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## **INDIVIDUAL CHARACTERISTICS OF NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATION LEADERS AND THE ORGANIZATIONS' READINESS TO IMPLEMENT SOCIAL INNOVATIONS**

## **CHARAKTERYSTYKI PRZYWÓDCÓW ORGANIZACJI POZARZĄDOWYCH A GOTOWOŚĆ ORGANIZACJI DO WDRAŻANIA INNOWACJI SPOŁECZNYCH**

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**Summary:** The aim of the article is to answer the following research question: Are there any differences between individual characteristics of the leaders of non-governmental organizations which represent different readiness to implement social innovations? The answer will be based on the study carried out in 2017 in 29 rural communes of Łódzkie Province, with 104 NGO leaders as participants. Five research tools were used, including psychological instruments to measure social competencies of NGO leaders, their openness to experience, readiness to resist, and locus of control. The respondents' education and sex were also analyzed. The analyses show that the leaders of organizations that are ready to implement social innovations have higher assertive competencies, cooperative competencies and social resourcefulness than do the leaders of organizations that are not yet willing to do so.

**Keywords:** local social policy, non-governmental organizations, social innovations, individual characteristics of rural NGO leaders.

**Streszczenie:** Celem artykułu jest udzielenie odpowiedzi na następujące pytanie badawcze: czy w zakresie charakterystyk podmiotowych występują różnice pomiędzy przywódcami organizacji pozarządowych, które różnią się gotowością do wdrażania innowacji społecznych? Odpowiedź zostanie udzielona na podstawie badań przeprowadzonych w 2017 r. na obszarze 29 gmin wiejskich województwa łódzkiego. Wzięło w nich udział 104 przywódców NGO. Wykorzystano 5 narzędzi badawczych, w tym narzędzia psychologiczne służące do pomiaru kompetencji społecznych przywódców NGO, ich otwartości na doświadczenie, gotowości przeciwstawiania się, umiejscowienia poczucia kontroli. Analizowano również zmienne takie jak wykształcenie oraz płeć respondentów. Z przeprowadzonych analiz wynika, iż przywódcy z organizacji gotowych wdrażać innowacje społeczne charakteryzują się większym natężeniem kompetencji asertywnych, kooperacyjnych i zaradności społecznej w stosunku do grupy przywódców z organizacji niezdecydowanych je realizować.

**Słowa kluczowe:** lokalna polityka społeczna, organizacje pozarządowe, innowacje społeczne, cechy podmiotowe przywódców wiejskich organizacji pozarządowych.

## 1. Introduction

It is the task of local social policy entities to satisfy social needs and solve problems affecting residents of various territorial systems, and non-governmental organizations (foundations, associations, and unions of associations) are examples of such entities [Grewiński, Kamiński 2007; Necel, Nosal 2016; Salamon 2015, p. 2154]. At least some of them are expected to implement social innovations [Dietrich et al. 2016], understood as activities that are atypical and alternative in the local context and whose aim is to satisfy social needs or solve the problems affecting the members of a territorial community [Zajda et al. 2016, pp. 73–100]. This kind of activity does not only correspond to the demands of civic [Grewiński, Kamiński 2007] and multisectoral [Grewiński 2009] social policy, but it also refers to the demands of the new public governance model in which citizens are no longer customers of social services provided by the state but become their co-producers and co-creators instead [Janoś-Kresło 2013; Lindsay, Osborne, Bond 2014, p. 193; Sørensen, Torfing 2015; Sześciło 2015].

K. Jaskyte and M. de Riobó [2004, p. 76] point out the relationship between the innovation level of non-governmental organizations and the management style of their leaders, claiming that organizations whose leaders display a democratic and participatory leadership style are perceived as innovative. Apart from the leadership style, the organization's innovativeness may also depend on their leaders' individual characteristics (cf. [Wojtczuk-Turek 2012]).

Given these assumptions, in the first part of the paper we identify individual characteristics of NGO leaders which according to source literature may play a role in those entities' readiness to implement social innovations. In the second part we describe the methodology of original research carried out as part of the project titled "Local Systems of Social Innovations in Rural Areas", financed with a grant from the National Science Centre<sup>1</sup>. In the third part we present the outcome of the analyses, summarized in the section "Conclusions".

