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THE ESSENCE OF SOCIAL COMPETENCES IN BUILDING RESILIENCE TO THREATS IN LOCAL COMMUNITIES ON THE EXAMPLE OF A COMMUNE

A b s t r a c t: Contemporary threats are characterised by their unpredictability, variability and rate of spread. These three characteristics lead to an innovative approach and understanding of the safety of small social groups – i.e. The local communities. One of the pillars of this security is the resilience of local communities to threats. The foundations for increasing resilience to threats are primarily: adequate communication, economic development, social capital and interpersonal competences. This article is devoted to interpersonal competences, which allow the local community to cooperate. The aim of the article is to indicate the essence of social competences in shaping resilience to threats in local communities on the example of the Lesznowola commune and to define social competences that help members of the local community build such resilience. The author tries to answer the following question: What social competences help members of the local community to the greatest extent in building resilience to threats?

Key words: safety of local communities, resilience to threats, competences, social competences

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INTRODUCTION

Along with the civilisational development we are witnessing an increased probability of natural, technical or social threats. The upward trend results mainly from population migration, population growth in specific areas, social dissonance, social vulnerability to modern technology and the information struggle. Therefore, it seems so important nowadays to pay attention to the safety of local communities, as they are in fact the most vulnerable to potential threats. The essence of local community security is expressed in the fact that it is the basis of national security. The safety of local communities is, above all, the creation of appropriate conditions for the existence and development of the individual units

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making up the community. This development should be connected with the so-called theory of resilience, which is associated with the ability to cope with sudden, unexpected changes and efficient return to normal functioning. Resilience in social terms refers to equipping individuals with the ability to plan, interact and communicate. These three skills explain the subject of the research – the social competences – which, according to the author, are the foundation for building resilience to threats in local communities. In order to be a resilient local community it is necessary to build certain common spirit, a group, create specific social bonds, and for this to happen a high level of social competence is necessary [Mitchell, 2013, p. 41–42].

The aim of the article is to indicate the essence of social competences in shaping resilience to threats in local communities on the example of the Lesznowola commune and to define social competences that help members of the local community build such resilience. The research problem has been formulated as the following question: What is the essence of social competence in building resilience to threats in local communities?

1. RESILIENCE TO THREATS

1.1. How a threat should be understood?

For a human being, a threat is an unfavourable situation that disorganises the established pattern of action, these are unfavourable factors that contribute to the disturbance of the socially recognised order [Ziarko, Walas-Trębacz, 2010, p. 21]. The threat introduces chaos instead of harmony.

According to philosophical assumptions, *a threat occurs when a person is threatened by some kind of evil, because only evil evokes horror, fear, evil is the shortage of good* [Kalinowski, 1987, p. 45]. A threat occurs when a given subject is threatened with the loss of the good it possesses, or when the subject has a problem with acquiring the good that should be acquired [Kalinowski, 1987, p. 46]. When transferring the above observations to the sphere of local communities safety, it should be stated that a threat is a situation in which there is an increased probability of a dangerous state for a given subject or environment.

A definition of a threat, interesting from the point of view of the article's author, was presented by K. Ficoń, who believes that *a threat is an event caused by random (natural) or non-random (intentional) causes, which has a negative impact on the functioning of a given system or causes adverse (dangerous) changes in its internal or external environment* [Ficoń, 2007, p. 76]. *He further claims that cumulative and unresolved threats may lead to emergency situations both in the system in question and in a specific system environment* [Ficoń, 2007, p. 76].

The term threat can be considered comprehensive and ambiguous, as it is often considered from the perspective of many scientific disciplines [Mroczko,

2012, p. 64]. It sometimes concerns a person, organisation, local communities or complex social processes [Mroczo, 2012, p. 64].

The above quoted definition by K. Ficoń reflects the essence of threats very well. The most important aspect in defining them is to give the reasons for their emergence, i.e. random causes (then we talk about threats caused by natural forces, natural threats) and intentional (then we talk about threats caused by human activity, technical threats).

Referring to the subject of research, proper functioning in society and a sense of security are among the elementary needs of a man. At the moment when these needs are not satisfied, various types of reactions appear, which result in, among others, the following:

- lowering the sense of self-dignity, social position and security;
- frustration, depression, apathy, a sense of loss of purpose and sense of life;
- suicide attempts;
- development of crime;
- economic emigration, especially of young, educated people;
- underutilisation of human potential at working age;
- the ageing of the population;
- demographic decline;
- reduction of state income;
- disputes among the population about political options;
- bad relations with the foreign community.

