

THE ROLE OF NGO'S SOCIAL NETWORKS IN THE MAINTENANCE OF A MULTICULTURAL ENVIRONMENT IN THE RURAL AREAS OF LATVIA

Larisa Brokāne¹, Dr.Psych., Linda Feldmane², Mg.sc.soc., Ginta Kronberga³, Mg.oec.,
Latvijas Lauksaimniecības universitāte,
¹Larisa.Brokane@llu.lv, t. 26300427 ²Linda.Feldmane@llu.lv, t. 29440601
³Ginta.Kronberga@inbox.lv, t. 29390994, Lielā iela 2, Jelgava, LV – 3001,

Introduction. A united cultural space, characterized by cultural diversity and united by common values is a basis of Latvian civil society. The existence of a united cultural space initiates development of various social, ethnic and religious groups as a united civil society. The national culture values based on the culture institutions of national significance and cultural heritage of each group take an important role in developing state cultural perspective and in development and maintenance of national identity.

Fundraising from EU and other foundations is an important sphere where networks and their agents start to cooperate. In many cases co-financing is necessary from the organization itself or from the local municipality or state, and coordination and cooperation principles become important. Recently new initiatives are observed also at the countryside, e.g., partnerships which unite local municipalities, private sector, state institutions, non-governmental organizations and other community groups show itself as a relevant development agent.

Methods. The research objective is to explore the role of NGO support network in the maintenance of cultural diversity and development of a multi – cultural cooperation at the Latvian countryside. The research methods are: structured interviews and SWOT analysis.

Key words: NGO, multi-cultural environment, social networks, countryside.

Theoretical Conceptions of Multiculturalism

There are two tensions within multiculturalism that sociology inherits. First, multiculturalism has come to define a set of state policies to manage (neutralize, nullify, subdue, or conquer) difference (multiculturalism as policy). Second, it also has come to define those strategies that mount resistances to state management policies of difference (multiculturalism as politics). Thus, multiculturalism has come to express both a will to difference and a will to sameness (equity, equality, fairness) simultaneously.

These tensions are not unique to multiculturalism. In the second half of the twentieth century, many struggles for social justice have mobilized identity and difference and placed new demands on citizenship. There are two reasons for this. First, which may be called the politics of identity, many social movements (civil rights and women's and indigenous peoples' rights being principal examples) called into question the shortcomings of the ideal of universal citizenship in practice, signalling that, while being formally citizens, their identities still excluded them from rights of citizenship. Second, which may be called the politics of difference, many social groups articulated rights that accrued to them on the basis of their difference. Struggles for minority rights in language, schooling, and public appearance were often waged on this basis. The politics of recognition (combining the politics of identity and difference) has, therefore, increasingly mobilized

itself as simultaneous and conflicting claims to sameness and difference, inclusion and exclusion, and rights and obligations. *(Bryan S. Turner, 2006:407)*

Multiculturalism, either as policy or politics, may well have exhausted its possibilities. It was never as accepted and embraced in the United States and Europe as it was in Canada, and it has had a variegated history in Australia. The growing securitization of the state and politicization and radicalization of borders, and the growing conflicts between Muslim minorities and dominant cultures, have already shifted the discourse in the United States and Europe from multiculturalism to euphemisms of “integration” and “cohesion”. Whatever the concepts deployed, the tensions of the politics of recognition will continue to influence the research and political agendas. *(Bryan S. Turner, 2006: 407-408)*

Multiculturalism in which ethnic groups exist separately and equally. The United States and other Western countries are pluralistic in many senses, but ethnic differences have for the most part been associated with inequalities rather than equal but independent membership in the national community. It does seem at least possible to create a society in which ethnic groups are separate but equal, as is demonstrated by Switzerland, where French, German and Italian groups coexist in the same society.

In Britain and elsewhere in Europe, the leaders of most ethnic minority groups have increasingly emphasized the path of pluralism. To achieve 'distinct but equal' status will demand major struggles, and as yet this is a very distant option. Ethnic minorities are still perceived by many people as a threat: to their job, their safety and the “national culture”. The scapegoating of ethnic minorities is a persistent tendency. With the young in Western Europe quite often still holding similar prejudices to those of older generations, ethnic minorities in most countries face a future of continued discrimination, in a social climate characterized by tension and anxiety. *(Giddens A., 2006: 498)*

The model and characteristic of NGOs

The model NGOs determines what functions need to be performed to achieve its mission and allocates the work or assigns tasks. Management regularly updates assignments in light of changing plans and priorities. Management aims for an optimum match between the human resources (staff and volunteers), their skills and expertise, and the tasks they are assigned..

An NGOs human resources (staff and volunteers) need skills, motivation, and opportunities to make the best contribution they are capable of. It is necessary to organize staff and volunteers so they relate to each other in ways that are most conducive to productive outcomes.

