THE INFLUENCE OF LOCAL SUPPORT SYSTEMS ON ENFRANCHISEMENT OF THE COMMUNITY METHOD IN SOCIAL WORK

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Abstract

Background. In local communities in Poland, introduction of innovative social work solutions which are directed towards solving particular problem cases and move beyond the current standard of social work in welfare centres, is a complex process fraught with many obstacles. It is only rarely a part of social issues management in local communities. This paper is concerned with qualitative research focused on the factors contributing to the effectiveness of initiatives utilizing the OLC (Organizing Local Community, Organizowanie Społeczności Lokalnej) method, which commenced in 2010–2014, under point 5.4 of the systemic project Human Capital Operational Program (Program Operacyjny Kapitał Ludzki) named "Creating and developing the standards of social help and integration – Standards in help" (Tworzenie i rozwijanie standardów pomocy i integracji społecznej – Standardy w pomocy).

Research aims. The aim of this paper is to identify and determine factors that influence, whether positively or negatively, the spread and establishment of innovative methods of working with communities experiencing social problems in social welfare centres. It focuses on factors associated both with internal social welfare centre management, with social issues management, and with the bodies created to solve them within a given local community.

Methodology. The research was conducted using the case study method in three localities and was supposed to appraise the subsequent fates of three social welfare centres in which new activities have been initiated under the systemic project, as well as the fates of social workers employed in them for organising local communities.

Key findings. Thanks to the research conducted and data gathered, we managed to highlight a number of contexts and circumstances which exert heavy influence over the functioning of social welfare centres as well as over the effectiveness of methods of working with communities experiencing social issues. Such contexts have both internal (e.g. the attitude of a centre's employees towards a given issue and

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their work) and external (e.g. the attitude of local government or other institutions towards a given social problem) character.

INTRODUCTION

Managing social issues in local communities consists of numerous elements, such as:

- determining and defining particular situations as problematic;
- placing them on a scale of importance;
- seeing them in wider frameworks of local/social order;
- searching for explanation for why certain issues are singled out as more important socially;
- identifying the root causes;
- searching for answers on how to deal with social issues, what social actions should be taken, and who should they be directed at and at what scale.

The last point, that is the one pertaining to creating strategies and taking action is key to our research interests and analysis (including this paper) and constitutes its most basic, widest frame.

The case study research was prompted by the results of five years of observing a local community where innovative OLC (Organizing Local Community, Organizowanie Społeczności Lokalnej) methods were being introduced under point 5.4 of the systemic project Human Capital Operational Program (Program Operacyjny Kapitał Ludzki) named "Creating and developing the standards of social help and integration – Standards in help" (Tworzenie i rozwijanie standardów pomocy i integracji społecznej – Standardy w pomocy). Actions and interventions conducted by social workers using these methods and the reaction to them from various partners and local institutions were examples of managing social issues in local communities.

The results of our observation turned out to be very surprising, both in data gathered as well as in the research process itself. Therefore, we became convinced that we should take a closer look at the process of introducing and enfranchising initiatives that can be described as innovative, as well as that we should identify circumstances and factors which shape that process.

COMMUNITY WORK WITHIN A PUBLIC SUPPORT SYSTEM

Alongside working with an individual or family and working in the group method, community work is one of the three basic methods of social work. In the most basic terms, it means animating and organising local communities: it is the:

> (…) process of giving people support to make group efforts towards improving their own community, as well as a method of (usually) professional action aimed towards the mobilisation of the community to work towards improving its situation (Wódz, 2013, p. 1).

Towards the end of 1960s, Jack Rotham selected out and described two basic models of working with local communities:

- The first one is planning and politics (empowering the government with publicly-available information necessary for developing a range of services). Its essence is in analysing empirical data, which leads to planning and executing new solutions, as well as public advocacy, that is strengthening the mechanisms of public participation with especial regard to communities which are politically marginalised. The key assumption here is that pressure is the best possible mode of action against individuals or institutions which are responsible for inducing problems or standing in the way of resolving them. This approach often calls on the ideas of social justice and equality and leads to conflict where interests clash.
- The second is described as the development of community potential. Its key assumption is that real change occurs when people experiencing trouble become empowered through knowledge and abilities necessary for them to understand their issues and subsequently commence group effort (cooperation) for overcoming said issues (Rothman, 2017).

In Poland, this latter approach has still to spread. Despite having roots in the tradition of community pedagogy from the period of the Second Polish Republic, it is instead treated as an innovation. The Polish social welfare system is, to the present day, dominated by passive, direct monetary aid, such as doles or sickness benefits. It stems from 1989 model of social politics as directed towards ensuring

social security and therefore ameliorating the side-effects of change in the political system. The basic consequences of this is the bureaucratisation of social policy as institutional, which in effect causes social workers, overburdened with bureaucracy and the need to document their work meticulously, and have no time and energy for social and community work.