Modern threats resulting from the progress of civilisation, affecting local communities, are gaining a new quality. They are primarily complex, dynamic and multi-causal. For efficient and effective building of resilience in local communities, threats must be detected, learned and investigated. The recognition of a threat allows to determine the areas of its most frequent occurrence, and thus to diagnose the possibility of natural disasters. Such action is also the basis for initiating prophylactic and preventive behaviour.

The knowledge of threats, the ability to identify them and the awareness that they may occur, allows for better preparation to face them, as well as taking preventive actions. Such an approach brings the local community closer to tackle the unfavourable development of a given situation, and thus allows preventing a crisis. A prudent approach to identifying threats and their symptoms, even the smallest ones, is also important. It is erroneous to claim that a threat will certainly not appear in a given area, because it has never happened before and previous experiences do not indicate that preparation for it was necessary and included in planning.

There are known risks that can be prepared for in the best possible manner and effectively prevented, but there are also unknown risks, which are particularly dangerous because of the scant knowledge about them. These can cause the

greatest damage in a specific area, so it is important to monitor and interpret the various types of symptoms that could cause a threat.

1.2. Threats to the local community on the example of Lesznówola commune

As social competences are considered in terms of building resilience to threats, the author of the article considered it reasonable to verify the inhabitants' knowledge of potential threats for which they should be prepared.

Table 1. The most probable threats in the opinion of the inhabitants of the commune

No.	Type of threat	Percentages				
		1	2	3	4	5
1.	floods	70.37	9.97	7.98	0.0	11.68
2.	chemical, organic	42.17	0	39.89	17.95	0
3.	epidemics	25.93	44.44	17.95	11.68	0
4.	construction disasters	29.34	30.77	39.89	0	0
5.	violent atmospheric phenomena (hailstorms, gales, heavy rains, droughts)	0	0	0	76.92	23.08
6.	road accidents	0	0	21.37	19.09	59.54
7.	railroad accidents	39.89	14.81	31.34	0	13.96
8.	air accidents	3.42	14.81	57.83	11.11	12.82
9.	failures of municipal installations (interruptions in electricity, heat, water, gas, telecommunication)	0	11.40	9.97	49.0	29.63
10.	firefighting	3.42	1.14	24.79	58.97	11.68
11.	terrorism	80.91	19.09	0	0	0
12.	demonstrations, riots	88.31	11.68	0	0	0
13.	social pathologies (e.g. drug addiction, alcoholism)	14.81	63.53	21.65	0	0
14.	unemployment	17.95	42.17	39.89	0	0
15.	thefts, robberies by economic immigrants	4.56	83.76	0	0	11.68
16.	overcrowding	0	43.30	15.95	29.06	11.68
17.	smog	6.87	0	0	39.87	53.28

Legend: 1 – an unlikely threat and 5 – a highly probable threat

Source: Own study.

In one of the questions in the questionnaire, the threats were divided into natural, technical and social ones. Interestingly, the inhabitants are most afraid of natural threats, i.e. violent atmospheric phenomena, e.g. hail, strong winds,

heavy rain, droughts (100% of the respondents) and technical ones, i.e. smog (93.15% of the respondents), failures of municipal installations, e.g. interruptions in electricity and heat supply, interruptions in water and gas supply, telecommunication disturbances (over 78% of the respondents), road accidents (over 78% of the respondents) and fire (70.65% of the respondents). The data is presented in Table 1.

The respondents are not at all afraid of social risks (i.e.: demonstrations, riots, thefts, population migration, social pathologies), which may arise due to the proximity of the commune to Warsaw (Table 1). However, over 40% of the respondents indicated that they were afraid of overpopulation in the commune due to the fast pace of development of housing infrastructure. Whereas more than 80% of the respondents stated that the biggest disadvantage of the commune is the difficult communication towards Warsaw and Piaseczno.

1.3. Social aspect of the resilience concept

When looking at the concept of social resilience, it is worth pointing out that it combines three elements, i.e., creating community with other members of society, improving existing social practices, and using and drawing on experience [Paton, Johnston, 2001, p. 270–277].

