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Neighborhood initiatives and movements
(Sub-table No. 6)

Participants of the discussion: Mariusz Cichosz, Halina Guzy–Steinke, Beata Górnicka, Bożena Kanclerz, Marta Pietrusińska, Astrid Tokaj, Paulina Głowacka, Marcin Szostakowski, Tomasz Herman, Tomasz Kamiński

In our cognitive variant of the discussion focused on *Neighborhood initiatives and movements*, we proposed – as coordinators – first of all to take a closer look at the notion of the „social neighborhood". The discussion of our interviewees outlined two perspectives on the neighborhood in Poland, which corresponded with theoretical findings, already drawn from „expert sociological knowledge", appearing in many publications dealing with this issue. On the one hand, it was emphasized that the social neighborhood, determined by the contacts and relations between residents, is changeable. Globalization processes, new communication technologies, industrialization, urbanization, significant mobility have significantly influenced the foundations of the constitution of the present territorial communities. Superficiality, pragmatism or commoditization define today the nature of interpersonal relations and neighborhood ties, which results in a deficit of trust and cooperation. Moreover, normative uncertainty, omnipresent mosaicism (expressed in behaviors, actions, decisions), pluralism, flexibility cause insecurity and increase the feeling of confusion (associated with the words of Beck and Giddens). In addition, the processes of privatization, individualization of human biographies and consumer modernity result in the emergence of a man distanced from the neighborhood, cherishing his/her own

privacy (studies by Wellman, 1979 and Fischer, 1982 were cited). The links between the people who form the society and which – within the society – are therefore less and less stable (Bujwicka 2011, p. 104 et seq.).

On the other hand, it was emphasized that „in the face of the progressing processes of On the other hand, it was emphasized that „in the face of the progressing processes of globalization, individualization, popularization of uniformized consumption patterns, the need to feel a sense of belonging becomes apparent" along with the need to awaken local and regional awareness (Bujwicka 2011, p. 104), in line with the results of the research by Unger and Wandersman, 1983. The publication titled *Od obyczaju do mody. Przemiany życia codziennego* (*From tradition to fashion. Transformations of everyday life*) by Joanna Zalewska and Marta Cobel-Tokarska from 2014 was also mentioned.

Introduction to the joint discussion was therefore a short, fragmentary description of contemporary reality, including the condition of man functioning in various everyday contexts, sometimes surprising, sometimes difficult to define, sometimes so obvious, that they were forgotten…. And yet: „Neighborhoods are the most local communities in terms of place." And the majority of people intuitively sense what is hidden behind this category – „thanks to neighborhood interactions, mutual support, joint gatherings and a friendly, attractive environment, or – in the case of „bad neighborhoods". – as a result of threats to security, anti-social interactions, feelings of exclusion, isolation and neglect', although, as it turns out, the characteristics of the neighborhoods include both physical and social features (top-down administrative „geography" and subjective identification with the place of residence), giving rise to certain difficulties in defining them unequivocally (aspects: environmental – topography, pollution; vicinity – location, transport infrastructure; buildings and more generally infrastructure – type, design, material, density, renovations, roads, appearance of streets; demography – age, social status, ethnic diversity, mobility of residents; accessibility and quality of local services; social interactivity – friends' and family networks, local associations, groups, informal interactions, social control mechanisms; sentimental – identification with a place, its historical meaning, local stories; political – territorial parties, political networks, citizen's involvement) (*Jak należy rozumieć i definiować sąsiedztwa?, p.* 7, 10). Referring to the two forms of social life distinguished by Ferdinand Tönnies: Gemeinschaft (community) and Gesellschaft (association) and taking into account the processes mentioned above, transforming reality and thus influencing people's way of functioning and their expectations, one can ask the question: how are these two components present at the moment? „To what extent have community

social forms survived and to what extent do they remain in relation to the association-organizational forms? Have any „new" forms of community appeared?" (*Sąsiedztwa i mikroorganizacje w polskiej przestrzeni społecznej – próba diagnozy i rekomendacje,* 2009, p. 17, 19).