The consequences of that can be seen in the ways that social welfare centres are managed. On the level of the state's central social policy, many potential solutions exist that could facilitate the development of the community method in Poland. An example of them would be introducing a separation between benefit work (bureaucracy work) and social work. However, in Polish social welfare institutions, there still is no differentiation between community, "field working" social workers and administration workers concerned with maintaining documentation. In the case of managing such a bureaucratized and (crucially) hierarchical system, macro-scale legislation solutions are key in the process of introducing change and enabling the "new approach" to take root. Top-down directives are of key importance in spreading and enfranchising particular organisational solutions on a wider scale. An extended analysis of systemic factors shaping the Polish welfare system can be found in a volume edited by Mirosław Grewiński and Bohdan Skrzypczak – Środowiskowe usługi społeczne – *nowa perspektywa polityki i pedagogiki społecznej* (*Community Social Services – A New Perspective on Politics Social Pedagogy*) (Grewiński & Skrzypczak, 2011), an in particular in a monograph by Mirosław Grewiński: *Od administrowania do zarządzania usługami społecznymi* (*From Administering to Managing Social Services*) (Grewiński, 2011).

Undeniable macro-scale conditions do not change the fact that the real change is not possible without micro-scale reorganisation happening on the level of functioning on individual local government institutions, that is social welfare centres working with particular local communities. The community method needs to always be adjusted to local conditions. The conditions indicated above show that a fully-fledged (when compared to other methods) embrace of the community method in social welfare centres can still be seen as a social innovation being enacted and implemented on the local level.

This state of affairs was supposed to be changed through point 5.4 of the systemic project Human Capital Operational Program (Program Operacyjny Kapitał Ludzki) named "Creating and developing the

standards of social help and integration – Standards in help" (Tworzenie i rozwijanie standardów pomocy i integracji społecznej – Standardy w pomocy). During the program, social workers went through a two-year training cycle and implemented their own local project that fit within the framework of Model Środowiskowej Pracy Socjalnej/Organizowania Społeczności Lokalnej (Community Social Work Model/Organizing Local Community Model) (Bąbska et. al., 2014). It needs to be mentioned that the final goal of the project was to introduce the community method as the main mode of social welfare centres' operation, but it was not achieved. While participation in the project was not just the result of an individual worker's decision, but also of the decision of the social welfare centre that employed them (indicating its openness for institutional change), the change in operation happened only at the level of individual centres, not in systemic solutions.

From the management point of view, the OLC model is implemented on three main levels:

- the first one is that of the most important implementer, that is the social worker, as the person organising their local community – it is the level of their roles, objectives and competencies in realising their professional occupation;
- the second one is of the social worker as a part of the institution that employs them and, more broadly, within their professional social services work environment;
- the third level consists of organising the local community as a social service in an institutional and precautionary sense, which takes that process outside the bounds of social welfare institutions and into the entire, public and non-public institutional environment, including local government.

Projects undertaken by social workers were accompanied by a two-year qualitative research programme aimed at diagnosing the effects of OLC on the social environment, with special interest in the communities being directly addressed by aforementioned projects of social workers. According to the model, the OLC method is addressed to communities threatened with social exclusion, due to both territorial (such as in the cases of social housing projects tenants, inhabitants of large housing complexes or people living in post-industrial or post-collectivized areas) and social causes (e.g. the elderly, the disabled, children, and teenagers). It needs to be stressed, however, that, at the core, OLC treats the local community integrally. A change that starts with

a micro-community (for example inhabitants of a single street or a flat, or a senior group) needs to be, from the start, oriented towards affecting a wider structure (a city block, district, village, county, or a similar unit) (Bąbska et al., 2014, pp. 11–12).

Social change effected through planned intervention is the foundational analytical category used in both research projects that this article is based on. This change is understood not as a definite, precise moment that can be observed, but as an initiated, long-term, complex process, shaped by the shifts in the management process. As the local community organiser is:

> (…) the link between a single community member and the community as a whole, then between the community as a whole and organisations and government, and then often also between them all and people who professionally work on building local communities, and who are employed by the district, town, village, various organisations and institutions (Gerrits & Vlaar 2011, p. 5),

the main focus of the research was the process in which their projects were executed and how they influenced the institutional environment and the project community's potential. During the first year, the research was conducted in eight places (two cities, three towns, three villages), and four of them were qualified to the second stage (two cities, one town, one village). An extensive presentation of the findings was published by Instytut Spraw Publicznych under the title *Oblicza zmiany lokalnej – studia przypadków* (*The Faces of Community Change – Case Studies*) (Dudkiewicz, 2013).