NGOs have historically been found on the Moral High Ground. They have been organizations founded by people with strong moral commitments to helping the poor or the powerless, of empowering people and developing communities, of changing unjust laws and oppressive behavior. They have set themselves up as official structures proclaiming these missions, and are prepared to live by these precepts. NGOs:

- They are driven by values that reflect a desire to improve peoples lives.
- They are voluntary (i.e. formed by choice, and involving voluntary contributions of time and money).
- They have private and independence governance.
- They are not for profit (i.e. not distributing profit to staff or shareholders.)
- They have a clearly stated and definable public purpose.
- They respond to, and are accountable to, a constituency.
- They are formally constituted in law. (*Holloway R.,2007*)

A further characteristic of NGOs is that in most cases they depend on donations for the resources required to perform their functions. The donations may come from the community, from businesses, from the government of the country in which the NGO operates, or from foreign governments, foundations and businesses. For an NGO to be able to collect donations from the general public there must be a certain measure of financial viability in some section of that community. The section of the community with financial viability must be sympathetic to the needs of that section which needs the service being provided by the NGO. The contribution by a government to an NGOs material needs can only happen where there is a friendly relationship between government and the NGO. This happen where the government wishes to channel its resources into work of more urgent need, but the government is prepared to have an NGO, or a number of NGOs take care of those needs which the government cannot fully pay attention to at that particular time. (*Fanyana D. Mazibuko, 2000*)

Social networks Theory

There is an old saying that “it’s not *what* you know, it’s *who* you know”. This adage expresses the value of having “good connections”. Sociologists refer to such connections as networks – all the direct and indirect connections that link a person or a group with other people or groups. Your personal networks thus include people you know directly (such as your friends) as well as people you know indirectly (such as your friends’ friends). Personal networks often include people of similar race, class, ethnicity and other types of social background, although there are

exceptions. For example, if you subscribe to an online mailing list, you are part of a network that consists of all the people on the list, who may be of different racial or ethnic backgrounds and genders. Because groups and organizations can also be networked – for example, all the alumni of a particular university – belonging to such groups can greatly extend your reach and influence.

Social network theory produces an alternate view, where the attributes of individuals are less important than their relationships and ties with other actors within the network. This approach has turned out to be useful for explaining many real-world phenomena, but leaves less room for individual agency, the ability for individuals to influence their success; so much of it rests within the structure of their network.

A social network is a social structure made of nodes (which are generally individuals or organizations) that are tied by one or more specific types of interdependency, such as values, visions, ideas, financial exchange, friendship, kinship, dislike, conflict or trade. The resulting graph-based structures are often very complex. (*Mouge, P., Contractor, N., 2003*)

Network analysis within organizations In general, network analysis focuses on the relationships between people, instead of on characteristics of people. These relationships may comprise the feelings people have for each other, the exchange of information, or more tangible exchanges such as goods and money. By mapping these relationships, network analysis helps to uncover the emergent and informal communication patterns present in an organization, which may then be compared to the formal communication structures. These emergent patterns can be used to explain several organizational phenomena. (*Burt, R.S., 1992*)

Along with growing interest and increased use of network analysis has come a consensus about the central principles underlying the network perspective. In addition to the use of relational concepts, we note the following as being important:

- Actors and their actions are viewed as interdependent rather than independent, autonomous units;
- Relational ties (linkages) between actors are channels for transfer or "flow" of resources (either material or nonmaterial);
- Network models focusing on individuals view the network structural environment as providing opportunities for or constraints on individual action;
- Network models conceptualize structure (social, economic, political, and so forth) as lasting patterns of relations among actors.

Network analysts believe that how an individual lives depends in large part on how that individual is tied into the larger web of social connections. Many believe, moreover, that the success or failure of societies and organizations often depends on the patterning of their internal structure (Wasserman S., 1994)

The network plays a significant role not only in the life of the actors of the organizations and other public sectors, but also in the individual's life, because the non-formal exchange relationship provides them with the necessary material and non-material resources.

The network concept lays stress on the fact that each individual has a connection with other individuals, who are connected at the same time with some other individuals etc. In the social network theory the network is generally homogenous, with a marked social nature, because the agents that form it are social beings or individuals, or their groupings of different kind. That is why the social network refers to the actors totality and the ties between them.

The actors in the social network theory may be both separate individuals and their groups, which possess legal capability, ability to make choice, to make decisions and to act. It is exactly the legal capability that is the most typical feature of the actors. The social network performs several functions, which are very important to the individual and the whole society. These are offering different kinds of support, information exchange, economic resources exchange, possibilities of socialization and providing the sense of belonging. It could be referable both to the official and to the non-official process of the network formation.

Aspects of problem

In order to make the research, the research problem SWID analysis aspects were indicated:

1. NGO role in the maintenance of a multi – cultural environment
2. Characteristics of a multi – cultural environment diversity in the Latvian regions
3. Significance of NGO social networks in the maintenance and development of a multi – cultural environment in Latvian regions.

