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## **THE ROLE OF LOCAL COMMUNITIES IN ENSURING SECURITY**

### ***Abstract***

*Security can be defined as a certain objective status quo, characterised by the absence of threats, and which is subjectively perceived by individuals or groups. Improving security, in particular that of the immediate surroundings, is the task of such institutions as the police or local government; their activities, however, will fail to produce permanent outcomes unless local communities get involved in the process of preventing threats. For security to emerge, it is of utmost importance that the numerous institutions that are in charge of security in a given area cooperate, supported by a local community whose representatives can identify local problems most effectively. Such cooperation should produce activities undertaken at the central and local levels, allowing for the level of security to increase.*

**Key words:** *local community, security, local governments, the police, prevention, social consultations, local activities*

### **Introduction**

Current human needs are changing rapidly, much more rapidly than the institutions that seek to adapt their strategies to the dynamically evolving situation. This can be remedied by the self-organisation of individuals, as well as the emergence of groups aiming to solve both *ad hoc* and long-term problems.

The changes that occurred in Poland after 1989, in particular the reform of the Polish administration system, restored local government, thereby contributing to the development of local communities. Meeting their needs and ensuring balanced development have also become the objectives of non-state entities since then (Wankiewicz, 2009, p. 37).

All the inhabitants of a given area are beneficiaries of the local community they are members of, and can have an active influence on what is happening in their immediate neighbourhood. Local opinion leaders, such as politicians, artists and academics, enjoy a particularly strong position

in this community, supporting local development which encompasses working locally for the benefit of a local community and employing local resources (Birkhölzer, 2006, p. 30).

One needs to realise, however, that neither the state nor a market economy will meet the needs of a local community, or solve its problems, unless the community itself wants to do so (Birkhölzer, 2006, pp. 27–28). In order to organise a local community, the organiser has to be flexible and able to follow the needs of the community he or she is cooperating with, therefore the social skills of a locally operating individual are crucial.

A local community assumes responsibility for its members, for itself, and for its place of residence, therefore it should have considerable influence in ensuring the security of the area it operates in. The aim of this paper is to indicate the role a local community can play in the system of entities that ensure security.

### **Local community**

A local community can be defined as the population inhabiting a given territory and bound by a network of permanent dependencies. Similarly to a territorial community, a local community resides in a certain area or place where everything that is significant for this community takes place. Yet a local community is not identified by any fixed borders. It is a community living in a certain space, which is smaller in the case of a neighbourhood, and larger in the case of a region, which is sufficient to develop the institutions that meet the inhabitants' basic needs and to run an organised and relatively independent settled existence (Kowalski, 1974, p. 79). For a local community to exist, it has to develop a strong sense of territoriality in its members. Oscar Newman notes (in *Defensible Space – Crime Prevention through Urban Design*) that, as it develops, the sense of threat is reduced, while people become more inclined to react to a potentially adverse course of events (Łojek, 2007, pp. 133–134).

Local communities are bound by strong cultural ties, tradition, common values developed over generations, as well as resources. Therefore, these people are connected by certain bonds, and they are socially interrelated and interdependent. Individuals are bound by a sense of group membership, collective interests, and the mechanisms of reaping the benefits of, possessing and using common resources.

## **Security**

It can be generally assumed that the security system is a social system of individual behaviour that is required and sanctioned in a given community. This system allows different individuals to function in a community without being exposed to activities that could increase their fears of losing life, health, property, as well as their nationality, statehood, religion, system of values, material status and other values. The security system serves an additional purpose of reducing the fear of a given threat that could inspire fear in others (Moczuk, 2009, p. 70).

Security stabilises development in all its dimensions, therefore constituting a fundamental value in both its individual and social aspects. It is related to individuals, as well as groups, assuming defined positions in society and to the possibility of improving particular social positions. It is therefore related to financial and economic development, because under secure circumstances, individuals and society can freely achieve various goals.

Protective and preventive activities in terms of local security are linked with the protection of the legal order and lifestyle established in the community. They are implemented by means of preventing and combating those phenomena that interfere with, or hinder a given community attaining its goals. It is the fundamental task of the individuals who are in charge of ensuring security to protect community members from external threats, whether natural or generated by other individuals and communities, by means of controlling emotional tensions within their community and the efficient control of social deviation (Kotulski, 2000, pp. 311–312).