## 2. Characteristics of rural NGO leaders and the organizations' readiness to implement social innovations

NGO leaders' attitudes<sup>2</sup> to social innovations and their individual characteristics may affect the activity of the organizations they lead in terms of creating and implementing such innovations. Among such characteristics K. Jaskyte [2015, p. 1925] identifies experience, knowledge, and social skills. In Poland, no research on this subject has been carried out. Based on analyses of samples made up of commercial organization leaders, it can be presumed that creativity combined with tolerance for ambiguity,

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<sup>1</sup> Project no. 015/19/D/HS6/00690 is being carried out in the years 2016-2019 (contract no.: UMO-2015/19/D/HS6/00690, decision no. DEC-2015/19/D/HS6/00690).

<sup>2</sup> Leaders are presidents of the organizations.

self-confidence, having independent views, the need to create the reality, goal-orientation, delaying gratification, endurance and openness to experience may be the important characteristics. In addition, A. Wojtczuk-Turek [2012, pp. 49–77] points to characteristics such as the sense of self-efficacy, optimism, resilience, knowledge, and social competencies. The inventory of characteristics is extensive. In this study we analyze only some of them.

The first group is social competencies mentioned by both K. Jaskyte, and A. Wojtczuk-Turek. A. Matczak and K. Martowska identify the following:

1. Assertive competencies – very useful for people in managerial positions, leaders and negotiators, because they need to communicate their opinions clearly and be able to resist situations that endanger things important to them, but in a way that would minimize the social costs of opposition.

2. Cooperative competencies – competencies of people who are able to collaborate with others efficiently and harmoniously; they ensure good cooperation with others.

3. Sociable competencies – they help to initiate and maintain informal contacts, useful in public exposure situations.

4. Community competencies – especially desirable for people working in organizations that operate for the public good.

5. Social resourcefulness – manifested in the ability to obtain goods from others or motivate them to behave in a certain way [Matczak, Martowska 2013, pp. 44–52].

The second discussed characteristic is openness to experience, mentioned by A. Wojtczuk-Turek, included in the five-factor model of personality [McCrae, Costa 2008].

The third trait of leaders of rural non-governmental organizations that we analyze is their readiness to resist, involving resistance to social influences. Resistance is readiness to oppose unwanted influences and social limitations [Pasikowski 2016a]. It may play a role in implementing social innovations, which are atypical and alternative activities different from the local routine: readiness to resist may facilitate the rejection of routine ways of activity.

The fourth analyzed individual characteristic of rural NGO leaders is their locus of control, i.e., general expectations concerning the nature of factors that determine the effects of their activity [Matczak et al. 2009, p. 6]. People with high social competencies find social interactions easier. They also display an internal locus of control [Riggio 1999, p. 800].

The respondents' education and sex were analyzed in the research, too.

With the literature review in the background, we intend to answer in the article the following study question: Are there any differences between individual characteristics of the leaders of non-governmental organizations which represent different readiness to implement social innovations? In order to answer it, we carried out a study involving the leaders of non-governmental organizations from all the 29 rural areas around the three largest towns of Łódzkie Province, i.e., Łódź, Piotrków Trybunalski and Skierniewice. The study was carried out between January and April 2017.

### 3. Methodology of original research

#### 3.1. Study procedure

Leaders of non-governmental organizations were recruited for the study. The number of organizations (397) was determined using the database of NGOs purchased from the Central Statistical Office. Finally, we obtained a verified frame of 142 organizations, from which organizations were randomly sampled for the study. This number was used to establish the sufficient sample size for inference at the 0.95 confidence level, with the estimated value of 0.5 for unknown fraction and 5% estimation error. The minimum size calculated this way was  $n_{\min} = 103.87$ . Therefore, 104 organizations were selected. The sample is representative for the analyzed communes.

The selection of entities involved an individual dependent sampling pattern using the prepared frame of NGOs. The analysis included two stages. In the first stage, statistical description measures were used to characterize the leaders of the analyzed NGOs. In the second one, one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was applied to evaluate the differences between the leaders of NGOs which differed in the level of readiness to implement social innovations. Statistical inference was performed at the assumed significance level  $\alpha = 0.05$ .