The important stage of the meeting was therefore the first part of the discussion – an attempt to answer the question: what is the situation? Taking into account the factors shaping the social neighborhood, i.e.: the environmental factors, social situation, socio-occupational status of residents, local satisfaction, emotional attachment to a given place of residence, as well as the age of residents, it was established that:

— The social neighborhood does not disappear, it is still an important „component" of the organization of social life and is one of the most important elements of its quality. It is not possible to speak of total social isolation, but there is a noticeable difference in the degree of social involvement of residents (this is confirmed by the results of research, e.g. by Guest and Wierzbicki 1999; Leszkowicz-Baczyńska 2001), which is why it is not possible to return to the neighborhood in line with the former traditional community. The desired type of neighborhood relations is currently rather a contact with a low degree of social commitment and a certain distance.

— The neighbors are therefore expected to provide occasional but mutual assistance. Generally speaking, neighborhood relations come down to various types of behavior. Referring to the typology of neighborhoods (due to the type of ties), one can indicate the following neighborhoods: limiting (awareness of having neighbors and therefore not taking actions that could disturb them), informed (having information about neighbors, their lives, situations, etc.), conventional (mainly exchange of courtesy returns), neighborhood of services (exchange of services), of solidarity (acting in the name of the common good) and social and friendly neighborhood (close relations, including, for example, mutual visits, spending free time) (Kryczka 1981). The results of a study carried out in Wrocław in 1998 were also referred to, where five categories of neighborhood relations and corresponding types of neighbors were distinguished: alienated (limited neighborhood relations), courteous (mainly a casual exchange of greetings, and closer relations maintained with a few families in the neighborhood), helping (broad networks characteristic of the neighborhood of services), friendly (close relations, of social nature), involved (extensive network of neighborhood relations, characteristic for all distinguished types) (Błaszczyk 2007, p. I. 164–165)

and from Łódź, realized at the turn of 2001 and 2002, where the following types of metropolitan neighborhoods were distinguished: pragmatic (mainly people aged between 45 and 65); private (especially the oldest people over 65) and sentimental and ritual (mainly young people under 29) (Bujwicka 2011, p. 111 et seq.), and then those results were compared with the tendencies observed after several years.

— The return to locality and rootedness takes place at different levels. From daily routines, to changes in the actions of city leaders or changes in promotional strategies. It is connected with the interest in the immediate space.

At this point, a review of activities undertaken in different regions of Poland was presented, indicating on the one hand the increasing popularity of such activities and, on the other hand, the variety of initiatives. And so, mentioned were: Q Neighborhood Movement from Warsaw (a very vigorous educational and animation initiative, promoting local cultural and social activities, supporting residents in the preparation of the Neighbor's Day), Gdańsk Neighborhood Days, which already have a long tradition (in 2018, the 10th edition was organized, with 169 meetings submitted), Gdynia and the idea of the Neighborhood Center, Wrocław and an idea for neighborhood strolls, Kościerzyna and the so-called neighborhood barbecue, or Poznań and the Neighbor's Day at ul. św. Marcin, as well as the Wilda on the move Festival (rich in shows, performances, workshops, concerts, etc.) These events / initiatives include various forms of activity addressed to people of all ages, e.g. colorful backyard animations, sports and arts activities, board games, ecological workshops, family fairs, photo exhibitions, garage sales, neighborhood cinema, meetings with guides who tell about the history of the area, etc. Neighborhood initiatives can also contribute to the revitalization of local space, e.g. through artistic initiatives (with the participation of animators, artists, designers, architects), often resulting in larger social activities, engaging residents and strengthening their awareness of responsibility for the place where they live.

Neighborhood initiatives, including those undertaken within the framework of the Neighborhood Day, which has already been organized in many towns and cities, have therefore become an important phenomenon in the local space and resulted in specific changes, as evidenced by the results of research conducted by the Q-Neighborhood Movement in 2014 (during the fifth edition of the Warsaw event). Attention was drawn to: mutual acquaintance of neighbors, better recognition of faces and names, increase in the level of universal kindness, integration of people involved in the preparation of activities, selection of neighborhood leaders, increased activity

of residents, development of valuable cooperation with local institutions, housing communities, as well as with business. The organizers, on the other hand, emphasized the fact of significant attendance of residents of various age categories. The lack of unnecessary formalities and bureaucracy and, of course, the grassroots nature of the initiative were also considered to be a big plus. At that time almost 75% of the organizers were pleased, expressing satisfaction with the activity they proposed and undertook, and 88% declared a clear willingness to continue it (Konarzewska 2014, p. 54 et seq.).