A resilient society understands and is aware of the threats to which it is exposed, prepared for their appearance and changes that will occur along with negative events. Therefore, resilience is associated with the ability to deal with sudden, unexpected changes and to recover efficiently [Ayyub, 2014, p. 343].

In order to determine community's resilience, the level of preparedness and responsiveness to specific threats among individual members and the whole group need to be firstly diagnosed and studied.

There are several elements that can facilitate the increase of resilience in local communities. These are primarily [Norris, Pfefferbaum, Wyche, 2008, p. 136]:

- *economic development* related to the diversity of economic resources and the evenness of their distribution;
- *appropriate communication* related to the choice of appropriate ways of providing information;
- *social capital* (cooperation, citizen participation, leadership and roles performed in society);
- *social competence*, i.e. the ability to cooperate, to feel at home with others, to listen, to solve problems together, to be creative in human interaction.

The foundations for community resilience are group activities, participation and active involvement in activities for the benefit of the individual and the entire

community, access to necessary resources, transfer of information and building a community culture based on support, the common good and empathy.

2. SOCIAL COMPETENCES – THEORETICAL AND EMPIRICAL APPROACH

2.1. The classic approach to competences

Defining the concept of competence became a challenge because every theoretician interested in this issue tried to describe the term in an individual manner. Therefore, despite a large number of attempts, it was not possible to establish a commonly accepted definition of competence.

A. Pocztowski understands competences as *permanent human qualities* [Pocztowski, 2007, p. 117]. However, a reflection arises as to whether all of them, even those that are not subject to improvement, practice or self-improvement, can be called permanent.

T. Rostkowski claims that competences are *all employees' traits, knowledge, skills, experience, abilities, ambitions, professed values, styles of action whose possession, development and use by employees enables execution of the company strategy in which they are employed* [Szczęsna, Rostkowski, 2004, p. 41].

T. Oleksyn, indicates that competence is primarily *the knowledge, skills, abilities and predispositions for teamwork, specific skills required at work and personal culture* [Sajkiewicz, 2001, p. 30].

In the above definition, T. Oleksyn points to the behavioural aspect, which refers to the behaviour and culture that an individual presents, and also draws attention to the skill that is certainly the group work. The latter requires an individual to have at least developed social competences.

The above definition may answer the question about the components of competences. Its author has indicated the most important elements that are considered when examining employees' competences.

When analysing the ¹source literature on competences and their components, it should be considered that the elementary components on the basis of which

¹ R. Walkowiak, *Zarządzanie zasobami ludzkimi. Kompetencje, nowe trendy, efektywność*, Dom Organizatora, Toruń 2007; D. Thierry, Ch. Sauret, N. Monod, *Zatrudnienie i kompetencje w przedsiębiorstwach w procesie zmian*, Poltext, Warsaw 1994; L.M. Spencer, S.M. Spencer, *Competence at Work. Models for Superior Performance*, John Wiley & Sons Inc., New York 1993, [in:] M. Juchnowicz, Ł. Sienkiewicz, *Jak oceniać pracę? Wartość stanowisk i kompetencji*, Difin, Warsaw 2006; A. Sajkiewicz, *op. cit.*, Poltext, Warsaw 2002; T. Oleksyn, *Zarządzanie kompetencjami. Teoria i praktyka*, Oficyna Ekonomiczna, Kraków 2006; M. Kocór, A. Strzebińska, *Jakich pracowników potrzebują polscy pracodawcy?*, PARP, Warsaw 2010; H. Król, *Podstawy koncepcji zarządzania zasobami ludzkimi*, [in:] *Zarządzanie zasobami ludzkimi. Tworzenie kapitału ludzkiego organizacji*, ed. by H. Król, A. Ludwiczynski, PWN, Warsaw 2006; Ch. Woodruffe, *Ośrodki oceny i rozwoju. Narzędzia analizy i doskonalenia kompetencji pracowników*, Oficyna Ekonomiczna, Dom Wydawniczy ABC, Kraków 2003; M. Butkiewicz, *Struktura modelu polskich standardów kwalifikacyjnych*, „Edukacja i praca” 1995.

the competences of a given individual are most often determined are: knowledge, skills, attitudes and values. Other elements that build the competence of an individual can be: personality traits, experience, behaviour, abilities, internal motivation, health, health condition, culture of the person.

2.2. Trying to define social competences

When analysing the social needs of a person, two basic definitions of social competences can be presented.