The research described above was concluded in October 2012. One of the places analysed, initially turned out to be a big success (Dudkiewicz & Górniak, 2013). However, a few years later, the researchers received information that all the accomplished goals have become forfeit and the OLC method ceased to function as one of the methods of social work supported and recommended by the institutional leadership. Due to that fact, a new stage of research became necessary. Five years after the original project's conclusion, the new research project took on a different focus. During the original phases, pragmatic questions took lead. The research, as a part of enacting the project, had a predominantly evaluatory character, and served to appraise the functioning of an innovative method (its efficacy, adequacy, the level to which it could affect the community). The latter part of the research,

meanwhile, arose from scientific curiosity and focused on finding the answer to the question on what factors and conditions support the enfranchisement of the OLC method in institutional enterprises (and which render more difficult), after project and legal support are gone. In a wider perspective, the research goal was identifying and naming contexts which influence managing institutions that embrace new work methods, and which influence the managing of social issues. Therefore, three separate cases were selected for case study research, each encompassing a different aspect of OLC's execution.

The first case, the de facto starting point of our research, was a situation where the OLC method had been effectively put to action, its effects became visible on the institutional level of a social welfare centre and it seemed to become firmly rooted in the activities and management of said institution. Effects that can be described as spectacular became also visible on the level of the socially marginalised community, both on an individual and social level. Changes in the relations with the environment appeared, resources increased alongside opportunities for action, the community became empowered. However, after the systemic project's conclusion, further work in the OLC method was barred and a decision was made to suspend the activities undertaken during the project and to not initiate further such actions. Such failure can also be described as spectacular.

The second case selected for research had a similar start, but a different conclusion. The community which took part in the systemic project managed to effectively utilize the OLC method and after the project's conclusion in 2012 decided to continue it, while the OLC method became an important part of the repertoire available to the local social welfare centre and its employees. This case nicely showcases the progressivist ideal of small steps – the method was at first slowly tested, and then gradually grew from something that was an addition to or a gap-filler in work to the leading form of a social welfare centre's operations.

The third case taken into consideration in our research is a community which did not take part in the aforementioned systemic project. Therefore, neither the institution, nor its employees have received the level of support as the communities that participated in it. Despite that, after having learned the principles and standards of the OLC method, they introduced and spread it around. In effect, it became one of the leading ways the local social welfare centre operates. In this

case, people working in the OLC method, as well as the institution itself, including its management, had to overcome the most barriers and obstacles in adapting to the method, since they did not receive the package of knowledge, information and abilities that was forwarded to the centres participating in the systemic project. Therefore, the social welfare centre that is the object of our research had to reach all of that on its own.

Our research took into consideration only those factors which are directly associated with the question of management. Without doubt, management is one of the key elements in the process of the OLC's method becoming enfranchised. Once the systemic project ended, any sort of an external support (be it content-related, organisational or educational) for community work ceased, and so what was happening five years hence was solely the result of local-level decisions made in particular social welfare centres. For them, it was a complex organisational challenge, which required adding new bureaus, educating social workers, giving them new professional roles and – what was perhaps the biggest hurdle – properly locating them within the entire team of social workers (see more on that below). Such a state of affairs is mostly the result of the aforementioned lack of political decisions with regards to including the community method as an important mode of operation within the Polish social welfare system.

SOCIAL WORKER IN AN INSTITUTION – MANAGING THE PERSONNEL

For the OLC method to take root in a social welfare institution, the first order of business is to include this mode of activity in the entire range of the institution's functions. Obviously, this cannot be accomplished without a positive attitude from the very people responsible for enacting such actions – the social workers. This necessitates a willing participation coming from a conviction that such actions are correct and can be successful. Perhaps their execution should not only be seen by them as a professional obligation, but also a chance for a personal and professional growth – an opportunity to escape routine, to strengthen their own position in the institution and in the system of local governance, all thanks to networking opportunities and processing feedback about oneself and projects being enacted. However,

