practices resulting from the cooperation between the Institute for Educational Research and the third sector for the benefit of changes in education. The team of social pedagogues from Szczecin has for years been implementing the principle of combining team and individual dynamics towards the shaping of change in the local environment. The assumption of combining theory and practice by

the researchers from this team is not only to focus on cooperation with the non-governmental sector, but also on guiding local social movements towards the development of a platform for integration and planned changes in the local environment. Examples of many interesting activities in Szczecin evoked in the group of participants a reflection on the importance of differences in the timing of response to social needs shown by social organizations and research universities. The participants indicated a significant dynamics of non-governmental organizations, their speed of reaction, courage to go beyond the borders of existing solutions in comparison to stable, even static university partners. We aptly called this a „multi-speed partnership”, showing that it is currently one of the key difficulties, sometimes giving rise to considerable frustration in the field of practice.

Barbara Janina Sochal, President of the Polish Janusz Korczak Association, in an equally moving speech entitled: „Does everyone know Korczak?” presented the idea of reviving and transmitting traditions and pedagogical ideas, which seemingly are known, but require constant effort of „explaining” them to new generations, demythologizing them, and a social discussion about actuality of meanings and values that they convey. She also drew attention to the need to conduct reliable research on the one hand, and to the promotion of its results by social organizations which could significantly reduce the falsification of history and social reality for political purposes, on the other. She also spoke about people excluded from scientific research and from our pedagogical memory, including Stefania Wilczyńska, remembered by the social movements.

Close to this idea was the presentation of Katarzyna Odyniec, who proposed to take a look at local initiatives operating in the multicultural environment of the Biała Podlaska district, using scraps of social memory as a factor binding and integrating the local environment.

The two previous speeches initiated a discussion on the role of remembrance in starting cooperation between social partners, recalling knowledge and tradition as an important factor of change for science and the environment. Thanks to them, the topic of remembrance disappearing and restored by social movements and their leaders was evoked. For remembrance is both the key to building and rebuilding the identity of local communities (the Biała Podlaska district) and the reference to the transmission of patterns from the past to the present, so that they not only live but also revive the present (the Korczak Association).

The subject of Magdalena Kuleta-Hulboj’s speech was cooperation between non-governmental organizations and higher education institutions in

the area of education of students in the field of global education. The Liverpool Hope University and Liverpool World Centre cooperation case study provided an opportunity to discuss whether social organizations and the actions they initiate can bring about a change in higher education teaching. We also discussed the conditions, potential and limitations of such cooperation.

The next two speeches concerned the role of non-governmental organizations and social pedagogy in building local communities: Agnieszka Bzymek pointed to the importance of pedagogy involved in the local community on the example of the analysis of the seniors' history of life in the context of the phenomenon of „resilience”, and Anna Rutkowska demonstrated that the pedagogical thought should pay attention to local development led by the community itself. The main question in her research concerned how to move from idea to action in the implementation of the concept of grassroots activity.

The subsequent statements in the discussion concerned the role of non-governmental organizations in restoring dignity to the elderly and terminally ill. Marta Kulesza, in her research on the role of seniors in the process of treating children and teenagers addicted to psychoactive substances”, showed good practices of intergenerational activity of non-governmental organizations through the analysis of the „Senior Mentor” project, and Agnieszka Lisiecka-Bednarczyk presented the possibilities of non-governmental organizations in supporting people experiencing difficult, traumatic situations that require long-term support. These speeches prompted us to reflect on the role of protection and assistance in difficult situations, when non-governmental activities restore hope in the good of another person and the willingness to share this good with others.

However, our group had also the task to consider how these inspirations lead us to more universal reflections on the factors that facilitate or impede the cooperation with non-governmental organizations.

The participants pointed to many features of social organizations that should be taken into account when initiating, strengthening, maintaining and analyzing the activity of social organizations, defining the framework and estimating the scope of possible cooperation:

1. Immersion in social practice resulting, on the one hand, in significant practical knowledge, understanding of the needs of people for whom the activities are carried out, and on the other hand, in a limited scope for conducting research, lack of time needed to prepare them, quiet reflection, understanding of the details of the methodological rigor that scientific research is subject to.

2. Courage in taking actions which are not taken by public institutions – this is an extremely interesting and valuable area of research on innovation, as well as an effective social partner who is not afraid of the risk of introducing recommended or experimental actions offered by researchers, sincerely reveals systemic and institutional deficiencies and failures, fights against regulations that are unfavorable to groups and individuals.
3. Huge human potential and social capital at the disposal of social organizations, which is worth supporting, developing, researching, setting as an example, but also analyzing difficulties, limitations and negative consequences of high social activity. It was emphasized that in social organizations focused on helping others sometimes the organizational potential is smaller than in public institutions, which may also result in lower efficiency, as well as weaker communication and worse public image.
4. Flexible structure, giving the possibility of quick changes, causes the cooperation with such organizations to result in better conditions for introducing innovations, adaptation of new working methods, adaptation to rapidly changing social needs, which means that especially people who are at risk of exclusion due to slow reactions of social systems have a chance to get help in social organizations and they are in a way the first informants about new, emerging social needs, threats, lifestyles, etc.
5. Declared openness to cooperation, also with social pedagogues – academics – social organizations are very eager to take advantage of the opportunities for cooperating in research, organizing internships and other possibilities of cooperation. The organizations are looking for allies, assistance, knowledge and resources to support their day-to-day work.
6. Expert knowledge and professional preparation of social organizations, sometimes supported by many years of practical and research experience, which is an inspiration for didactic changes at universities (e.g. global education, anti-discrimination education or equality education).