#### 3.2. Participants

The study participants were 104 leaders of non-governmental organizations: 69 women 35 men. The distribution of education in the sample was as follows: 16 persons with vocational education, 33 persons with secondary education, 7 persons with first cycle higher education, 48 persons with second cycle higher education.

#### 3.3. Research tools

Five research tools were used in the study: an interview guide, PROKOS test, the Openness to Experience scale (O) from the NEO-FFI Personality Inventory, Questionnaire of Readiness to Resist (*KGP*) and “Person at Work” Questionnaire (*Człowiek w Pracy – CP*). Below we briefly describe each of them.

The interview included the question: “In the nearest future, is your organization going to implement any activities to satisfy the needs or solve the problems of commune residents which are new, atypical or different from ones used before?”<sup>3</sup> It was also used to obtain the respondents’ age and education level.

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<sup>3</sup> The cafeteria was made up of the following responses: 1. Yes, 2. No, 3. Hard to say. We are aware of the fact that using only one question may be perceived as a limitation of this study, however, also S. Osborne used one question in his study devoted to innovativeness of voluntary and non-profit organizations [1998].

The second tool was PROKOS Questionnaire<sup>4</sup> by A. Matczak and K. Martowska [2013]. This test is used to evaluate the social competencies profile. PROKOS is an instrument most often used in studies carried out in Polish socio-cultural conditions. The questionnaire measures five dimensions of social competencies: assertive competencies (A – 14 items), cooperative competencies (K – 16 items), sociable competencies (T – 11 items), social resourcefulness (Z – 13 items) and community competencies (S – 6 items) [Matczak, Martowska 2013].

Another tool applied in the study was the Openness to Experience scale (O) from the NEOFFI Personality Inventory adapted to Polish [Zawadzki et al. 1997], designed to measure the personality trait manifested in intellectual curiosity, tolerance for novelty, tendency to seek novelty and appreciate it.

The Questionnaire of Readiness to Resist [Pasikowski 2016a, b], was also used in the study. It is designed to measure resistance when experiencing interpersonal impact. The questionnaire has a four-factor structure. The items of each factor make separate scales: retaliation (Rt – 6 items), assertive confrontation (Ac – 6 items), opportunism (Op – 5 items) and inertia (In – 3 items). The first scale collects data on oriented expression of anger and aversion as well as activities taken against the persons who exert the pressure. The “Assertive confrontation” scale measures the person’s readiness to openly communicate objection to unwanted social influence connected with searching for arguments to change the situation, however, respecting the rights of other people. The outcome of the “Opportunism” scale reflects the readiness to instrumentally build the impression of acquiescence, which makes it possible to achieve one’s goals or minimize potential losses connected with open opposition. The fourth scale, “Inertia”, measures the readiness to limit contact, withdraw, avoid, refuse and reject activities, possibly combined with aversion to the persons who try to exert influence or the pressure situation.

The last research tool used in this study was the “Person at Work” questionnaire designed by A. Matczak, A. Jaworowska, D. Fecenec, J. Stańczak and J. Bitner [2009]. It is used to measure the locus of control with reference to the conditions of work, which may include the activity in a non-governmental organization. “Person at Work” is an instrument most often used in studies carried out in Polish socio-cultural conditions. The locus of control is diagnosed using<sup>5</sup>: The Personal Control Scale, which measures the belief in control of one’s life and activities, and the Control Ideology Scale, which measures generalized views on a person’s influence on their behavior, goals and activities [Matczak et al. 2009].

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<sup>4</sup> Licenses for using PROKOS and the “Person at Work” questionnaires were purchased from the Psychological Test Laboratory of the Polish Psychological Association; PROKOS and “Person at Work” questionnaires were not translated into English, so in their case we use shortened markings of scales derived from Polish-language names.

<sup>5</sup> It must be remembered that the Personal Control Scale (CP(ko)) and Control Ideology Scale (CP(ik)) provide reversed results: if the score in the scale is high, the level of the trait measured by the scale is low.

#### 4. Results of the research

In the first stage of the analysis, we reviewed the descriptive statistics of the measured values of analyzed NGO leaders' characteristics, i.e. their sex, education level, social competencies, readiness to resist, the locus of control, and openness to experience (Tables 1–3). The organizations were divided with regard to their category, i.e., ready to implement social innovations (a), not ready to implement social innovations (b), and indecisive (c).