The challenges to ensuring security are primarily responded to by means of preventive measures.

## **Cooperation of local communities with the police**

Crime prevention encompasses all the measures that allow crime to be countered and/or improve the social sense of security, applied by such entities as legislators, public institutions, the police or social groups (Cielecki, 2004, p. 43, cf.: Czapska, Kury, 2002).

Preventive measures applied by the police at regional and local levels require detailed identification of both the types and sizes of threats to the security of the community, as well as recognition of the needs and

expectations of its inhabitants in terms of prevention. Therefore, a partnership between the police and local community, its citizens, is necessary. The concept of community policing applied in numerous countries is an example of such a partnership, accounting for joint problem solving by the police, security services, administration units, local governments and the local community. Consultations can take a variety of forms, ranging from individual meetings to public opinion surveys. The mobilisation and commitment of individuals, in particular that of significant persons and local authorities, such as commune heads, mayors, presidents and local community leaders, and other institutions, accompanied by appropriate legislation and implementing extensive strategic measures are the most effective activities in solving problems related to ensuring security (cf.: Juszczak, 2007, pp. 101–113). Community policing assumes that a local community can partake in developing police strategies. It introduces new types of relations between the police and citizens, contributing to overcoming social passivity and apathy, and to citizens becoming actively involved in a wide range of activities. Such programmes aim to protect the groups that face the greatest risk of criminal activities, that is minors, the elderly, the handicapped and the poor. If such undertakings are efficiently implemented, mutual respect between the police and the inhabitants of a given area grows (Hołyst, 2004, pp. 1277–1280).

It is a fundamental task of a local government to meet the collective needs of the inhabitants of a given territory, including the need for security. It should be mentioned, however, that different responsibilities are divided among different entities, and Article 8a of the Law of 6 April 1990 about the Police (OJ 202, no. 7, item 58 as amended) defines the task vested in the police. By virtue of this Law, the police are supposed to initiate and organise the activities of local communities aimed at the prevention of crime, offences and other criminogenic phenomena (*Obwieszczenie*). Such activities can be exemplified by neighbourhood watch groups operating in limited areas. Their purpose is surveillance of a neighbourhood and reporting any suspicious individuals or events to the police.

The experiences of other states in the area of local communities playing role in ensuring security present a number of practical examples. One of them is provided by the “Neighbourhood Watch Groups” programme, popular in the US, Canada and Western Europe. Such groups are supported and partially financed by local governments and private entrepreneurs. The goal of such groups is to reduce crime, strengthen the sense of community, curb the fear of crime, improve the standard of living in a given

neighbourhood and improve contacts between inhabitants and the police (Urban, 2012, pp. 104–105). Another example (from the Netherlands) is provided by the establishment of guards serving local needs. Such guards operate within the range of civic rights, their operations are directed by the police and their tasks encompass monitoring threats and reporting on them. An additional, desirable outcome is providing jobs to the unemployed, thereby allowing them to re-enter the labour market (Czapska, Wójcikiewicz, 1999, pp. 241–242).

Regardless of the form such local community participation in ensuring security adopts, it is beneficial for all the inhabitants of the area.

### **Cooperation of local communities with local governments**

Since 1990, the system of public administration in Poland has employed a dualistic principle, under which different tasks are performed by the structures of central administration and by local administrations (Niewiadomski, 2000, p. 12). This means that local governments perform a number of tasks significant for local communities, as stipulated in the Constitution of Poland of 2 April, 1997, and the regulations of local government legislation. As concerns the basic units of local governments, auxiliary units can be additionally established in municipalities (Law of 8 March, 1990, on municipal local government, OJ 2001, no. 142, item 1591, as amended) such as village councils, town districts and housing estates, as well as other local government institutions without legal personality. They are both the engines of development in local communities, but also allow security to be monitored more comprehensively, which is a prerequisite of any advancement. A municipal government is also supposed to facilitate local communities participating in exercising power.

By their involvement in problem solving, local communities make the perception of the situation more realistic, as local governments usually view it through statistics which to a large extent generalise individual problems. Therefore, a local community's participation is particularly valuable when designing or updating municipal strategy. Good communication constitutes a significant element of cooperation between local governments and local communities. It involves efficient notification of the citizens about important undertakings, and gathering opinions in different ways about the matters that are important for a given community. It also calls for social consultation and an assessment of the levels of social participation.

