



Assessing Voluntary Experience in a professional perspective

First Report – Poland



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I. Basic Facts on volunteering, NGOs – associations and foundations in Poland

- There are over 36,500 associations and over 5,000 foundations (NGOs) registered in Poland.
- At least 58% of the total number of NGOs registered are active. In the case of 10% of the registered NGOs it was found that they are not engaged in any activities.
- 91% of the NGOs were founded after 1989, whereas 30% of the NGOs are less than three years old.
- 49% of the total registered NGOs have their seat in large towns (current and former voivodship capitals).
- The largest number of associations and foundations indicate sport (59.3%), education (48,2%), health protection, rehabilitation and assistance to the disabled (32,6%), as well as culture and the arts (27,4%) as their most important fields of activity.
- Over half (55%) of the NGOs do not employ full-time, paid personnel.
- 35% of the NGOs employ staff on the basis of a labour contract. The total scale of employment in NGOs can be estimated to correspond to approximately 62,000 full-time equivalent (FTE) positions, which amounts to 0.58% of total employment, excluding the agricultural sector.
- Volunteers (who are not members of the associations) participate in the work of half of the NGOs. We estimate their number at about 1.6 million. On average last year, one volunteer worked about 18 hours a month in an NGO.
- Half the associations have no more than 46 members. One in four associations has 100 or more members, whereas about 5% of them have over 750 members.
- In 2001, the revenue of half of the NGOs did not exceed EUR 4,7501.
- In the case of all association and foundations, the financial resources in 2001 principally came from: public sector funds (local and regional government) - 19.6% of the NGOs' income; public sector funds (central government) - 13.5%; donations from individuals and firms - 16.5%; income from economic activity - 10.4%. Funds from foreign donors, such as the European Union, amounted to 5.7% of the sector's income.

- 57% of the NGOs feel that the introduction of the law on public benefit organisations will improve the situation of NGOs, 3% disagree, while the remaining NGOs feel that there will be no change or express no opinion. 62% of the NGOs express a desire to gain recognition as a public benefit organisation, while 54% consider that they already fulfil the requirements required to achieve this.
- 69% of NGOs use computers in their work. 33% have internet access at the NGO's office, with another 11% making use of internet access outside the office for their NGO's activities.
- Difficulty in having the basic financial or material means required to work is the problem that the greatest number (78%) of NGOs feel they face more often than any other. In the opinion of 68% of the organisations, unclear and unstable legal regulations regarding the NGO sector are a serious problem. The same number of organisations considers unclear rules regarding cooperation with public administration to be a problem.

II. Basic data regarding the number, territorial spread and age of NGOs – voluntary organizations.

The number of registered NGOs

The basis for the calculation of the number of NGOs registered in Poland was the REGON register of the Central Statistical Office². At the time the research was carried out, the register contained 36,791 associations³ and 5,068 foundations. They are referred to as NGOs in this report. Were we to take a broader definition of the third sector, we would also need to take into account 12,468 voluntary fire brigades, 6,655 social organisations (parent-teacher committees, hunting associations, social committees), 15,704 trade unions, 14,832 church- and faith-based organisations, 4,260 economic and professional associations, as well as smaller numbers of employers' organisations and political parties. If we were to include all of these categories in our definition of the third sector, we would come to almost 96,000 registered organisations. In the context of this research we chose a narrower definition and it is only for this group – of association and foundations – that this research can be taken to be representative.

As shown in Graph 1, the number of NGOs registered annually keeps growing from year to year (with the obvious consequence that the overall number of registered organisations is growing).

We must bear in mind, however, that the REGON register counts only the births of NGOs. It does not take into account the obvious fact that organisations are not only established, but that they also cease activities. As a result, the REGON data and the graph based on it do not allow for an assessment as to whether the number of active NGOs is increasing or decreasing. Using the language of demographics, it can be stated that a relatively high birth-rate persists in the third sector, but we do not know whether that reflects genuine population growth. This graph also shows that the number of associations has been growing faster than the number of foundations. The early 1990's are an exception to this rule, when the legal status of foundations found greater favour. Later, for a number of reasons, especially an unusually complicated registration procedure, foundations became less popular.