**Table 1.** Sex distribution in different categories of NGO leaders

Group	Women		Men	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
a	20	28.99	11	31.43
b	38	55.07	18	51.43
c	11	15.94	6	17.14
Total	69	100	35	100

Source: own study.

The review of contingency table shows that distribution of sexes in the categories is similar.

**Table 2.** Education level distribution in different categories of NGO leaders

Group	Vocational		Secondary		Higher (I <sup>o</sup> )		Higher (II <sup>o</sup> )	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
a	1	6.25	6	18.18	2	28.57	8	16.67
b	10	62.50	22	66.67	1	14.29	23	47.92
c	5	31.25	5	15.15	4	57.14	17	35.42
Total	16	100	33	100	7	100	48	100

Source: own study.

It is much harder to make a similar statement in the case of education level distribution, so below we present the results of analysis of the relationships of sex and education level with the organization category.

Comparison of the average values of the measured characteristics (Table 3) to population-based reference values shows that generally in each category the level of control ideology (ik), personal control (ko), retaliation (Rt), assertive confrontation (Ac), opportunism (Op) and inertia (In) are at the average level, and social competencies and openness to experience (O) are average or slightly above.

**Table 3.** Descriptive statistics of the measured values of NGO leaders' characteristics by organization category

Characteristic	a		b		c	
	<i>m</i>	sd	<i>m</i>	sd	<i>m</i>	sd
Rt	12.68	6.45	12.26	5.73	13.94	5.72
Ac	33.68	6.74	34.42	6.18	35.88	5.12
Op	14.45	5.13	15.01	6.05	14.35	6.37
In	11.29	4.97	10.77	4.76	10.82	4.50
A	45.50	5.23	42.28	6.26	40.88	6.36
K	57.20	5.51	53.56	6.49	53.59	7.50
T	37.52	4.60	34.56	6.41	35.29	7.62
Z	44.80	5.45	41.50	6.43	40.24	8.27
S	19.17	2.74	18.02	3.34	17.88	2.96
O	30.06	6.97	28.25	7.75	30.00	5.23
CP (ik)	57.74	7.84	57.11	6.79	56.00	5.51
CP (ko)	25.35	5.38	26.00	5.00	27.65	5.10

*m* – arithmetic mean, sd – standard deviation, Rt – retaliation, Ac – assertive confrontation, Op – opportunism, In – inertia, A – assertive competencies, K – cooperative competencies, T – sociable competencies, Z – social resourcefulness, S – community competencies, O – openness to experience, CP(ik) – control ideology, CP(ko) – personal control.

Source: own study.

**Table 4.** Intergroup comparisons of NGO leaders' characteristics

Characteristic	$F_{(2, 101)} / H_{(2, 104)}$	<i>p</i>	$\chi^2$ median test	<i>p</i>	post hoc (Bonferroni / Dunn)	$\eta^2$
Rt	1.58	0.4544	0.92	0.6301	.	0.01
Ac	1.25	0.5351	3.12	0.2099	.	0.03
Op	1.60	0.9245	0.01	0.9957	.	0.00
In	0.12 ( <i>F</i> )	0.8827	.	.	.	0.00
A	4.18 ( <i>F</i> )	0.0181	.	.	a > c*	0.08
K	7.07	0.0291	3.78	0.1507	a > b*	0.04
T	3.81	0.1488	2.45	0.2930	.	0.02
Z	6.38	0.0412	3.91	0.1418	ns	0.04
S	2.50	0.2863	0.63	0.7280	.	0.01
O	0.81 ( <i>F</i> )	0.4478	.	.	.	0.02
CP (ik)	0.35 ( <i>F</i> )	0.7085	.	.	.	0.007
CP (ko)	1.11 ( <i>F</i> )	0.3338	.	.	.	0.02

\*  $p < 0.05$ ; *F* – *F* value in ANOVA test; *H* – Kruskal-Wallis test value, ns – pairwise comparison statistically not significant

Source: own study.

In the next stage of the analysis, the measured values of characteristics of leaders representing each category of non-governmental organization were compared.

