

LOCAL PARTNERSHIP IN THE COMMUNE OF LWOWEK

The partnership of Lwówek region was established in 2006 inspired by Barbara and Tomasz Sadowski (founders of Barka Foundation). We noticed the presence of new social problems and some different dynamics than before, especially low participation of the inhabitants.

We saw the need to involve different public partners. Social services intended to invite the local community to cooperation. There were only 3 local organizations in the commune. Active participation of the inhabitants was limited to some occasional events and benefit parties. The locals were not really involved in public affairs, presenting quite passive and expectant attitude. There was a hierarchical order to manage public life and in the beginning of the process of creating the partnership we were not aware of the real essence of civil society. We just wanted to revitalize the community in an innovative and progressive way, and did not expect it would also cause our own development.

Accomplishments

2006 - Meetings with the initiators in the local communities, meetings in villages.

2006 - Creating 4 organizations (Grońsko, Posadówek, Władysławowo, Marszewo). Local authorities were represented by local welfare office, Communal Cultural Centre and Communal Sports Centre.

2007 - Establishing 4 organizations (Zębowo, Zgierzynka, 2 in Lwówek).

2008 - Establishing 2 organizations (both in the village of Pakosław).

2009 - Establishing 1 organization (village of Brodki).

2010 - Establishing 1 organization (village of Brody).

2011 - Establishing 2 organizations (villages of Konin, Lipka Wielka).

2012 - Establishing 4 organizations (Linie, Lwówek, two villages Krzywy Las and Józefowo joined the Association in Grońsko).

Since 2006 there were 18 new organizations established in the Lwówek commune. There are now operating in the commune:

* 36 organizations,

* 3 Social Cooperatives,

* 1 Social Enterprise,

In 2012 all local authorities from the Lwówek commune joined the partnership ,with full participation of the municipal authorities, the representatives of education and business. During the period of 2008 -2012 the entities acquired as a result of different projects funds of 2.742.033,78 PLN.

Difficulties

- 1) Death of one of the first leaders. The loss of the leader instantly slowed down the establishing of partnership.
- 2) Improper concept of democracy, focusing energy on attacking the municipal authorities, instead of cooperation.
- 3) Incidental use of partnership in the political games.
- 4) Misunderstanding of the idea by some local politicians in the beginning, making the establishing process difficult; discouraging the leader.
- 5) Fluctuations and changes among the members of the partnership, resignations, permanent education.
- 6) Lack of funds to finance meetings.
- 7) There was no juridical legislation for partnerships

Perspectives

1. Further activation of the inhabitants: the organization of feasts, Children's Day, Women's Day, Senior's Day, Grandmother' Day, Harvest festival, festivities in various villages.
2. Further organization of courses, seminars, meetings as a part of permanent education and activation of inhabitants.
3. Further learning of taking the responsibility for local commune and learning civil participation
4. Further organization of trips to the seaside, in the mountains, to the theater, cinema, swimming pool, visiting of the heritage sites of the country.
5. Continuous work for people but with them, including them
6. Continuous animation of new initiatives, cultivating traditions, values connecting generations.
7. Establishing of a formal model of partnership called the Local Partnership of Lwówek on the 1st June 2013.
8. Building civil society.
9. Engagement to create a partnership in the poviate (bigger region than commune

The advantages for the local authorities

- bigger participation of inhabitants in the City Council sessions,
- increase of individual initiatives of inhabitants,
- good communication, better exchange of information in the community,
- Carrying out public tasks by organizations - social care services, care for green areas, sport and recreation events,
- education of local community,
- consultation of local affairs, social dialogue,

The advantages for NGO's

- activation of inhabitants, arranging own representations of the villages, taking responsibility for own affairs, awareness of one's impact on the quality of life,
- organizing parties, going out to cinema, theater, opera, swimming pool, seaside, the mountains, organizing events, trainings, implementation of the projects financed by ESF, FIO, competitions organized by the municipality, region, ministries,
- identification of the needs and carrying out the activities by the local organisations
- creating of new reality/situation in the community,
- establishing a positive competitive spirit in the community,
- cultivation of tradition, values, patriotism
- better contact of the inhabitants with the local government, bigger political awareness,
- dialogue with the authorities,
- integration of the local community, the inhabitants feel the hosts of their homeland, willingly offer their time and work for the good of the village,

Advantages for the business

- permanent contact with representatives of local authorities and organizations,
- potential possibility of obtaining orders and commissions among the partners
- supporting others with their knowledge, entrepreneurship,
- having influence on the economic affairs,

The receivers of the activities

The target group of the projects carried out by organizations in the partnership are all inhabitants: children, adults and the elderly, working, unemployed, disabled, people who are at risk of social exclusion or who are already excluded. In our activities, we foresee different means relevant to identified needs. There are many needs and problems in the community and all of them are important for us.

What is unique for us

- 1) Lwówek Partnership is a new form of organization of the local community. We created platform of cooperation between local authorities, NGOs and business partners.
- 2) Building partnership relations requires commitment, permanent education, overcoming stereotypes in local governance; it organizes local governing in a new way and adds a new meaning to it. Governing and managing the local affairs is not being done by public local administration only, but with active influence and participation of inhabitants
- 3) Good communication, minimum of formalities, trust: those are qualities which we try to achieve in the community, building up a conscious society.
- 4) We are not a partnership focused on some specific project. We do not focus our attention on one social group. We create a permanent platform for the development of the whole community.
- 5) Social engagement creates a new reality, builds social capital - the most precious thing in the community.