The need to support non-governmental organizations by social pedagogues and other researchers dealing with issues of education, knowledge and skills and experience in the scope of, e.g.: diagnosing social problems; noticing the broader context of conducted analyses and activities on practice, assistance in preparing applications for co-financing of social activities, especially in the scope of justifying the purpose of the project, assistance in evaluating the effects of work was also emphasized.

Difficulties preventing non-governmental organizations from making better use of the research potential of social pedagogues were pointed out as

well. This includes the lack of knowledge of the non-governmental community about the resources and capabilities of universities and individual researchers. It was explicitly stated that „the social pedagogues must prove their value” – promote their research among practitioners, promote their willingness to cooperate in the area of joint research, although the organizations are not always able to take advantage of such an offer.

According to the participants, there are also obstacles on the side of universities, which make it more difficult for social pedagogues to become more involved in cooperation with internship institutions. They stressed that the social pedagogue must also prove their value at universities – as a researcher of educational phenomena. As the second, no less important difficulty, it was pointed out that practical activity is unwelcome at universities, because it can distract theoreticians, causing them to use their time to help practice, which does not have a direct impact on producing highly scored articles and conducting highly specialized scientific research. In this point, a change in the current parametric evaluation has been noted, drawing attention to the development of innovations by universities, proving their practical value, but in the case of pedagogy it is still an area of tension around the objectives of the higher education institutions, especially the role of universities, which very often conduct research of a narrow scope, which does not have an effect on their practical use in particular by social organizations. Additionally: universities do not promote practical activity, volunteering, although the New Higher Education Act (2018) already contains provisions which change this; there are considerable differences in flexibility and mobility of work in the functioning of universities and non-governmental organizations; on the university side there are several administrative barriers, e.g. in terms of transferring funds, thinking only in terms of financial projects, but also some schematic thinking about the organizations as performers of assigned tasks, for example in case of settling grants is perceived. In addition, the politicization of the transfer of funds and the objectification of organizations and beneficiaries also play a significant role today.

Hence, in the area of discussion, many doubts arose over the tasks of social pedagogues in the context of cooperation with non-governmental organizations, e.g. the following questions were asked:

- What is the role of the social pedagogue today?
- What are the social expectations and expectations of universities? Should the social pedagogue be a creator or a companion of creators of social change?
- How should their work be evaluated and how should social activities be evaluated from the perspective of social pedagogy?

- What should the co-building of education reality consist in?
- What are the forms of joint planning and implementation?
- How to conduct critical reflection on important and necessary activity, characterized by extraordinary emotionality and commitment – and therefore in situations that are difficult to be more objective, sometimes treating critical reflection as an attack?

Among the opportunities and tasks of cooperation with non-governmental organizations, the main focus was on the potential for designing the future, possibilities of combining pedagogical activities with organizations, implementation of plans and pedagogical projects by non-governmental organizations, the possibility of diagnosing needs by universities, conducting various expert opinions, as well as mutual support in initiating activities, social integration, promoting educational volunteering as an element of civil education and forming social sensitivity, as well as jointly developing tools to introduce democratic ideas in schools.

The participants advocated the model of cooperation below, which strengthens the integration of different roles in the collective concept of „research and action” preserving the value of professional practice and in-depth scientific reflection in a three-part process:

1. Social reality research and diagnosing needs (social pedagogy).
 2. Professional implementation of activity (non-governmental organizations).
 3. Investigating the social effects of conducted activities (social pedagogy).
- According to the participants of the meeting, it is a formula of cooperation and use of potentials instead of attempts to combine different roles by one institution (sometimes one individual), carrying the danger of lower quality of both research and activity). The cooperation in the joint implementation of this model requires proper communication, knowledge of the partner and cooperation standards.

Researchers gathered in the discussion group emphasized a number of advantages and new opportunities for non-governmental organizations brought by effective diagnostics of social problems and educational needs, applying the wide range of knowledge and expert skills of social pedagogues (or exchange of expert knowledge when a non-governmental organization has more knowledge in a given field), and the possibility of conducting various types of training. In their opinion, it is beneficial not only for a non-governmental organization but also for a social pedagogue: it has opportunities for development, going beyond previous experiences, personal self-development and institutional development support, the opportunity to learn about the functioning of social

partners and the environment, including various institutions of the city and the region, to supplement knowledge.

Apart from the formal advantages of raising the university's evaluation index in relation to cooperation with the surrounding environment, the establishment of a real partnership forum is an opportunity to activate students and show the interdisciplinary character of research and it leads to the development of pedagogy and pedagogues.

At the end of the discussion, the participants stressed that despite the above mentioned dilemmas of cooperation, we should reach out to non-governmental organizations with ideas for cooperation. They are not only an important social area for the implementation of pedagogical initiatives, but also an increasingly important place of work and internships for students, as well as a place to experience and study social problems, which for many pedagogues is related to the need to enjoy life and professional satisfaction when they have the opportunity to combine these two areas: research and action, theory and practice, understanding problems and needs and seeking solutions. As a result, it is also possible to accelerate social change and introduce innovations in current research and internship institutions.