The number of active NGOs

There is no legal obligation in Poland to register the demise of an NGO, and this presents the greatest difficulty in establishing the number of active NGOs. In consequence the comprehensive research, whose results are presented here, was preceded by an initial survey of 3,300 NGOs whose aim it was to estimate the number of active organisations. We managed to reach 58% of the registered organisations and establish without any doubt that they are active. In turn, for 10% of the NGOs it turned out that they had ceased activity, are in the process of deregistration, or that in practice they are not active. It was not, however, possible to discover the fate of over 30% of the NGOs, but given the nature of NGOs it is not possible to exclude that they exist (even if their activity is unlikely to be highly developed). We may thus state with certainty that at least 58% of the associations and foundations registered are active.

The reasons indicated most often for having ceased activity were: difficulties in raising resources (27%), a lack of motivation among the activists (22%), and completion of the task for which the NGO was founded (10%). It is thus unfortunately four times more likely for activity to cease for reasons tied to a lack of finances or conflict than for an NGO to have achieved its goals or transformed into a different organisational form.

Territorial spread of NGOs

As many as 15% of active NGOs have their seat in Warsaw. If we calculate the proportion of NGOs to the number of inhabitants for each of Poland's administrative regions, we note the

greatest NGO density in Mazovia (the proportion is of 14.2 NGOs per 10,000 inhabitants), Pomerania (13.0), Malopolska (11.8) and Lubuskie (11.8). The smallest proportion of NGOs relative to the number of inhabitants is in the following voivodships: Opolskie (7.6), Swietokrzyskie (8.5) and Kujawsko-Pomorskie (9.2). 49% of the associations and foundations in the REGON register have their seat in large towns (former and current provincial capitals, including Warsaw).

Who sets up NGOs

Most often NGOs are established by individuals (92%). NGOs can also be established by other NGOs, although this phenomenon is rare (3.5%). Registration of NGOs by other organisations – entities and NGOs in Poland – research results.

The age of NGOs

The number of organisations active at the time the research was carried out and according to the year in which they were founded. In this sense, the graph does not provide a full picture of the history of NGOs. Nevertheless, there is a correlation between the number of NGOs founded and important events in Poland's newest history.

The considerable number of organisations was set up over the past 2-3 years. As mentioned earlier, their number will probably fall fairly rapidly. The graph can be interpreted geologically. The up-thrust on the right side of the graph indicates a large number of newly established NGOs that unfortunately often cease their activities soon after foundation. Moving left we come to NGOs that are a little older – those that have managed to survive. The speed with which newly-founded organisations collapse is worrying. It indicates that the environment in which they must function is quite harsh. The cumulative effect of these factors results, however, in a sector that as a whole is young – with all the positive and negative consequences that may have. All in all, 91% of the organisations surveyed were founded after 1989, with 30% of the NGOs surveyed less than three years old.

Membership of NGO networks

30% of the NGOs belong (formally or informally) to national, regional or sectoral NGO networks (associations of associations, federations). Membership of foreign networks concerns about 9% of NGOs.

III. Areas, types and coverage of activities

Research carried out by the Klon/Jawor Association over the years has been based on the same, proprietary classification of 22 fields of NGO activity. Using survey results and the information accessible in the REGON register we can estimate how many NGOs are active in each of these fields, both for our narrow, as well as the broader definition of the third sector.

Types of activity

The majority of NGOs is regularly involved in the direct provision of services to their charges or customers and rarely treat such work as accessory. Such a concept of support does not, however, include financial or material assistance to members and charges (such activity is seen as principal or important by 12% of organisations).

Activities aimed to the outside of the NGO (educating public opinion, working with other organisations or groups) are relatively frequent. It is rare (though this is doubtless due to the very nature of such work) for NGOs to engage in research work, in the collection and analysis of data. For NGOs to act as sponsors toward other NGOs and institutions is very rare.