Mission of the Partnership

- 1) We are here to create and strengthen the self-governing community.
- 2) We are members having the same rights, for whom the most important is the local development and a good quality of life.
- 3) We are apolitical.
- 4) Striving for improving the quality of life, based on a partnership, which helps us to strengthen social capital in the community.
- 5) We are all responsible for the local community
- 6) We are building up a good image of the municipality.
- 7) We care about good and economical management.
- 8) We cherish traditions and care about the patriotic values.

The effects on public life

1. Non-statutory activities of the social welfare office changed its image in the community. Through the challenge of cooperation we developed qualities of leaders, we also became aware of the responsibility for managing local social policy. The amount of people using social support decreased significantly, 58% of people joined the labor market.
2. In the village there are 3 Social Cooperatives and the partners make sure that the cooperatives are prospering well and promote them to others
3. In response to the recent proposal of the municipality, one of the organizations undertook the task of running an animal shelter as a Social Enterprise.
4. Partnership uses the help of organization to reach out to disadvantaged environments, to organize neighbourhood help and assistance.
5. The inhabitants of our community have learned that the authorities have time for them, and that they would willingly sit down for a social chat, and that they are friendly to them and know what social entrepreneurship is.
6. Municipality let NGO manage rural community centers, and special funds to be established. The rooms, which were occupied only during election meetings now serve people to realize their projects and activities which allow them to play, enjoy, learn and integrate.
7. The activity of inhabitants is priceless. Inhabitants create associations and take responsibility. They identify the needs and create actions to answer the needs
8. The Association of Konin found old chronicle of the village. It describes the history from the first time of regaining freedom in Poland. This was scanned and put on CD and given to the inhabitants, to protect the continuation of generations and their identities.
9. The Association of Inhabitants of Zgierzynka is continuing a permanent co-operation with Nature University and "Salamandra" association in the field of environmental protection. They promote the bird reservation, which is found in the neighbourhood. In the project, the information board was created, hundreds of unique photos were taken and soon there will be a sightseeing tower built to observe the animals. Care was taken of the renovation of the cultural centre of the village, equipment and restoration of the ancient Fire Engine. These tasks are completed in co-operation with local village Council.
10. The Association of "Aktywne Gronsko" have cleaned the children's playground. They have laid the pavements at the school, they have renovated spaces given by the council and initiated and founded the plaque for the school. The plaque carried the name of the first head teacher and great community person and friend of all inhabitants.
11. There are many other initiatives taking place, which are improving the life of the inhabitants, using minimum resources.

Relationships

The managing is happening in a democratic way and the decisions are taking place through consensus. The partnership is a platform, which is connecting all the local organizations and each of them is carrying out its goals, thanks to their own means and/or their funding. **The communication is very positive, the relationships are amicable and this creates a friendly atmosphere for development.**

Conclusions

1. Lack of civil participation is a sign that certain groups remain passive, there are no strong leaders and the attitudes of people are the remaining of the previous political system- expecting public administration to arrange everything
2. It is not difficult to undertake actions when there is project funding and legal frames. It is more difficult to empower people to be active and activities sustainable despite lack of funds and lack of legal frames.
3. Partnership makes us more aware regarding social entrepreneurship, enhances communication and promotes responsibility
4. Partnership shows what democracy really means, how the term 'local community' should be understood and what are the qualities of civil society
5. Partnership which implements change, has to be aware of the consequences and responsibility towards future generations.
6. Local participation is a crucial factor for sustainable change and strengthening needed values.

Local Partnerships- Recommendations

Local partnerships are a part of local problem management, they are a useful tool.

They are one of the methods of solving social problems happening in local community. They show an attitude of solidarity of organizations and institutions aimed at increasing the quality of life of whole local community. The partners get to know and understand each other better, which enhances trust and cooperation. A model partnership is a platform of continuous cooperation of public authorities, civic society organizations and business.

Through creating local partnerships we move from a model of governing based on public administration to another way of governing, when participation of many entities enriches the managing process. Public administration is treated as a coordinator of actions, not their creator.

Being close to local problems and ability to look for effective solutions and prevention – those are the strengths of partnership approach. The most efficient way of dealing with difficulties is dealing

with them locally, where they arise. Knowledge of local community, engagement of local partners and local coordination are a big and effective potential.

Local partnership, through involving various partners revives whole local community- institutions, organizations and also individuals.

The possibility of having influence on governing process, on making decisions, enhances the responsibility of inhabitants towards their local community and their willingness to participate in the democratic growth of their local community.

A partnership is usually created motivated by need to solve some specific social problems, but in practice, it broadens its activities.

There is lack of trust visible in Poland. Historical past is not making it easier to cooperate and trust people in the times of stability. Polish society was functioning well, when united against the oppressor, but in times of freedom it is not easy to cooperate.

Some people still don't understand that they can have influence on local policies and actions, and that local governing can be done in partnership. Existing partnerships are a good practice and a chance to change the passive attitudes towards greater participation. Given the Polish circumstances local partnerships are being created and developed with big difficulties, but through that, they also give the participants a chance to better understand social changes processes, the meaning of democracy and the importance of historical circumstances.