



Agnieszka SOBOL

CIVIC PARTICIPATION IN TERMS OF COMMON GOODS

Agnieszka **Sobol**, PhD – *Katowice University of Economics*

Correspondence address:
Faculty of Economics
Department of Spatial and Environmental Economics
1 Maja 50, 40-287 Katowice, Poland
e-mail: agnieszka.sobol@ue.katowice.pl

ABSTRACT: Civic participation is becoming more and more important topic of public discourse in Poland. Its meaning is analysed not only in terms of democratization process but also in practical terms of creating urban commons. Besides private and public goods these goods determine local development. The aim of the article is to identify connections between civic participation and creation of the urban commons. The article presents the mechanisms of governance in the process of local development and the tools of citizen's participation in the cities in Poland. The outcomes are the result of the detailed studies of theory and research, as well as own research and authors' observations related to the commons.

KEY WORDS: local development, the commons, sustainable development, civic society

Introduction

Civic participation is becoming more and more important topic of public discourse in Poland. Its meaning is analysed not only in terms of democratization process but also in practical terms of creating urban commons. Besides private and public goods, these goods determine local development.

Civic participation is due to an awareness of an importance of the urban commons. It expresses a manifestation of a sense of responsibility for the city and “the right to the city”. It results also from a need for continuous improvements and growing expectations of the residents. This involves phenomenon of hedonic treadmill, which is a natural tendency of people to strive towards the improvements of their living conditions.

Citizens’ movement is also a result of dissatisfaction of the residents and dissonance between a vision of a development of local policy and the needs of the residents. The Constitution of the Republic of Poland in article No 4 states that the supreme power belongs to the Nation. This raises the question of who has the real power in the cities? Mayor (president) and the municipal (city) council can be indicated on the basis of the relationships established in the formula of representative democracy. Simultaneously criticism of the existing management system in the Polish cities shows its various disabilities.

The key aspect seems to be the interpretation of the notion of the representation. The essence of the representation should be acting in the interest of the residents in the process of management of public affairs, not simple ruling.

The deficit of public participation which can be observed in the Polish cities derives *inter alia* from the management process. Organisation of the institutional system keeps the residents at a distance. Its conservative design allows only a limited self-determination of the inhabitants. At the same time, the inhabitants are aware that their rights can be greater.

Supporting civil society requires an adequate level of political culture (Pietrzak et al., 2011, p. 11). Political culture determines in fact the perception of the State and the public affairs as the common goods. It affects citizen-administration relationship.

Representative democracy doesn’t realise the policy of a common good and provides only a framework (more or less limited) to joint actions. According to Paweł Śpiewak, the result of this approach is a depoliticisation of the attitudes of the citizens (Śpiewak, 2004, p. 7). Residents don’t participate in public life and they focus on individual needs and self-realization. Individual

values displace the common values. Such an approach is self-defeating for the society. On the contrary, the essence of the civil society is the interdependence between individual rights and needs with the social obligations arising from the existence of the common goods.

On the basis of the criticism of representative democracy was build a paradigm of local development management, which includes much more direct participation of the residents. In countries that are more advanced in democracy the idea of governance gradually displaces a traditional understanding of local self-government. Governance indicates the direction of coordinated actions undertaken together by the governments and the citizens in a way to increase the urban commons.

In Poland the common good has its constitutional legitimacy. The constitutional principle of the common good derived from the article 1 of the Constitution declares that "The Republic of Poland is the common good of all citizens." This principle should be perceived in terms of rights and obligations of all the Poles. The same applies to the residents of the cities. The obligation to care about the common good includes a need of responsiveness that is addressing the needs of other members of the society.

Urban commons

A category of the commons is strictly tighten with the fact that a human is a social unit. Already Aristotle noted that the process of production and exchange of goods is associated with a sense of common aims and conviction that a success of a unit depends on the prosperity of the social group it belongs to.

The theory of the commons derives primarily from the work by Garret Hardin and Elinor Ostrom. Garret Hardin in the famous work „*The tragedy of the commons*” explained the conditions and the threats of the use of the commons (Hardin, 1968). The most important recognised response to Hardin’s thesis is scientific work by the Nobel Prize winner Elinor Ostrom. Ostrom’s special scientific contribution was an analysis of the management processes of the common-pool resources and an identification of the core values of the common good (Ostrom et. al., 1999). In her work „*Governing the commons: the evolution of institutions for collective actions*” Ostrom proved that people are prone to cooperate for the common good and an interest of the community (Ostrom, 1990).