for that to be fully possible, an approach needs to be introduced to institutional management which would ensure that the OLC initiatives are properly understood by the entire team. Especially important here a conscious initiation of internal public relations operations by the management. The classic definition of PR as given by Scott M. Culip, Allen H. Center, and Glenn M. Broom, who describe it as "the management function that establishes and maintains mutually beneficial relationships between an organization and the publics on whom its success or failure depends" (Cutlip, Center & Broom, 2006, p. 7). Without proper enfranchisement of the community method within a social welfare centre, the method is doomed to fail. Social workers that tend to execute their duties in a traditional fashion need to be effectively convinced that the activities of local community organisers not only do not threaten them (if only by increasing the bureaucratic burden on them), but even can, with appropriately planned cooperation, become an important source of support in their activities which are directed to families (if the families are simultaneously also the targets of the OLC method actions). To create such a synergistic effect, it is necessary to manage internal communications within the institution. Basically, people in charge of the centre need to initiate and lead dialogue within their internal environment. Simple information-giving is not sufficient – the communication needs to be reciprocal, directed not only at forming competent communiques, but also on processing them. After a fashion, such a relation can be described as "constantly consulting". Such an approach allows to quickly catch possible disturbances and distorted information, react promptly to them and build channels for communication and knowledge transfer between the ones who utilise new methods and the ones who operate within the scope of social welfare operations focus mostly on delivering benefits and managing the bureaucracy. Finally, it also empowers the institution's personnel by allowing them to build positive relationships in the mode of mutual benefits coming from successful if distinct activities, instead of fostering rivalry (Dudkiewicz, 2014, p. 75).

Of course, not even the most elaborate actions taken in this direction can replace the real value of the local community organiser's work. It is their duty to build a proper relationship with the project community, which demands approaching them with dignity and as subjects (instead of starting from paternalistic, domineering positions, "objects of welfare"). It demands the ability to listen, a capacity for empathy

and an advanced knowledge of the project community issues. It is a set of skills that is supported through education and professional experience, particularly in social work and in work with problematic groups. The ability to work methodically and to formulate clear goals is likewise beneficial. Such skills can be developed through acquiring a specialisation in organising local community or by participating in training, such as the one conducted by Centrum Aktywności Lokalnej CAL (Center for Local Activity CAL). Introducing the OLC method is therefore a complex undertaking, one that requires readiness for analysing own notions and actions, and one that demands being oriented towards building good interpersonal relationships, cooperation, and ability to ask for help. Local reputation can be helpful with that (such as one coming from earlier work), both in the professional environment as well as in the local community, especially the project one. It is important to appear in their eyes as someone more than just a "welfare person", but also an advisor, a supporter, a figure of authority. From the point of view of institutional management, it is key to build proper relations between the Local Community Organiser and other social workers (Dudkiewicz, 2013).

SOCIAL WORKER IN RELATION TO THE PROJECT COMMUNITY

Success of a local community organizer in establishing relations to the community that they direct their actions at hinges on them being prepared for a particular mode of management of this complicated process. Enacted actions should be, above all else, factually sound, that is, methodically planned and introduced, in accordance with the community method's procedures. They also need to be properly managed, which is not possible without first conducting a participatory (including the community and potential partners) analysis of needs and potentials, which allows to plan and enact actions in a carefully selected and well-understood space. An important challenge is the unpredictability of managing such a project. Due to its less leader-focused and more animated character, flexibility and adaptability of particular actions needs to be taken into consideration (e.g. creating alternate scenarios around different than assumed intervention models). Operations undertaken need to also be systematically self-evaluating. This mode

of management also needs to be oriented towards the process and small successes that serve as means of increasing the community's good-will towards the project and increasing the self-esteem of project community population. (Dudkiewicz, 2012). The choice of the mode of action depends in large part on whether the community had prior positive project experience, in which case they can be consciously called upon, or whether it is its first experience of this type, which offers a change for greater enthusiasm.

In daily practice, proper enactment of the project depends on proper handling of the project community. It is contingent on a number of factors:

- conducting constant surveillance (including good working knowledge of local leaders);
- calling upon and considering the needs and interests of the local community in planning;
- readiness to acknowledge its expectations;
- setting goals which are realistic and beneficial;
- being reactive to feedback and participatory modes of action (so that goals and the ways to achieve them can be internalized by the locals);
- viewing the project community as an integral whole;
- treating the community as a partner, not a beneficiary;
- introducing the project community into the operation of other projects;
- maintaining constant communication and readiness for often, informal meetings as well as other shows of interest.