The first one shows the need for approval and acceptance, reducing the importance of the ability of social competence to shape human behaviour, which facilitates the forming of interpersonal relationships. In this aspect, the notion of social competence should be understood as *relational skills, with the help of which we initiate, negotiate, maintain, change and discontinue (end) interpersonal relationships* [Smolka, 2016, p. 27]. Based on this definition, a person will have social competences if he/she is able to establish social, interpersonal relationships with another person. Such relationships should be both intimate and professional, i.e. job-related [Maxim, Nowicki, 2003, p. 748–758].

The second definition of social competences refers to the sense of need for status and power. In this perspective, the discussed notion is understood as *effectiveness in fulfilling one's own intentions in contacts with other people and is connected with the ability to exert influence*. This definition means that the level of competence is evidenced by the effects and results that a person has achieved through his/her contacts with other people. The social competence in this case is also attested by the respect and authority an individual has in society.

It needs to be noted that social competences are not only evidenced by the possibility of affecting other people, influencing them, but also by certain effects, positive results that stem from following the example of a more experienced or knowledgeable person. The essence of such recognition of social competences lies primarily in the effectiveness resulting from the ability to adapt to society.

The possession of social competences is a necessary condition for establishing and maintaining interpersonal contacts. Therefore, it is crucial to demonstrate certain social skills, which are part of the competence.

Despite the diverse definition of social competences, researchers in this area consider them to be a very important factor in the effective functioning of a person. Moreover, the conducted research proves that social competences have a large impact on the level of life satisfaction, interpersonal contacts, willingness to cooperate with other people, as well as eliminate the feeling of stress, which becomes very important in building resilience to threats.

Knowing the basic model of competence, i.e. knowing “what” (mastering theories in a given area), knowing “how”, (having certain skills) and “wanting”

(harnessing knowledge to practice), it is worth to relate it to social competences. If we talk about them at the level of knowledge, we should mean the knowledge of principles, rules of cooperation, collaboration, group behaviour, motivating factors or multiculturalism in interpersonal contacts. The level of skills concerns proper interpersonal communication, cooperation in a group, achieving common goals, decision making, identifying with the situation of another person, managing emotions. Social competences at the level of attitudes concern assertiveness, respect for the other person, willingness to carry out tasks in a group, lack of prejudice, tolerance, empathy [Koszevska, 2014, p. 2].

In the opinion of the author of the article, special attention is to be paid to the claim of scientists that the development of social competences should be sparked already at school age. Numerous studies have proven that social skills contribute to achieving school, academic, professional and social success. They are a sign of proper adaptation to any environment, making it easier for people to adjust themselves to the new surroundings. The researchers found that at school level, the functioning of children and young people can be effectively improved by developing their social skills. However, this requires a diagnosis of the level of social competences as well as an indication of certain deficits.

2.3. Methodology of work and own research results

The aim of the article is to indicate the essence of social competences in shaping resilience to threats in local communities on the example of the Lesznowola commune and to define social competences that help members of the local community build such resilience. The research problem has been described in the form of the following question: *What social competences help members of the local community to the greatest extent in building resilience to threats?*

In order to solve the research problem presented in the article, a diagnostic poll method was used, implemented by means of a survey technique, utilizing a questionnaire tool. In the research, the general population were the inhabitants of Nowa Iwiczna, located in the commune of Lesznowola in the Mazovian Voivodeship.

Based on the formula for the size of the research sample, the author of the article calculated the size of a representative sample which was 351 people. 52.7% women and 47.3% men took part in the study. Most of the respondents (66.9% of them) have higher education, the remaining part – secondary education. The most numerous group among the respondents were people aged 31-40 (38.7% of the respondents) and 25-30 (36% of the respondents). The third group, in terms of numbers, were 41-50 year-olds (20.5%). The least numerous groups were people at the age of: 18-24 (2%), 61-70 (1.7%) and 51-60 (1.1%).

The next criterion in the certificate is the place of work. Over half of the respondents indicated that they work in the public sector, while 37% in the private sector. More than 6% are already retired and 2% are still on educational path. It is a positive sign that nobody indicated unemployment.