The commons can be defined as goods that regardless of the ownership aspects and public or private possession are essential for the purpose of the implementation of the needs relevant from the point of view of the rights of

all inhabitants (UNESCO, 2015, p. 77). These includes inter alia aspects of the technical infrastructure, economic situation, environmental resources and the state of the environment, environmental management system and security. In addition as a mature form of the commons can be regarded so called relational goods i.e. interpersonal relations such as: friendship, sympathy, solidarity and a sense of belonging. The urban commons refer to the city space and include a number of the elements and phenomena that meet the needs of the community.

Presenting the commons in relation to a local level we can use the terms urban commons and municipal common goods. A value of the commons is that they meet the needs of both the individuals and the community.

Elinor Ostrom indicates several principles for a proper managing the commons. These include (Ostrom, 2013, p. 126):

- clear group boundaries;
- matching rules governing use of common goods to local needs and conditions;
- ensuring that those affected by the rules can modify them;
- developing of the monitoring system;
- using of the graduated sanctions for rule violators;
- providing accessible, low-cost means for dispute resolution;
- the rights of the community members are respected by the others.

In the urban space the commons are affected by different people's behaviours. Particularly important is management system and the mechanisms supporting self-organisation of the communities for the protection of the commons. It is impossible to eliminate completely the failures and stowaway behaviour. It may be a short-term situation that upset a system of the protection of the commons. However in the process of building the networks and partnership of the community a long-term protection will be implemented.

Elinor Ostrom has proved, on the basis of the field research, that besides the so called rational players in the interactions are involved persons willing to cooperate. These are so called conditional co-operators. The existence of a space that will allow in an effective manner to resolve the potential conflicts in the group is also not irrelevant. Cooperation can take place if the public administration will grant the right to self-organization through the recognition the norms and the standards determined by the group. Ostrom also recognized the threats for the managing of the commons. She pointed inter alia migration (in and out of the group), corruption, technological changes and international assistance.

More or less at the same time as Ostrom about the dilemma of collective action also wrote Robert D. Putnam in his "Making democracy work" (Putnam, 1995). According to the results of his long-term research on the local

communities in Italy, a civil society can be distinguished by a mutual trust between its members and institutions for cooperation (various associations) in which citizens can learn the principles of cooperation and responsibilities for the commons. Similar conclusions were also presented by Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba in their work: „*The civic culture: political attitudes and democracy in five nations*” (Almond, Verba, 1963).

The meaning of cooperation in shaping the common goods

Any efforts to improve the quality of life in the cities are not possible to manage within a single organization. In this sense a local self-government unit should build a partnership network around a vision of development worked out together with the socio-economic partners (Cutcher-Gershenfeld et al., 2004). It is a challenge to achieve a compromise solution in a situation of conflicts of individual and collective needs. A local government is a kind of a community that can be defined by the following features (Etzioni, 2004, p. 190):

- An existence of networks of affective relationships within of a group that often intersect and reinforce each other;
- An identification of common values, standards and meanings, as well as the shared history and identity.

A civil society can be seen in terms of organisation of public life, in which residents are active and decide together about the future of the community. The work of civil society reconcile different rights and met the interests of both individuals and collective. A civil society serves therefore a formation of the commons. Alexis de Tocqueville was a precursor of marking off a civil society in a structure of a nation. He described it as a sphere of mutual relations between citizens who act together for the common good in a framework of social system (Tocequeville, 1996, p. 193).

Similarly as described it Elinor Ostrom, Putnam presented that a long-term practice is conducive to the cooperation for the common good. It allows to master the rules of “the game” and allows to build a confidence to other participants of the interactions. An experience of engagement is therefore essential in a process of cooperation. In an opposition, a lack of current contacts, superficial relationships and lack of trust leads in a consequence to an erosion of cooperation. These conclusions confirms also Manuel Castells in his work “*City and the grassroots*” pointing out a necessity of clear rules and current contacts for a formation of active local communities (Castells, 1983).

Martha Nussbaum and Amartyi Sen refer also to an importance of cooperation and social relations. In their “theory of capabilities” they prove that

the modern societies do not take full advantage of the abilities of the citizens. A huge potential of knowledge, creativity and engagement is therefore wasted, while it could be used to the benefits of the individuals and the whole society (Nussbaum, Sen, 1993).

Given the above findings it can be stated that the current social processes are not conducive to citizens' participation for common good. A foundation for it is therefore a stable society. A criterion of "relative stability" which was described by Sennett is far from brief and superficial relations that take place in today's highly mobile societies (Sennett, 2012, p. 207). Anonymy, lack of rooting and temporality are not in favour of engagement for a common good.

Another enemy of cooperation is focus on individual success. A social withdrawal and indifference are *inter alia* the processes that derive from the ongoing educational system where an importance of an individual success is over common good. Alexis de Tocqueville as one of the pioneer researchers of individualism described this state as follows: "A man.. each of them living apart, is as a stranger to the fate of all the rest, he exists only in himself and or himself alone; and if his kindred still remain to him, he may be said, at any rate to have lost his country" (Tocqueville, 1996, p. 329).