The reach of organisations

40% of the NGOs act within the boundaries of their locality (*gmina*) or county (*powiat*), 23% are active within their region (voivodship), 11% work within their immediate surroundings (housing estate, city district). 25% are active nationwide (which does not mean that they have to have separate territorial units and are truly active in all of Poland – this is due mainly to the type of work they engage in and for which administrative boundaries have little meaning).

We asked separately about activity outside Poland's borders. It seems that such activity is significant, for 16% of NGOs declare that they have over the past three years carried out work on behalf of individuals and institutions outside Poland (provision of assistance to persons and

institutions outside Poland, not receiving foreign assistance). The countries most often mentioned as those with which Polish NGOs cooperate in this context are immediate neighbours: Ukraine (4.1% of NGOs), Germany (2.5%), Lithuania (1.8%), Belarus (1.4%) and more rarely – Slovakia, Russia and the Czech Republic.

It is likely that as the question concerns provision and not receipt of assistance that other EU countries or the US and Canada are mentioned less frequently.

IV. People in voluntary organizations.

Paid staff

Over half the NGOs (55%) have no paid staff. 35% of the NGOs employ staff through employment contracts. About 85,700 persons are employed in this way in foundations and associations, which is equivalent to about 62,000 full-time equivalent (FTE) positions or 0.58% of those employed outside agriculture. If we take into account all staff regularly receiving remuneration, regardless of the form of their contract (employment contract), their number comes to about 108,000.

One in three NGOs with paid staff has between one and five employees, while only 13% have more than five staff. The number of NGOs employing more than 50 staff is insignificant (less than 1% of the NGOs), although it is these organisations that account for a significant number of the employment.

Although the employment level in the NGO sector does not set Poland apart from other countries in the region, when compared to developed democracies (especially other EU countries, where the NGO sector shows the most dynamic employment growth rates), it has marginal significance as an employer .

Members

We can talk of members only in the case of associations (having at least 15 members is a formal requirement for their establishment). Half the associations have no more than 46 members. One in four has more than 100 members, while about 5% have more than 750 members.

The issue of the involvement of the members can be looked at in two ways. First of all, we can say that the majority of the members are involved in the work of the organisation. On the basis of

statements of associations regarding the involvement of their members and estimates regarding their number it can be stated that 60% of all members are active (involved frequently or sporadically), while 40% are not active or limit their involvement to general meetings of the members.

65% of all members of associations pay membership dues. At the same time, in 19% of cases hardly anyone pays their dues, while less than half the members do so in 24% of cases. In 37% of organisations more than three in four of the members pay.

6 Accurate research on employment, based on data gathered by the Polish Central Statistical Office, is under way at the NGO Research Unit of the institute of Political Studies at the Polish Academy of Sciences as part of international comparative research on non-profits undertaken by Johns Hopkins University. It is important to note that this research covers not only associations and foundations, but also employer organisations, business and professional associations, political parties, social organisations and trade unions. According to this definition, the employment level of the non-profit sector on the basis of 1997 data comes to 1.2% of national employment outside agriculture, calculated as FTE positions.

Volunteers -

“volunteer” – the term shall mean a person providing benefits voluntarily and at no remuneration under terms and conditions as described herein.

(ACT OF LAW of April 24th 2003 on Public Benefit and Volunteer Work)

Volunteers who are not at the same time members of the association are involved in the work of 47% of the NGOs.

In half the NGOs making use of volunteer staff their number in the previous year did not exceed 15 persons, in another 21% their number was between 16 and 30, while 7% of NGOs had help from more than 100 volunteers. On average, one volunteer worked about 18 hours a month in an organisation last year.