The social worker's decision on how to view their role and function in their work with local community is therefore crucial: whether they see themselves as a helper and a person supporting its aspirations and activities, following up on reported needs; or as a patron-figure that sets out directions of action and deciding on their own what is good for it and what is not, what is needed and what is not. Our research clearly indicates that the real (and not just surface-level) assumption of the former stance – which is not always easy for social workers accustomed to a somewhat different approach – makes it more likely for initiatives utilizing the OLC method to succeed. Realising this ideal of partnership in project practice gives the OLC method a significant chance of success, understood as effecting a positive change in a given community. The social worker should therefore work not only with

the community, but also with themselves. This should be understood more broadly than just training and increasing competence. It is the need to move beyond current modes of action and attitudes that associate with social work, which may be effective in traditionally understood work, but when working in the OLC method become a significant limitation. It is thus needed to avoid locating the project participants on a scale from "deserving" to "undeserving" of aid and viewing reported needs and expectations as "demands". It is vital to trust the project community and leave behind controlling approach.

An important matter with regards to the relation between the social worker and a participant of actions taken with the OLC method is the proper approach to resources or capital available to the participants of the initiative. If the overarching goal is to achieve change, then it prudent to consider what and on what scale should be utilized to that end. Two approaches open before the social worker in this case. They can focus on lacks and deficits or other internal limitations of the community members and in consequence move towards addressing them. They also can, after learning of resources at hand, work towards expanding and strengthening them, or at least basing their actions on them. The three cases studied here indicate that the second approach – the one that puts at the front what is available (capabilities, potentials, skills) over what is missing (failures, losses, mistakes) – is more beneficial. Therefore, instead of correcting capital, the local community organiser should strive to identify them and build their project work on them. Of course, this does not preclude equalising shortages, which should not, however, be the leading priority. It needs to be mentioned that such an approach is a challenging one within the bounds of social welfare centres, which are institutions called to existence in order to manage shortages, not potentials.

The described approach to project communities which experience various social issues (poverty, unemployment, elder age, etc.) makes it easier for their members to overcome challenges and regain control over own life and decisions. In this, it allows them to move past the role of a passive victim reliant on external support, or of a beneficiary that is a subject of welfare operations. This approach can therefore be used to give them their agency, which, as an expert on social exclusion wrote:

> (…) is a very important element of the individual identity and the
> sense of self-worth. Survival in situations of oppression and deprivation

is aided by the feeling of ability, of any sort of control over own life (Lister, 2007, p. 155).

SOCIAL WORKER IN THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

Local community organizers naturally grow to become the chief person managing the project – but they should be seen as such not only by the project community that they direct their actions at, but also the entire local environment. To create such a state of affairs, it is necessary to consciously utilise knowledge already gathered in the social welfare centre, including the awareness of the attitudes of environment to the institution and their prior experience with projects. The community environment of the local community organiser's actions, especially institutional one, is often key for success. This is impossible to achieve without identifying local social and support infrastructure, both those that already function as well as those that remain potential. Of particular use may be consciously initiated and properly managed cooperation with subjects such as:

- local government and its branches;
- NGOs;
- other welfare institutions such as Community Self-help Centres;
- institutions of formal (schools, academies) and informal (day-cares, universities of the third age) education;
- the police;
- religious institutions;
- informal groups, including self-help ones.

The greater the distance is between welfare centres with their employees and other subjects and institutions (institutional environment), the more difficult it is to introduce innovative solutions and popularise them. This distance manifests in the lack of knowledge, low awareness of the role and function of Social Welfare Centres and in displaying a lack of respect for its activities while failing to notice their results. This creates barriers that are difficult to overcome and which disrupt effective work towards managing social issues, establishing cooperation and creating satisfying, systemic relations. In short, it makes it difficult to coordinate. As a consequence, it decreases the capacity to influence communities faced with social issues because the resources of particular institutions, instead of

helping each other and filling in mutual gaps, become dispersed and work at lowered efficiency.

The capabilities and potentials for action of the social worker operating in the OLC method are therefore in no small part dependant on how the social welfare centre is seen by the institutional environment and on their ability to influence that environment and acquire support for actions taken. This can happen both formally (signing cooperation agreements, conducting cooperative action, etc.) and informally. As our research indicates, the latter mode, relying mostly on personal relationships and contacts, based on actions taken "outside the system" remains real and effective, although sometimes short-term in lasting effects.

Of particular importance here is the attitude of the local government, that goes beyond the social recognition of the project community and the high position of the social welfare centre in the local hierarchy. Above all else the recognition of the need to support the most marginalised communities is crucial. If it is the case, the government finds it difficult to refuse support (however superficial), even when it is not really engaged with the problem. However, as noted by Dobroniega Trawkowska, the government noticing the importance of social issues is in large part the result of individual relations between institutions:

> (…) it is specifically the political orientations and "dealings" between the leading social welfare centre and the leading local government branch that play a not entirely understood role in situations of jockeying for support for innovative or new solutions to social issues, for programs and strategies aimed at dealing with them. A high position of the centre's director and his/her good relations with "important others" significantly improve the understanding of social welfare issues and create a good environment around "fieldwork" (Trawkowska, 2008, p. 101).