One of the questions in the questionnaire asked respondents to indicate which of the listed social competences should members of the local community have in order to build resilience to threats? Based on the results of the survey, the key social competences were determined, assuming that they would be those indicated by more than 50% of respondents. It can therefore be concluded that these competences are of great importance to the respondents and help them most in creating and maintaining a community capable of monitoring, anticipating and reacting to threats. The results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Social competences of local community members

No.	Social competences	Percentages	
		No	Yes
1.	Openness to others	14.53	85.47
2.	Communication skills	24.79	75.21
3.	Conflict resolution skills	25.93	74.07
4.	Resilience to stress	26.21	73.79
5.	Empathy	29.34	70.66
6.	Ability to establish and maintain contacts	30.48	69.52
7.	Negotiating skills	41.60	58.40
8.	Initiative in action	55.84	44.16
9.	Ability to share knowledge and experience	60.11	39.87
10.	Ability to make public speeches	60.11	39.87
11.	The ability to speak and be understood	60.11	39.87
12.	The ability to understand yourself (your emotions, strengths and weaknesses)	69.23	30.77
13.	Teamwork	73.79	26.21
14.	Personal culture	74.07	25.93
15.	Ability to achieve social and individual goals while maintaining good relations with other residents	80.34	19.66
16.	Assertiveness	80.91	19.09
17.	The ability to mentally support another person	83.76	16.24
18.	Ability to listen	87.18	12.82
19.	Ability to achieve objectives while building and maintaining good relations with people in one's environment	87.18	12.82
20.	Emotional intelligence	87.18	12.82

21.	Ability to lead, to be a leader	93.16	6.84
22.	Ability to defend one's own opinion	96.58	3.42
23.	Ability to motivate	98.86	1.14
24.	Hobbies, passions, hobbies	100	0
25.	Tolerance	100	0
26.	Self-esteem	100	0

Source: Own study.

As already indicated, social competence is a term difficult to define unambiguously. This is due to the dynamic development of civilisation, local communities change as a result of e.g. migration, demography, social position, professional position of its members. The way and quality of establishing interpersonal contacts is also subject to revolution. Nowadays, maintaining established contacts with other people is of great importance in this area.

The respondents indicated that improving existing social practices, creating community with other members of society and using and drawing knowledge from the experience gained is facilitated by having and developing the following social competences:

- openness to other people (85.47% of the respondents);
- ability to communicate (75.21% of the respondents);
- ability to solve conflicts (74.07% of the respondents);
- resilience to stress (73.79% of the respondents);
- empathy (70.66% of the respondents);
- ability to establish and maintain contacts (69.52% of the respondents);
- negotiation skills (58.40% of the respondents).

The above competences determine the effectiveness of coping with specific social situations and are acquired by people through experience. It seems reasonable to claim that openness to others determines or helps to acquire the remaining competences indicated by the respondents. Perhaps this is why most respondents indicated this competence.

From the results of the research we can additionally conclude that tolerance for others, self-esteem and fulfilment of passions do not affect building resilience to threats.

SUMMARY

To sum up, it should be noted that the contemporary safety of local communities should be an area of deep interest for both theoreticians and practitioners. These are the local communities that are most vulnerable to various types of threats and they are the first ones to deal with their course and consequences. Such a situation translates into the functioning of larger social groups at the level

of voivodships or the whole country. Therefore, building resilience to threats should be one of the priorities in the functioning of communes.

In this article, the author has tried to signal and prove that the local situation and the strength of local communities depend on the social competences of the individuals forming that community. The level of social competence of the local community will depend on how early the units forming it were equipped with them.

The results of scientific research conducted in the discussed thematic area allow to claim that children should be equipped with social competences at the primary school level. It is necessary to create such teaching conditions for children and to create such a school environment to make it possible to acquire and improve such competences. In this way, developing e.g. empathy, communication skills, resilience to stress or group cooperation will allow adults to create better human relations, have a high level of social capital and be empathic in a balanced way. Such skills will help individuals to build resilience to threats in larger social groups.

The obtained research results indicate that the research aim has been achieved and the main research problem has been solved. The author of the article is aware of the fact that the research and considerations contained in it do not exhaust the issues related to social competences in building resistance to threats in local communities. In connection with the above, the author hopes to continue research in the future, thanks to which it will be possible to determine what social competences are possessed by the inhabitants of the described commune, which, as a result, will allow to compare the preferred one with the actual competency profile and to list the competency gaps among the respondents. When obtaining a competency gap, data can be used to create workshops for residents, trainings and activate residents to participate in various types of associations, social groups, and contribute to the local community.

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