Who the volunteers in NGOs are? In the majority of cases they are employed, working elsewhere (61% of NGOs state that such individuals are often to be found among volunteers), school children (42%) and students (40%). In 28% of NGOs the retired and pensioners are often volunteers. The unwaged (bringing up children) and unemployed are the found among volunteers

least often – about 9% of NGOs. A little more frequent is the presence of those that have completed secondary education – 17% or higher education – 11%.

80% of NGOs (those that make use of volunteers at all) have no structured recruitment in place. The remainder that seek volunteers in a structured way most often do so through advertising (e.g. in the press), brochures and posters (12.5%), 7% make use of the intermediary of radio, television or the internet, while 3.8% approach institutions that specialise in this area, such as Volunteering Centres.

Volunteers are most frequently used (in 79% of organisations that employ volunteer labour) to organise events, meetings or campaigns. In 50% of the organisations volunteers work in order to promote the organisation, while in 46% of the cases they work directly with the charges or the customers of the organisation. In one in four cases the volunteers play the role of experts, in 14% of the cases they participate in the work of collegial bodies, while in 13% of organisations they manage or co-manage individual projects within the organisation.

Organisations consider the greatest **advantages** of employing volunteers to be their motivation and enthusiasm (71.5%). Over half (54%) the organisations appreciate the low cost of their labour, while almost 40% are pleased with the fact that they build ties with the local community through the volunteers. The advantages mentioned least frequently include flexibility and adaptability (36%), as well as the fact that the volunteers bring in new competences, skills and ideas (34.5%). 31% of the organisations see no problem in working with volunteers. Those that claim there are **difficulties** see them principally in external factors, such as a lack of means to carry out essential training for volunteers (37%) and the lack of necessary legal regulations regarding voluntary work (30%). Moreover organisations find annoying the fact that volunteers do not work regular hours and are not always available (29%), as well as barriers linked to their recruitment (22.5%).

The lack of legal regulations may be playing a role in the fact that the formal status of volunteers is not clear. 15% of the organisations refund costs borne by the volunteers, but only 4% of the organisations provide volunteers with civil liability and accident insurance. Only 3% of organisations ensure their volunteer staff undergo medical examination and occupational safety training.

Helping Individuals

47.7% surveyed had directly helped individuals in 2001 (regardless of the form or the relationship to those who received the help).

Percentage of people who directly helped individuals in 2001 (regardless of the form or the relationship to those who received the help)	47.7 %
Individuals who received help by category:	
▪ immediate family or relatives who do not live with me (e.g. siblings)	11.3
▪ farther removed family or relatives	3.1
▪ friends	8.3
▪ people whom I know or met previously, but are not my family or friends (e.g. neighbours)	6.9
▪ people I did not know previously who approached me for help (e.g. at home, on the street, or through an organised appeal that reached me)	25.4
▪ other	3.6

- 30% of the cases of helping individuals did not last longer than 1 hour a month.
- For 50% of the cases of financial and material donations to individuals in 2001, their combined value did not exceed PLN 100 (about Euro 26).
- The most frequent cause for offering personal help to an individual (in terms of donating money, material donations and time) is simply their poor financial situation (55%). One third of Poles offered help specifically for victims of the floods in Poland in 2001. Approximately the same number declared that in 2001 they personally assisted sick or handicapped individuals, giving money towards medical treatments and rehabilitation. 13% helped elderly people.

Donations for Organisations and Institutions

- 37% of respondents gave help by donating goods or their time to organisations and institutions in 2001.
- For 60% of the cases of donations to institutions and organisations in 2001, their value did not exceed PLN 100 (about \$ 25).

- 60% of the donations were made on the street. 24% of the support was made by purchasing goods where the revenue was earmarked for social goals. 11% of donations were made through a transfer of money through the post office, 3.5% were made by Audiotele (telephone fundraising) or by SMS fundraising. Only 3.7% took advantage of the option to deduct their donations from taxes.
- Over 60% of Poles would be willing to donate 1% of their taxes towards organisations if they were to be given the option.