Therefore, a problematic situation can arise when local government places no trust in the social welfare centre's management and, even in spite of its successes (which can be declared to be the local government's), makes attempts at undermining its actions and marginalising their effects. If the relationship between the local government and the social welfare centre's management is not proper, or worse, is a conflicting one, then the local government will not support introducing any sort of new solutions or innovative approaches regardless of benefits, social and political alike, that they could bring.

Such a situation took place in one of the researched cases: the consequence of a conflict between local government and the social welfare centre manager was his recall in a situation where he was heavily invested in introducing the OLC method, as well as taking a series of other actions towards broadening the mandated catalogue of the centre's operations. In two other cases, where the OLC method had successfully and firmly entrenched itself in the social welfare centre's operations, positive relations based on trust and mutual understanding between the management and the local government could be identified. Thanks to that, the centres were allowed to self-determine and take on innovative initiatives, as long as they seemed to bring social benefits and contribute to the community development.

THE IMPORTANCE AND UNIMPORTANCE OF SOCIAL ISSUES

It needs to be kept in mind that the attitude of the local government to social problems (and by extension to the Social Welfare Centres and actions taken by them) does not just mirror the personal relations between institutions (as mentioned above by Trawkowska). This attitude is in equal, if not greater, part the result of more or less consciously held notions and values on how the societal development is defined. It is the question of the idea of how local communities or groups facing difficult situations that they are unable solve themselves function. In managing certain social issues on their own grounds, local government can approach them either actively or passively (those are the two extremities). The passive approach is characterized by remaining limited by legal-administrative directives stemming from current legal system. In that case, the local authorities take only such actions and work towards only such goals in regards to social issues as they have been obliged to. In such a case, issues and actions identified and taking place beyond the local community are not seen as "ours", our own, and therefore as worthy of attention and work. Meanwhile, active issue management works on the basis of moving beyond the legal minimum and obligatory activities. It is a move beyond mere administering over the issue and beyond particular action. Active attitude of local government in local communities is displayed in careful defining of problematic situations and seeing them as varied,

not one-dimensional and homogenous. It is making them the subject of discussion on public fora, developing practices and actions directed towards diminishing them and reducing harm stemming from them. Active attitude is also the taking of responsibility for problematic situations, and in consequence it is also founded on creating and shaping integral local public policies which take into account issues that are particular and characteristic for a given community. It is also the search for new, innovative solutions and helping in their creation.

The success and enfranchisement of the OLC method is therefore largely reliant on the model of managing social issues represented by the local government: how they see them, and how important they think they are to solve. Active governance, that exhibits a sense of responsibility and which is open and ready to take on new challenges is beneficial to such a mode of work in a social welfare centre. It allows for the centre's employees to take actions utilizing innovative methods such as OLC and is understanding of difficulties faced. Passive governance, meanwhile, will lead less to limiting the workings of a social welfare centre, but rather to creating situations where it will be forced to work "soundlessly", as if it did not exist. In such a case, local government will avoid being faced with issues that the centre is dealing with, thanks to which it can treat them as non-existent and therefore ones that should not be seen as important.

Managing social issues is accompanied by enacting various strategies for making particular problems public, so that actions taken by government and its branches can be justified. There are three main strategies: validating – normalising – invalidating. The first two can be seen as belonging to the active model, while the last one belongs to the passive model of managing social issues. The first strategy, that is validating, is without doubt the rarest in social practice. It relies on highlighting social problems, treating them as a priority in action taken and on giving them a lot of exposure in public debate. Within it, issues are presented as valid and important. Far more common is (including two of cases studied for this paper) is the second strategy: normalising social issues, which are then treated as a problem, usually a difficult one, that can be solved or dealt away with. This is why the social welfare centres are seen as partners and their actions are treated as important from the point of view of the local community as a whole. In this case we can see significant acceptance of new solutions and practices (but not without limits). It is a strategy dominated by

rationalism and pragmatism in viewing social issues. Therefore, the activities of the social welfare centre are seen as investments for the future, helping the local community develop.

The third strategy is perhaps the most common and firmly rooted in practice (see Danecka, 2007; Tarkowska, 2013; Warzywoda-Kruszyńska, 2001; 2009). It is characterised by failing to identify problematic situations or marginalising them, for example through pathologising, trivialising, accenting individual responsibility for their appearance, while ignoring systemic or structural causes. This individualisation, in particular, shifts responsibility for solving said issues onto the people experiencing it – it is therefore the privatization of social issues. Taking such an approach, the government often excuses itself from taking action towards addressing issues or reducing harm. Its actions can be described as neglect and evasion. Due to that, it sees the activities of social welfare centres as redundant, as a form of necessary evil. It is reluctant to support any sort of action moving beyond obligatory minimums, despite beneficial results it could have on a given community. In this strategy, activities of a social welfare centre are seen as a cost, and an unnecessary one.