Many researches indicate today on passiveness of the inhabitants. Even in the social organizations it can be observed a phenomenon as Putnam describes it of "bowling alone". The organizations have relatively passive members and their work is based only on a small number of leaders. In addition, the reasons of civil actions are not always "clean" in terms of civil work, which in turn can affect a quality of the commitment. The essence of collaboration in the name of common good should be "active participation rather than passive presence" (Sennett, 2012, p. 233).

The community therefore requires the opportunities for meeting, positive relationships, confidence and awareness of the common objectives. The accidental meetings can lead to joint ventures. An experience of "sociability" can lead to local activity and vice versa. Formation of the commons can bring some unexpected "side effects". For example, thorough an initiative of urban garden, the residents gain not only fruit and vegetables, but also a green space, a palace for meetings or education of children.

For a development of cities a key meaning has a process of socialization stressing an importance of cooperation and transparency policy (Nam, Pardo, 2011). Relationships promoting involvement in public life have positive impact on its atmosphere and a climate of cooperation. Communication of the local authorities with the inhabitants and other social partners should therefore be based on dialogue.

The problem of the modern societies is civil alienation. A rivalry power for cities has become a virtual reality which can impact on an atomization of

societies (Komakech, 2005, p. 259-264). However modern technologies can be an ally of social integration. A well planned strategy of communication with inhabitants can have affect an increase of their activity in a life of the city, taking bottom-up initiatives and building people-to-people bonds. Nevertheless a popularity of social media is successfully used by the business and only to limited extend by the public administration.

Tools such as crowdsourcing and citizensourcing, moulding from “the wisdom of the crowd”, are a way to get quickly ideas and opinions of wide group of the people. They can effectively support a management system of the city. Crowdsourcing allows the inhabitants to engage in the development of their city at any time and from anywhere. It increases their sense of their self-impact of the development of the city. In consequence this contributes to more aware and active citizens and an increase of social bonds and a felling of local identity. The use of on-line platforms and social activity in Internet network is also a basis of an idea of crowdfunding. Through financial involvement in the local grass-roots project crowdfunding complements the investments financed by the city hall (Sobol, 2014).

Participation of inhabitants in development of modern cities

A specific sign of our times are changes that take place in an area of civic participation. Multidimensional processes of social, economic and cultural character led to an increase of civic subjectivity. Thanks to progress in technology, including development of ICT tools, opportunities to take part in public life are bigger and take on more and more different forms.

Proper and on time information for modern cities is crucial. This applies to the inhabitants for whom it is important in terms of quality of life, for business to improve competitiveness and for the local authorities to optimize local policy.

Exchange of information about a city is crucial for a proper (compatible with the needs of the users) formation of urban commons. However, as Sennett indicates, even though each modern organization in theory wants to promote cooperation, it effectively prevents it in practice. Management sciences describe this phenomenon as a “silo effect”, that by separating the individuals, a sense of anonymity and a lack of awareness of common objectives prevents from sharing of information. Therefore there are lost information valuable for the entire organization. A Sennett describes it: “Superficial relations and short term institutional bonds together reinforce the silo effect: people keep to themselves, so not get involved in problems which are none of their immediate business” (Sennett, 2012, p. 8).

An ally of fast dissemination of information are modern ICT tools. Internet can serve to inform about the current events in the city through system of newsletters, which like crowdsourcing is poorly used tool of communication in Polish cities.

New communication technologies radically affect communications environment. A pace of transfer of information plays an important role in improving of urban system and in the context of development of civil society. On-line messages often have a real impact on people's behaviour. However, despite the enormous opportunities posed by the modern tools of communication, they should not displace a personal contact. Residents should have the right to attend the current meetings with local authorities and the representatives of administration.

A development of civic participation occurs in a situation of positive effects and a sense of self-impact in local development. Therefore important are the specific tools that enable participation such as: participatory budgeting, local initiative or the village funds. Not without significance is their organization, the availability of financial resources and the regularity of the opportunities for participation. The most important seems to be to create a climate of real co-decision, not only apparent to consult on local matters.

A range of tools of participation develops along with progress of civilisation and development of new technologies. Today Internet is one of the basic tools of management of the city. Access to wireless Internet in a city is one of the determinants of its modernity and innovation. Tools from a group of e-administration (e-governance, e-democracy) affect an efficiency of local authorities. However, their principal aim should be to serve the inhabitants.