Volunteering through an Organisation or Institution

- There are about 30,000 active nongovernmental organisations (NGOs) in Poland. 87% of them work with volunteers to various degrees.
- 10% of respondents declared that they participated as volunteers in the activities of organisations or institutions in 2001.
- Poles would like most to engage in volunteerism when it deals with a charity organisation for the poorest (20% of responses). 30% would want to donate financial and material help towards these goals.
- 82% of Poles feel that each person has a moral obligation to help those in need. 74% feel that the work of social service NGOs (such as associations, foundations) are more needed now than five years ago. 73% surveyed feel that those who do socially beneficial work can offer something that paid personnel can not.
- What did the volunteerism consist of? One third of the volunteers working through organisations or institutions were directly involved in helping people in need. 18% of volunteers fundraised. 17% organised events, campaigns and festivities. 14% of volunteers donated their spare time for unpaid participation on boards, councils, commissions etc. 20% of Poles who were asked if they had heard of the Volunteer Center responded positively.
- 84% of volunteers feel that one should simply help those who are in need. 68% work as volunteers because it brings them joy and they are interested in it. 67% claim that they just cannot turn down a request for help. 66% believe that if they help others then they

can expect the same in return. 48% would like to gain more skills by volunteering. 23% of the people who volunteer say they want to repay good deeds done to them.

- 70% of those who do not participate in volunteerism or who do not donate money to organisations or institutions claim that they do not do so because they have to take care of themselves and their family first. 59% claim that they were never asked for such help. 53% claim they do not have time for social work.
- One quarter of Poles say that they will be able to donate the same amount of time next year as they did in the preceding year. 7% feel they can donate more time. 63% are not able to predict today how things will be in the future.
- Poles would like most to engage in volunteerism when it deals with a charity organisation for the poorest (20% of the cases). 12%, if they were able to in the future, would like to participate in an organisation or institution having to do with health care and rehabilitation of the handicapped.

Opinions of Volunteerism and Nongovernmental Organisations

- Volunteers and those who do not donate their time to social service work have varying opinions on volunteering and in general helping those in need. The starkest difference was found in the responses to the question of whether each person has a moral obligation to help those in need. 62% of volunteers believe that they do, which is 24 percentage points higher than those who did not donate their time towards helping those in need in 2001. Volunteers seemed to be more convinced that social service work is something that does not have a price but rather has its own intrinsic worth (such is the feeling of 46% of volunteers and only 32.3% of those who do not volunteer). Such opinions seem to form a pattern whereby those more sensitive to the needs of others are more eager to get involved in such work.
- Those who spent time doing volunteer work in institutions or organisations value their role in solving social problems in their neighborhoods more than those who do not volunteer (16.2% vs. 6%). It is a concern that in general so few people are able to identify any kind of important role being played by an organisation in their neighborhood. When it

comes to the influence of organisations in solving social problems on a national level, one in ten Poles, regardless of their social involvement, strongly agrees that it is small. This view of organisations having little influence in solving social problems is opposed by 13% of volunteers and 4% of those who do not volunteer.

- Regarding the quality of work of NGOs that use volunteers, only one in ten Poles, regardless of their volunteer status, strongly believe that they are often not well organised and ineffective. 53.9% of volunteers and 28.6% of non-volunteers do not agree with this notion or are firmly against it.
- 51.1% of volunteers agree that the activities of social sector organisations (such as associations and foundations) are more needed now than five years ago. Those who do not agree or are firmly opposed to such a notion make up 4.9% of Poles. The remaining people, apart from the small percent which does not have an opinion on this matter, feel to varying degrees that there is an ever increasing role and necessity for the work of NGOs.

Variance between Particular Groups of Respondents

As stated above, 10% of Poles claim that they worked as volunteers at an institution or organisation in 2001 and 37% donated money and goods to them. The numbers differ greatly between the various groups of respondents, and these differences are quite telling. It is worth noting that the decision to volunteer is often tied to age, education level, and the income of the respondent.