SWOT analysis

The research selection:

1. NGO Support Centre of the South Latgale (SL) (Head – Ilgvars Zvīdris, Daugavpils);
2. NGO Support Centre of the North Kurzeme (NK) (Head – Inese Freije-Neimane, Talsi);
3. NGO Regional Support Centre of Zemgale (Z) (Head – Uldis Dūmiņš, Jelgava);
4. NGO Resources Centre of Vidzeme (V) (Head – Evija Platača, Valmiera)

1. The role of the NGO in maintenance of the multicultural environment – the SWOT analysis

Strengths	Weaknesses
NK. <i>“The activities organized by the NGO are those, which come from “below”, respectively – they come</i>	SL. <i>“The participation of the NGO in the politics formation has an insufficiently high level or it has none</i>

<p>organized from the very nation. That is why they have such power.”</p> <p>SL. “The NGO is one of those opportunities that unite people who are thinking similarly and who are willing to do something. In the same way, if they join together in the organization, the participants have much bigger influence in the processes of civil society.”</p> <p>Z. “The NGO’s of the minorities in Zemgale are developed as the organizers of cultural activities and initiators of their own traditions maintenance...”</p>	<p>at all.”</p> <p>Z. “In the sphere of the multicultural environment maintenance there is a lack of knowledgeable NGO leaders in project management.”</p> <p>NK. “There is no concrete action in maintenance of the NGO’s multicultural environment.”</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Opportunities</p> <p>SL. “The NGO is the very organization that is able to show/to express a different opinion from the official point of view of the state.”</p> <p>Z. “For protection of the minorities’ interests the NGO can strengthen the capacity of these organizations by providing the support in different spheres.”</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Threats</p> <p>NK. “The support of the NGO cannot provide the maintenance of the multicultural environment, because many organizations exist there, where these issues are included in the range of activities.”</p>

2. Characteristic of the multicultural environment’s multiformity in the regions of Latvia – the SWOT analysi

<p style="text-align: center;">Strengths</p> <p>NK. “People have become more familiar and get on. Russian community functions in Saldus as a very active organization that helps maintain the traditions of the Russian culture.”</p> <p>“The best cooperation with Saldus and Ventspils districts can be found in Kurzeme region.”</p> <p>Z. “For the formation of an enabling environment the NGO uses the informative network of the NGO’s database, the section of the self-governmental Web pages “NGO”.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Weaknesses</p> <p>NK. “The cultural difference is not marked in Kurzeme region. This is a matter of the Roman culture; and there are more representatives of the Russian culture in the biggest cities, but in general I suppose that there are no marked cultural distinctions.”</p> <p>“The information exchange and cooperation are insufficient; the reason is that each district has a shortage of financing and valuable cooperation provision.”</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Opportunities</p> <p>SL. “The Latgalians are characterized as the people willing to speak the Latgalian language and achieve the aim that means that the Latgalian language is accepted on the state level.”</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Threats</p> <p>V. “Valmiera hardly can have typical ethnic groups.”</p>

3. The significance of the NGO’s social networks in maintaining of the multicultural environment and the development in the countryside of Latvia – the SWOT analysis

<p style="text-align: center;">Strengths</p> <p>SL. “Tight interaction ties with the Support Agency of Latgale region and the Countryside Forum of Latvia.”</p> <p>“It acts unitary, because it uses its self-formed networks in case, if necessary, and cooperates.”</p> <p>Z. “The network of the NGO’s Support Centres – Zemgale NGO centre and Jēkabpils NGO centre are the organizations -that unites the most part of Zemgale region. The number of the resources users reaches more than 300 organizations from approximately 600 of them registered in Zemgale region.”</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Weaknesses</p> <p>NK. “Lack of financing for provision of the ties (links) and cooperation.”</p> <p>V. “One does not have to form anything artificially, practically, the networks exist in each district and there are contacts with Riga.”</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Opportunities</p> <p>SL. “In order the network could successfully function a mutual communication is necessary; it is one of the most significant motives for the network development and life.”</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Threats</p> <p>Z. “The network structure has not been precisely defined, because several support organizations take part.”</p>

Social network analysis is focused on uncovering the patterning of people's interaction. Network analysis is based on the intuitive notion that these patterns are important features of the lives of the individuals who display them.

Conclusions

The geopolitical situation and history have created a *multicultural society* in Latvia, which may become more multihued due to the globalization.

The survey data speak volumes for the significant role of the NGO in the maintenance and development of the multicultural environment, because the NGO functions as a central agent between the governmental and the non-governmental structures.

A big part (35%) of the active network links in the countryside of Latvia is local. That means, in world of today, where a high mobility and perfect migration opportunities exist, we still receive a great part of support from the agents.

The individuals whose are evolved into NGO's work they try satisfy their necessity of community feeling.

NGO's improve their participation to some social group, also cooperation, friendship and faithfulness and more over their process supports integration into society and forming civil cognition.

The NGO's representatives emphasize that the biggest problem in the maintenance of the multicultural environment in the countryside of Latvia is connected with the lack of finances and human resources.

The survey data show that the resources block is used insufficiently; the opportunities of the network resources and agents should be coordinated and used not only on a scale of the local region, but also in the country in general.

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