Including the inhabitants in the process of strategic planning can bring about a number of desirable outcomes, such as establishing permanent contact between local actors, increasing the awareness of the local community as to the potential of their own region and local resources, and inspiring the need for endogenous development of their region. Including a local community in strategic activities increases social support for the solutions adopted and generates a sense of responsibility for the achievement of the planned, long-term results of the strategy that is being implemented. It also contributes to the interests of various circles to be revealed and facilitates negotiations of the conditions under which they can be met (Rosiński, Rosińska, Kawalek, 2011, p. 7).

The above examples demonstrate how well-developed local governance provides natural conditions for an entire range of social activities to emerge.

### **Social community activities versus the European Union**

The goal of the Lisbon Strategy, adopted at the summit of EU leaders in March 2000, and later complemented at the Gothenburg summit in June 2001 by adding the environmental dimension, was to ensure that over the next decade the European Union became the most dynamic, competitive, knowledge-based global economy able to ensure sustainable growth, offering more and better jobs, greater social cohesion as well as protection of the natural environment (*Strategia*). The social dimension of the Strategy is expressed in one of its subgoals, “Modernising the European social model,” supposed to be implemented by means of the following programmes: 1. education for life and work in a knowledge-based society, 2. developing active employment policy, 3. modernisation of social care, and 4. promotion of social involvement (Czerwińska, 2004, p. 1).

The goal indicated in the Lisbon Strategy as concerns social cohesion is to be implemented by means of the Local Activity Programme, involving the emergence of a new active social state. It requires investments to be made in human and social capital, that is investments made in people and their relations, mutual trust and commitment to communal issues, that is in all these aspects that are decisive for the pace and quality of local development on a par with financial capital. It should be remembered that a sense of identity, belonging and commitment to one’s region is an essential foundation of conscious citizenship.

The Local Activity Programme is one of the instruments of active integration. It fosters social activation and resolves a local community's problems by means of involving its citizens.

The Lisbon Strategy was continued in the Communication from the Commission of 3 March 2010 – *Europe 2020. A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth*. Particular attention is given there to rural areas, which are the targets of the programme. An active development policy of rural areas, conducted by the European Union which is assisted by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development, should contribute to advancements in the infrastructure, social and educational services, and, in a more general dimension, to enhanced human capital in rural areas (Europejska, 2010, p. 16).

It is worth noting that the participation of Polish local governments in EU programmes allows them to take an active part in the collective work of member states and increases their development opportunities (Wankiewicz, 2009, p. 32).

## **Conclusions**

The Polish Ministry of Labour and Social Policy understands civic society as having two dimensions: "civic group activities, or the activities of non-governmental organisations, local communities and local governments, informal groups and social movements coupled with civic consciousness" (*Spółeczeństwo*). It seems that the latter, alongside a sense of locality, provides a significant stimulus to start working for improved security.

The sense of locality fosters a sense of subjectivity and stronger personal relations, it helps meet the needs to belong and be appreciated. The sense of locality also facilitates the development of social capital, which enhances the bonds of trust, loyalty and solidarity which are expressed by means of self-organisation and self-governance, mainly via voluntary associations (Sztompka, 2012, pp. 179–185). Therefore some individuals take various steps as a group in order to collectively improve conditions they find disadvantageous.

Self-governance is more than a guarantee of the right to manifest one's own interests through local communities, the right to manifest one's values and preferences. The development of self-governance allows local communities to make their own, sovereign decisions concerning their is-

sues and problems. All this is supposed to enable them to participate in exercising power, thereby making the authorities meet the needs of inhabitants and stimulating socio-economic development. The high development level of a region, high political consciousness of its inhabitants, highly dynamic and effective activities of social organisations translate into the level of security in this region.

The activation of a local community brings about the emergence of non-governmental organisations or social co-operatives, thereby creating new jobs, teaching new skills that are helpful in achieving one's goals, and ensuring appropriate funds. In particular, the participation of young people in local undertakings that teach them appropriate attitudes, prepare them for work in local government and international administration is invaluable.