There is also the topic of neighborhood houses and neighborhood clubs, which aim to appeal to the basic values that constitute social life, namely: solidarity and openness to diversity (in every form: age, ethnic, religious, etc.). It was reminded that the aim of their efforts is to activate the residents through: „strengthening interpersonal relations; building local identity; joint action; taking responsibility; providing programmes/services in response to identified needs". The Neighborhood House is to be accessible to all those who make up the local community. And undoubtedly it can play an important role, as it „builds social potential by involving the resources of individuals, families, informal groups, organizations, local institutions, entrepreneurs and local government", and „using local resources, is based on the neighborhood." It provides residents with, among other things: meeting rooms, that is, a place encouraging building and strengthening the neighborhood and sharing information and experiences; space for those who want to engage in volunteering; a „point" where programmes that meet the various needs of the community (a day care center for youth, a club for residents, a chess group, etc.); support for staff professionally prepared to work with the community, including, of course, a social animator; environment open to heterogeneity and stimulating to activity, including positive models and inspirations (Neighborhood House Model 2011, p. 15 et seq.).

In relation to the issue raised, the topic of identifying and giving appropriate character to such initiatives, and more specifically of their similarity to institutions already existing in the community, offering cultural, sporting, etc. services to residents and the differences between them was also addressed. It was emphasized that in this case it is the residents themselves who co-create the house/club/center (complementing the local institutional offer), are initiators, inspirers, have a chance to „infect" others with their passions. This way they can also feel a natural, unforced responsibility for the place where they live.

These specific examples also gave rise to the need to reflect on the specificity of neighborhood activities undertaken in territorially diversified

locations (large city vs. rural areas), as well as the importance of neighborhoods in gated communities. A reminder was made that there are two contradictory views on the impact of gated communities on neighborhood bond. The first is that this bond is very weak, because the residents are anonymous, do not establish relations, do not maintain contacts and their privacy is important to them. And the second one says that the creation of a defensible space (Oscar Newman's concept) is in fact intended to strengthen this bond (thanks to the fence residents gain a sense of security and control, which encourages them to have more frequent contacts) (Szczepańska, p. 11).

The multitude of issues undertaken is evidenced by the topics particularly exposed by the participants of the discussion. An interesting social initiative, taking place in Warsaw, was presented by Marcin Szostakowski, who described the Warsaw Breakfast Fair, which promotes a new way of spending free time by the residents. Everyone agreed that social initiatives affect the development of good neighborhood relations, which not only make living in a given place more comfortable, but also affect safety and a sense of rootedness.

On the other hand, Bożena Kanclerz pointed out the importance of the school as an initiator of neighborhood activity. The idea of a community school – active, open, on the one hand inspired by activities undertaken in its immediate surroundings, and on the other hand – inspiring the neighborhood and its residents – emerges very clearly here. Undoubtedly, locality and the formation of neighborhood bonds need infrastructure – places to meet, as well as investments in local capital. This opinion was embraced by Tomasz Kamiński, an animator of the neighborhood movement, the owner of a restaurant/café in Poznań, who shared his observations on the basis of many years of experience in this field.

The second part of the discussion concerned the importance of neighborhood in life, education and training. The participants tried to answer the question: What challenges arise in the context of the future, or, using the language of social pedagogy – how could it be? Or how should it be?

When you look for ways to achieve better neighborhood integration and intensify neighborhood initiatives and movements, there is a need to reflect on the challenges faced by social pedagogy, but also by social life in general. It is, among others: – *Education to „neighborhood culture"*, i.e. to everyday politeness, to selfless kindness, which should be universal, education to mutual respect, respect for privacy and individualism. It is already known that good quality of public life increases individual satisfaction from living in the place of residence. The neighborhood culture is also a challenge for the neighborhood movement, which means developing new relations, ideas and definitions of our

neighborhood. These include discussions about local behaviors (observance of housing estate rules), which requires from the residents the ability of dialogue and the attitude of tolerance, as well as fair and just „social compromise" – referring to the words of John Paul II.