The distribution of the number of women and men in leader groups (Table 1) proves there is no correlation between sex and organization category ( $\chi^2$  Pearson = 0.12,  $df = 2$ ,  $p = 0.9398$ ,  $C = 0.03$ ,  $C_{\text{cor}} = 0.04$ ). There is no correlation, either, between the leaders' education and the category of organization they represent (Table 2) ( $\chi^2$  Pearson = 9.94,  $df = 6$ ,  $p = 0.1273$ ,  $C = 0.29$ ,  $C_{\text{cor}} = 0.35$ ).

In the case of sociable competencies (T) values, the assumptions of homogeneity of variance were not met (Levene's test  $F(2, 101) = 3.49$ ,  $p = 0.0341$ ). Distributions of seven variables in the three categories of leaders differed significantly from normal distribution (evaluated with the use of Shapiro-Wilk test). These variables are: retaliation (Rt), assertive confrontation (Ac), opportunism (Op), cooperative competencies (K), sociable competencies (T), social resourcefulness (Z) and community competencies (S). Therefore, the analyses for these variables were performed using the non-parametric equivalent of one-way ANOVA, i.e., Kruskal-Wallis test. Statistically significant differences only occurred in assertive competencies (A), cooperative competencies (K) and social resourcefulness (Z), which means that at least in one of the identified groups the average value of the trait differs from the average value in other groups. A closer look at the results (post hoc tests) shows that leaders of organizations ready to implement social innovations have a higher level of assertive competencies and cooperative competencies than those from organizations that are not ready to do so. In both cases, the correlation between the category of organization and the level of the competencies is weak, which is proved by the effect size coefficient ( $\eta^2$ )<sup>6</sup>, although this effect is the highest for assertive competencies. However, caution is necessary when evaluating the obtained results because testing statistical hypotheses is dependent on sample size.

The result proving intergroup differences in social resourcefulness (Z) must be additionally commented on. Actually, these differences are too low to be regarded as significant in the procedure of pairwise comparisons (with a correction protecting from inflation of Type I error rate)<sup>7</sup>. In other words, the measured values of social resourcefulness are slightly higher in category "a" (leaders of organizations ready to implement social innovations), especially in comparison to the scores of category "b" (leaders of organizations not ready to implement social innovations), but the difference

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<sup>6</sup> Eta-squared ( $\eta^2$ ) is an indicator of the effect size independent of sample size. It is used in the analysis of variance to evaluate the correlation between nominal variables (quality factors) and continuous variables. It points to the proportion of variation of the continuous variable explained by the quality factor. If  $\eta^2 \leq 0.10$ , the effect is regarded as weak [Cohen 1992]. In Table 4, the  $\eta^2$  coefficient for parametric analysis of variance was calculated using the formula for partial eta-squared. For non-parametric analysis of variance, it was calculated using  $\chi^2$  from the median test and the sample size ( $n$ ) with the following formula:  $\eta^2 = \frac{\chi^2}{n-1}$ .

<sup>7</sup> Type I error is mentioned in the context of statistical inference, in the theory of statistical hypotheses testing.



is not big enough to be considered as reliable when comparing the three categories and at the confidence level adopted for this comparison.

## 5. Conclusions

NGOs' readiness to implement social innovations may depend on a number of factors, including individual characteristics of their leaders, extremely important especially in the context of rural non-governmental organizations, where the leadership is often one-person and paternalistic. This article analyzes some of them.

The results of data analysis suggest that the organization category only determines reliable differences between two characteristics of leaders: assertive competencies and cooperative competencies. The leaders of organizations ready to implement social innovations have a higher level of cooperative competencies than do the leaders of organizations that are not ready to implement social innovations, and a higher level of assertive competencies than the leaders of indecisive ones. A sufficient level of assertiveness makes it possible to resist situations that endanger things important to the leaders and to openly communicate their views on matters important in terms of the organization's objectives. Assertiveness helps make decisions concerning the implementation of social innovations which require the rejection of previous ways of counteracting social problems and routine practices of dealing with them. Cooperative competencies, in turn, facilitate interpersonal contacts with organization members (who need to be persuaded to accept the idea of taking non-standard and unconventional activities) and other representatives of local social policy entities. Non-governmental organizations do not operate in a social vacuum. Other entities of local social policy, including communal offices, are significant for their functioning and activity. Cooperative competencies make it easier to interact with their representatives and accept the proposals of activities which are often financed by communal offices.

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