Civic communities implement numerous valuable initiatives. They allow a number of institutions to reduce costs and apply the principles of cost-effectiveness, involve the representatives of local communities, mainly as volunteers, undertake difficult and frequently unpopular tasks, educate leaders who will later assume significant positions in public administration, and, first and foremost, monitor and in a way supervise public services in order to improve the quality of services provided to citizens (Wankiewicz, 2009, pp. 39–41). By means of exercising control, a local community both meets its needs and indicates new ways of satisfying them, allowing them to be evaluated in public debate and taking an active part in the implementation of different undertakings (Wodniak, 2002, pp. 100–101).

It is of utmost importance that society should trust social institutions and perceive them as operating in a legal manner and for social benefit. Social satisfaction with the structural contexts translates into better individual moods, as well as increased assets in social capital (Moczuk, 2009, p. 13).

Considering the role of local communities in ensuring security, it should be stressed that it involves a “consciously directed and organised process that encompasses the elements of control, management and coordination of the activities performed by different entities for the common good” (Gęsicka, 1996, p. 12). Therefore, in order to ensure stability, it is of fundamental importance to have a partnership of numerous institutions that are responsible for security in a given area and their investing in the local character of activities. It seems desirable to achieve a situation where concern about security, perceived in a multifaceted way, will unite individuals, communities and institutions.



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### **Streszczenie**

*Bezpieczeństwo może być definiowane, jako pewien obiektywny stan, polegający na braku zagrożenia, odczuwany subiektywnie przez jednostki lub grupy. Poprawa bezpieczeństwa, szczególnie w najbliższej przestrzeni, to zadanie dla instytucji takich jak policja czy samorząd, jednakże działania nie będą przynosiły trwałych efektów bez zaangażowania społeczności lokalnych w proces poprawy bezpieczeństwa. W kreowaniu bezpieczeństwa niezwykle istotne jest partnerstwo wielu instytucji odpowiedzialnych za stan bezpieczeństwa na danym terenie, a także partnerstwo ze społecznością lokalną, która wydaje się być komórką najbardziej zorientowaną w aktualnej sytuacji*

występowania zagrożeń na danym obszarze. Efektem wszelkiej współpracy muszą być działania podejmowane na poziomie rządowym i lokalnym, co jest gwarantem poprawy bezpieczeństwa.

**Słowa kluczowe:** społeczność lokalna, bezpieczeństwo, samorządy, policja, prewencja, konsultacje społeczne, aktywność lokalna

### **Резюме**

Безопасность может быть определена как некое объективное состояние, состоящее в отсутствии опасности, субъективно ощущаемое отдельными лицами или группами. Повышение уровня безопасности, особенно в непосредственной близости, это задача для таких учреждений как полиция или местное самоуправление, однако же действия не принесут долговременных результатов без участия местных общин в процессе повышения безопасности. В создании безопасности чрезвычайно важным является сотрудничество многих учреждений, ответственных за состояние ситуации безопасности на данной территории, а также сотрудничество с местным населением, которое, кажется, является наиболее ориентированной ячейкой в текущей ситуации возникновения угрозы на данной территории. Результатом всяческого сотрудничества должны быть действия принятые на государственном и местном уровнях, что является гарантом улучшения уровня безопасности.

**Ключевые слова:** местное общество, безопасность, муниципалитеты, полиция, превенция, общественные консультации, местная активность

### **Резюме**

Поняття безпеки можна визначити як певний об'єктивний стан, який засновується на відсутності загрози та суб'єктивному відчутті однієї особи чи групи. Покращення безпеки, особливо в найближчому оточенні, є завданням, передусім, поліції чи органів місцевого самоуправління. Їхня діяльність не буде ефективною без допомоги та підтримки місцевої спільноти. В покращенні безпеки дуже важливою є співпраця багатьох установ, які є відповідальними за стан безпеки в даному регіоні, а також партнерство з місцевим населенням, яке є найбільш зорієнтованим в появі небезпечних ситуацій. Результатом такої співпраці повинні бути конкретні рішення, прийняті на рівні уряду та органів місцевого самоврядування як гарантії безпеки.

**Ключові слова:** місцеве населення, безпека, органи місцевого самоврядування, поліція, профілактика, консультації з громадськістю, місцева діяльність