- *Education to actions based on values.* The object of the activities is the other person, the existence of faith in the good in people, the existence of faith in social ties and the confidence in the sense of undertaken neighborhood activities. A significant role is played by local patriotism and social solidarity, as well as trust in other people – says Paweł Jordan, President of the Support Office for the Movement of Social Initiatives, animator of the neighborhood movement in Warsaw (as quoted in: Henzler (ed.) 2012).
- *Education to democratic action and making changes in the place of residence* Through activities such as organizing neighborhood initiatives, exchanging experiences, sharing knowledge, building support, promoting models and behaviors of good neighborhood kindness, we can achieve goals that are worth to be emphasized once again: awakening the „spirit" of cooperation between neighbors, stimulating residents to implement social initiatives, strengthening neighborhood bonds, developing joint responsibility for the local environment.

In this context the following topics fitted in very well: The topic of Halina Guzy-Steinke and the issue of the presence of somebody new, an alien, a foreigner in the changing social reality; Marta Pietrusińska's topic, dealing with the important issue of the (anti inclusive nature of neighborhood initiatives in relation to groups excluded from local participation processes, where the theme of civic participation, which can take place and takes place in different aspects and on different levels, with the participation (more or less, in the context and proposals and decisions) of many entities, including institutions and organizations, has been highlighted, what raises an important question about their impact on typical neighborhood activities, as well as the topic of Beata Górnicka, drawing attention to the significance of neighbors in relation to families with disabilities, where some difficulties resounded, resulting from the adopted attitudes, ignorance, lack of knowledge, but also positive indicators of these relations, observed in the neighborhood space.

It was also noted that the neighborhood initiatives are actions of a typically „positive" character, i.e. undertaken so that the inhabitants could be active, have a chance to spend their time nicely/usefully, do „something" together, or of a typically „negative" character, being a reaction to a difficult

situation, requiring intervention/ objection, while at the same time uniting to the problem, which may constitute the beginning of further, joint actions taken.

In the end, the discussion revealed a very clear need to remove barriers hindering the formation and development of creative and active attitudes All interlocutors agreed that there is no shortage of such. They may result, among other things, from the lack of awareness that something can be done, it is worth acting together; from the – still dominant – internal conviction that „it is best if everyone lives their own life and has no interest in anything else"; from the lack of stimulus that triggers this „first spark"; from previous negative experiences in this regard. Moreover, as the results of the CBOS (Public Opinion Research Center) study show, „Poles are rather mistrustful in social life", being very cautious in contacts with other people (the average value of the index in relation to the surveyed population in 2018 was -0.89, the negative sign means that „in Polish society mistrust and caution in the attitude towards others generally takes precedence over trust and openness") and this has not changed for years (CBOS, publication no.: 35/2018).

And yet: „A good neighborhood is the one in which a compromise is worked out, which seeks […] to bring about changes in the common space. It is also a meeting of people with different competences and skills. It is a discussion about common issues". (Kalita 2016, p. 17). Therefore, it should be stated that an important feature of contemporary reality (including democracy) becomes, as Tadeusz Pilch points out: „the art of building a local and global community and the ability to live together in such a community […], a common sense of responsibility for the fate of the community and for the fate of the «weaker»". (Pilch 1995, p. 265). The concept of „small homelands" and environmental education, which addresses the issues of social life, culture or social issues, provide a good platform for the tasks and opportunities in this area, as well as an appropriate perspective for their undertaking.

At the end of the never-ending debate, a proposal was put forward for a new meeting in the form of a discussion forum, the title of which would be: *Pedagogy of co-existence as an inspiration to act in the sphere of local life.* The meeting is scheduled for 2019. As coordinators of the discussion about neighborhood initiatives and movements, we would like to thank all the participants of our sub-table for their active participation in the discussion and willingness to share their knowledge and experience from working in local communities, while inviting them to further cooperation.

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