The way in which local governments approach social issues and which models of social issues management (alongside with associated strategies) they assume is the most important factor in success or failure of initiatives undertaken by social welfare centres, particularly the ones that can be seen as innovative. Social issues management is mirrored in how local government manages social welfare centres: what limits does it impose, how do they set out their ability to operate. The lack of acceptance and support from the local government or having to working against their approach and interests means that OLC method is unlikely to be successfully introduced and enfranchised.

PARTICIPATION AND THE PROJECT COMMUNITY

Success of such endeavours as the OLC method is also contingent on how the community that project is addressed to is treated (both by the social welfare centre employees and by the local government) – whether as a partner or a passive recipient. The issues around how social workers approach project communities have been described previously, so we will now focus on the issues of relations between the

local government and the community. The level of social participation in community-level decision-making influences heavily the success of innovative initiatives and is correlated with the assumed model of social issues management. Social participation in decision-making is based on allowing the voice, opinions, doubts and attitudes of the communities to be heard. In such a case, the communities become more than just passive recipients or executors of decisions made by other bodies, but active, co-responsible participant in the decision-making process, visible, present and engaged in their own goings-on.

It is difficult not to notice, both through research and observation (see Olech, 2012; Lewenstein & Dudkiewicz, 2011; Lewenstein, Schindler & Skrzypiec, 2010) that the lack of social participation is the default state in the Polish political reality and that it is particularly visible in the area of public politics. It is an important context for managing social issues. Broadly speaking, participatory ideas and concepts are not treated by government as helpful or useful, even if they lead to:

- increase in the quality of policy that is in line with the real needs of populace;
- inclusion of various needs and interests;
- increase in the level of social satisfaction and thus reduce community conflicts (as all interests have been attended to);
- increase in social integration and trust.

The style of local politics (including social policy) – the tension between the "we do it for you" and "we do it with you" attitudes – affects conducting action in the OLC method, which had become particularly visible in one of the cases investigated. There was a period when representatives of public institutions approached the project community in a partner-like and participatory fashion. They listened to their needs, allowed the community to determine them themselves, followed their suggestions and negotiated difficult situations. During that time, the community exhibited high levels of preparedness for change, and in time, tell-tale signs of change became apparent: increased self-sufficiency, agency, social integration, networking with the environment, fiscal self-sufficiency. However, when local government blocked the participatory approach, the local community returned to old ways of action built on surviving and "hanging by" the social welfare centre.

By avoiding increasing the participatory element of local social policy, local government reduces it merely to the area of expertise of

professional institutions. In doing that, it robs the local community of its voice, especially taking it away from those who directly benefit from social welfare and would like to become engaged in its creation and development. The local government places itself on a hegemonic position, where it single-handedly decides the shape and scope of offered support and does not see a need to extend, vary or individualize this support. We are therefore unsurprised that it is then uninterested in participating in such initiatives as the OLC method and seeks to eliminate them if present, seeing them as redundant, complex dead-weight, which requires complex management and often extra funding. This approach to participating from the side of local government can be, after Joanna Kurczewska, called elitist, because it legitimises and preserves civic passivity and due to that:

> (…) limits equality in the sphere of communications and deci-sion-making (…). It is the elites that are displeased with their local communities and convinced that there are things to be done for them, but not with them (Kurczewska, 2000, p. 403).

CONCLUSIONS: MANAGING SOCIAL ISSUES – KEEPING THE STATUS QUO OR NORMALISATION

The above considerations indicate that enacting and spreading initiatives implemented in innovative methods such as the OLC method is contingent on many factors, which should be treated as separate, but interlinked or even overlaying, increasing each other's influence. They array themselves into circles around the project, which can be represented on the following Figure 1.