Percentage of people who directly helped individuals in 2001 (without regards to the form it took or the relationship with those who received the help)	47.7%
Individuals who received help	
Immediate family or relatives who do not live with me (e.g. siblings)	11.3
Farther removed family and relatives	3.1
Friends	8.3
People whom I know or met previously, but are not my family or friends (e.g. neighbours)	6.9
People I did not know previously and who approached me for help (e.g. at home, on the street, or through an organised appeal that reached me)	25.4
Other	3.6

Reason for Helping An Individual	N	% of total	% of donators
Poor financial situation	251	25.1	54
Flood	138	13.8	29
Sickness / Handicapped (medical treatment, rehabilitation, assistance)	132	13.2	28
Elderly (assistance, helping in daily activities)	60	6.0	13
Helping with construction / renovation / cleaning-up (but not in connection with the floods)	41	4.1	8
Childcare	38	3.8	8
Educational help	38	3.8	8
Other	20	2.0	4

Reasons for Volunteering	% of people who think this is a major reason
I feel that one should help others (these are my moral, religious or political views)	84.1
It brings me happiness / I'm interested in it	67.8
I find it hard to say no	67.2
I believe if I help someone, then someone will help me in return	65.6
My family and friends do it as well	54.5
I want to acquire new skills, learn something new	48.0
I have a debt to pay (someone once helped me)	22.6

Why don't you participate in any activities at an organisation or institution	% of people who think this is a major reason
I have to think of myself and my family first	70.0
Nobody asked me to	59.4
Don't have time	52.7
Haven't come across any interesting offers for work	47.2
I don't feel that I have anything to offer	43.6
I'm not interested in it, I've never thought about it	41.3
I don't feel I'm physically able to do it	32.2
I've had bad experiences with such work	12.9

How did you start volunteering?	N	% of the total	% of people who donated money or time
I was interested by a mass media campaign (advertisement, article, billboard, TV, Radio, internet)	169	16.9	38
I was approached at home or on the street by a representative from an organisation, institution or Church	145	14.5	32
I knew about the activities of a specific organisation, institution or parish and I offered my help	120	12.0	27
A person in need approached me at home or on the street	98	9.8	22
I was approached by someone I knew or a family member	75	7.4	16
I met or knew someone in need and offered my help	55	5.5	12
Other answer	20	2.0	4
I can't remember / hard to say	20	2.0	4

Character of the volunteer work at an organisation or institution	N	% of the total	% of volunteers
Personal activities for those in need living with me (shopping, giving care, repairs...)	32	3.2	31
Fundraising (canvassing, writing grant proposals...)	19	1.9	18
Organising events, meetings, campaigns, or festivals	18	1.8	17
Unpaid participation on boards, committees, councils	14	1.4	14
Medical care, therapy, nursing at a shelter, hospital, work at an orphanage	9	0.9	8
Providing information (e.g. postering, flyering, working on helplines...)	8	0.8	8
Donating blood or willingness to be an organ donor	8	0.8	7
Advising, counseling or expert's work	6	0.6	6

Character of the volunteer work at an organisation or institution	N	% of the total	% of volunteers
Office work	5	0.5	4
Rescue – fire department, Voluntary Mountain Rescue Organisation, Voluntary Water Rescue Organisation	5	0.5	4
Other	17	1.7	16

Familiarity with the terms “volunteer” and “volunteering”	% of those surveyed
Never came across the terms	20.2
Yes, but difficult to say what they mean	19.8
Yes, I’ve come across them and I could explain what they mean	60

General opinions on the functions of NGOs and organisations that help those in need	% of respondents who agree with this opinion
Each person has a moral obligation to help those in need	82.4
The activities of social sector organisations (associations, foundations, etc.) are more needed now than five years ago	73.5
People who do social sector NGO work offer something that paid personnel can not	72.5
If the government took care of its responsibilities there wouldn’t be a need for additional social sector work	62.8
Organisations that use people in the social service sector are generally well organised and effective	31.2
Social sector organisations (associations, foundations, etc) solve serious problems in my neighborhood	28.7
Social sector organisations (associations, foundations, etc.) have a considerable impact on solving serious social problems	28.5

V. Management of voluntary organizations.

The management board of an NGO is on average made up of six persons, in 60% of NGOs it is made up of five persons or less, in one in ten cases there are ten or more members. The board is made up of just one person in fewer than 1% of organisations; a similar number have boards made up of 25 or more members. On average a board will meet twice a month, although the most popular model is for one meeting per month.