The Internet platforms are required to use crowdsourcing or crowdfunding. The first Polish initiative is portal of the Unit for Social Innovation and Research "Shipyards" www.naprawmyto.pl, which was based on the British project www.fixmystreet.com and American project www.seeclickfix.com. These portals use a method of mapping i.e. indicating on a virtual map points in a local space which require an intervention of local administration. These may be issues for example: holes in the roads, dumps, broken street lights etc. The benefits of collecting opinions on functioning of the city motivated the creators of one of the first city crowdsourcing projects i.e. a platform Change by Us www.newyork.thecityatlas.org in New York City in 2011. A visual design was projected as a board with post-it notes on which residents write their ideas, opinions and suggestions. The information are automatically categorized and directed to the appropriate departments in the city hall where they are used to improve a management process.

The above examples show that a combination of an involvement of inhabitants and modern ICT solutions is helpful in solving problems in a city space.

Thanks to the residents a management process in a city is cheaper and more efficient.

Conclusions

A city is a space of confrontation of often conflicting needs and expectations. Hence, an importance of cooperation and deliberation in order to find the optimal options for the common good.

From this perspective a city should be co-created by the residents who in a process of cooperation, through an exchange of ideas and experiences and knowledge spillover create added value. A positive effect of synergies in a city is achieved through co-working of many different partners, as well as an integration of wide variety of functional areas.

As already indicated a cooperation for the commons requires a direct and systematic experience of interactions. The common rules, conventions and rituals of exchange described by Sennett deepen a sense of identity and belonging to a group. In this sense they support an awareness of common objectives and support transformation of the common goods. On the other hand, a lack of community awareness leads to an erosion of social structures and destruction of cities.

The strength of civil society depends on the citizens and also the conditions that shape their interactions. A lack of bonds in local communities and civil activity limits a use of many local potentials. Passive citizens and deficits in socialization mechanisms of a city are the sources of a crisis of democracy and many interferences in a socio-economic system.

Through civic participation and collective actions a city gains new common goods. A process of socialization of a city has therefore an impact on development of the urban commons. A sense of self-impact of the inhabitants neutralizes deficiencies of representative democracy and imperfections resulting from a need to reconcile both, the individual and collective needs.

Literature

- Almond G., Verba S. (1963), *The civic culture: political attitudes and democracy in five nations*, Princeton, NJ
- Castells M. (1983), *The city and the grassroots*, Berkeley
- Cutcher-Gershenfeld, J. et al. (2004), *Sustainability as an organizing design principle for large-scale engineering systems*, Engineering Systems Monograph, Cambridge, MA. www.esd.mit.edu [20-07-2016]
- Etzioni A. (2004), *Wspólnota responsywna: perspektywa komunitariańska*, in: Śpiewak P. (ed.), *Komunitarianie: wybór tekstów*, Warszawa

- Hardin G. (1968), *The tragedy of the commons*, "Science" No. 162 (3859), p. 1243-1248
- Komakech, D. (2005), *Achieving more intelligent cities*, "Municipal Engineer" Vol. 158 (4), p. 259-264
- Konstytucja Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej z dnia 2 kwietnia 1997 (Dz.U. 1997 nr 78 poz. 483)
- Nam, T., Pardo, T. A. (2011), *Conceptualizing smart city with dimensions of technology, people, and institutions*, the Proceedings at the 12th Annual International Conference on Digital Government Research, www.inta-aivn.org [10-07-2016]
- Nussbaum M., Sen A. (1993), *The quality of life*, Oxford
- Ostrom E. (1990), *Governing the Commons: The Evolution of Institutions for Collective Actions*, Cambridge
- Ostrom E. (2013), *Dysponowanie wspólnymi zasobami*, Warszawa
- Ostrom E., J. Burger, Ch. Field, R. Norgaard, D. Policansky (1999), *Revisiting the Commons: Local Lessons, Global Challenges*, "Science" No. 284, p. 278-282
- Pietrzak E., Szczepanik R., Zaorski-Sikora Ł. (2011), *Aksjologia życia publicznego*, Łódź
- Putnam R. (1995), *Demokracja w działaniu*, Kraków
- Sennett R. (2012), *Together: The Rituals, Pleasures and Politics of Cooperation*, Yale
- Sobol A. (2014), *Crowdfunding jako oddolne narzędzie realizacji zrównoważonego rozwoju*, in: B. Kryk (ed.), *Gospodarka regionalna i międzynarodowa*, Vol. II, Zeszyty naukowe nr 826, Szczecin, p. 137-146
- Śpiewak P. (ed.) (2004), *Komunitarianie: wybór tekstów*, Warszawa
- Toqueville de A. (1996), *O demokracji w Ameryce*, Kraków
- UNESCO (2015), *Rethinking education. Towards a global common good?*, Paris
- www.fixmystreet.com – Portal FixMyStreet [15-07-2016]
- www.naprawmyto.pl – Portal Naprawmyto.pl [15-17-2016]
- www.newyork.thecityatlas.org – Portal City Atlas New York [15-07-2016]
- www.seeclickfix.com. – Portal SeeClickFix [15-07-2016]