The first circle is made out of the institution that enacts the project and introduces the OLC method – that is to say, it is the social welfare centre, directly responsible for preparing, implementing, and monitoring the entire process. Therefore, the way the centre functions, how it is managed, what decisions regarding its internal structure are made and how the social worker is seen impacts directly the success of the entire enterprise. In managing social welfare centres it is also important what place it has (alongside its associate function) in the institutional environment, because this environment can both support as well as block or even boycott the project. The most important player is the
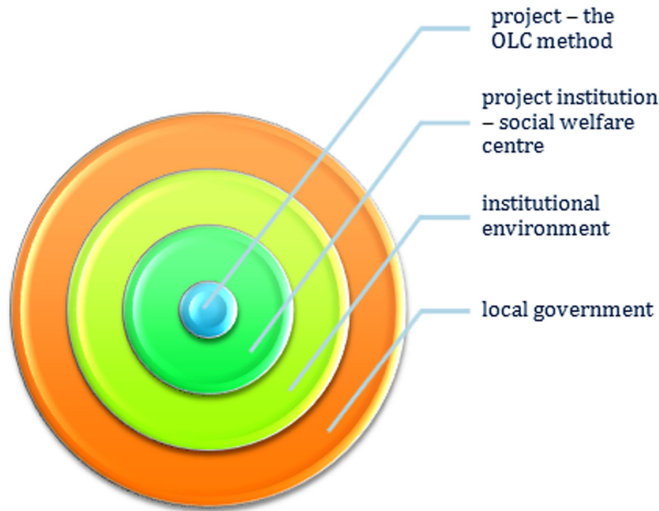
project – the
OLC method

project institution
– social welfare
centre

institutional
environment

local government

Figure 1. The impact of external factors on OLC method development

Source: own elaboration.

local government, whose impact on functioning of all other elements is difficult to overstate. It is the local government figures which fit into certain modes of managing social issues have real control over whether a given initiative has chances for success or is doomed to failure.

Enacting and spreading initiatives such as the OLC method is of significant importance in the face of new challenges faced by local politics and social work. They allow more effective management of social issues, based on individual approach, tapping local potentials and considering local conditions. However, whether they are possible is dependent on the model of social issue management dominant in a given community: whether it is based on a system of exclusion, or rather on inclusivity and cooperation of different subjects.

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WPŁYW LOKALNEGO ZARZĄDZANIA SYSTEMEM WSPARCIA NA ZAKORZENIENIE METODY ŚRODOWISKOWEJ W PRACY SOCJALNEJ

Abstrakt

Tło badań. Wdrażanie w społecznościach lokalnych nowatorskich rozwiązań nakierowanych na rozwiązywanie określonych sytuacji problemowych i wychodzących poza standard dotychczasowej pracy socjalnej w ośrodkach pomocy społecznej jest procesem w polskich warunkach dość złożonym i napotykającym na wiele przeszkód. Raczej rzadko wchodzi w zakres działań związanych z zarządzaniem problemami społecznymi w społecznościach lokalnych. Niniejszy artykuł dotyczy badań jakościowych koncentrujących się na uwarunkowaniach mających wpływ na dalsze losy inicjatyw realizowanych metodą OSL (Organizowanie Społeczności Lokalnej) i zapoczątkowanych w ramach realizowanego w latach 2010–2014 projektu systemowego do działania 5.4. Programu Operacyjnego Kapitał Ludzki, pn. *Tworzenie i rozwijanie standardów pomocy i integracji społecznej – Standardy w pomocy*.

Cel badań. Identyfikacja i określenie czynników, które oddziałują pozytywnie bądź negatywnie na upowszechnianie i zakorzenienie w pracy ośrodków pomocy społecznej nowatorskich metod pracy ze zbiorowościami doświadczającymi problemów społecznych. Badanie koncentrowało się na czynnikach związanych zarówno z zarządzaniem w obrębie OPS (szczególnie jego pracownikami), jak też na zagadnieniach odnoszących się do zarządzania problemami społecznymi i powołanymi do ich rozwiązywania instytucjami w obrębie społeczności lokalnej.

Metodologia. Badania były prowadzone metodą studium przypadku w trzech lokalizacjach i miały na celu przyjrzenie się dalszym losom zainicjowanych w ramach projektu systemowego działaniom Ośrodków Pomocy Społecznej i zatrudnionych w nich w związku z organizowaniem społeczności lokalnej pracowników socjalnych.

Kluczowe wnioski. Na podstawie przeprowadzonych badań i analizy zebranego materiału udało się wyróżnić szereg kontekstów i okoliczności, których wpływ na funkcjonowanie tak ośrodka pomocy społecznej, jak i samych metod pracy ze społecznościami doświadczającymi problemów społecznych jest znaczący. Konteksty te mają zarówno charakter wewnętrzny (np. podejście pracowników ośrodka do danego problemu i swojej pracy), jak i zewnętrzny (np. stosunek władz lokalnych czy innych instytucji do danego problemu społecznego).

Słowa kluczowe: metoda środowiskowa, Ośrodek Pomocy Społecznej, zarządzanie problemami społecznymi, zarządzanie w instytucji pomocowej.