In 80% of NGOs none of the management board members are simultaneously staff of the organisation. In the remaining cases (where the NGO has at least one member of staff) an average of 8% of the management board members are remunerated for work not related to their work on the board.

The management of an organisation can in practice take various forms. As part of the research we asked NGOs to state what elements they apply as part of a loosely defined management system. This concerned actions going beyond basic, day-to-day management. Only one in five organisations stated that they carry out none of these actions.

Training

One in three NGOs had staff participate in exterior training in 2001. The need for training remains constantly high. As noted in Table 7, the most popular form of training concerns fundraising (66% of organisations claim such a need). This is not surprising, although it is worth noting certain less obvious results. Second in the list of NGO training needs come topics specific to the area of activity of the organisation (related to the work the organisation is involved in). This is encouraging, for it shows an awareness of the need to professionalize the work of the organisation in areas other than internal management issues. At the same time it has to be stated that the supply on the training market for the NGO sector has until now very rarely included such topics. Here we touch upon a more general issue concerning the quality of NGOs that in many cases ought to face up to competition from other sectors or more generally (where there is no competition) show efficiency in their work.

In what areas do the NGOs require training ?	% of NGOs
Fundraising	65.9
Know-how on the field of activity specific to the NGO	45.8
Legal issues related to the functioning of the NGO	43.6
Image-building of the NGO, promotion, cooperation with the media	40.0
NGO finances (accounting, financial management)	28.5
Knowledge of foreign languages	23.4
Interpersonal skills (communication, negotiations)	22.0
Use of modern technologies (including computer use)	21.3
Seeking and organising the work of volunteers	17.5
HR management (team-building, running meetings, leadership)	16.5
Management of the NGO's programmes (planning, evaluation)	16.5
Other	4.6

VI. NGO operating environment

In general, NGOs most frequently cooperate with institutions in their closest surroundings – their locality (*gmina*) or county (*powiat*). In the case of over 80% of the NGOs this concerns self-government institutions. We can risk the assertion that it is the quality of this cooperation (division of labour) that determines the sense and possibility of local organisations existing. Mutual relations are very complex and burdened by many objective barriers (lack of funds, legal issues), as well as more subjective constraints (mutual, often excessively critical stereotypes). Cooperation with local authorities is often one of the greatest challenges before both sides, and what is more, the shape of these relations is of fundamental importance to democracy in Poland. Local institutions (often run by the local authorities) such as schools, museums and the local media (part of which is also linked to local authorities) are part of the same local environment. Other NGOs are mentioned less frequently as partners than are public institutions – 30% of NGOs state that they have no relations with other organisations. Simultaneously, almost 50% of organisations note that a lack of coordination of actions among organisations is a serious problem for the NGO sector.

Almost half the organisations state that they have no contacts with the regional (voivodship) authorities, while 67% have no such contacts with national authorities. It is natural that the higher the level of administration, the smaller the number of NGOs concerned, so the only issue worthy of note is the scale of these levels of contact. We can ask for the meaning of the fact that almost

one third of all organisations maintains contact with central government. The answer may lie with a still insufficient effectiveness of the mechanisms of decentralisation and the fact that many decisions are still made at the level of central government.

55% of the NGOs maintain contacts with business. The purpose of these contacts needs no further elaboration. Two thirds of the NGOs maintain no contacts whatsoever with church institutions – this fact cannot be analysed without a deeper understanding of the structure of NGO actions. It is clear that in many cases there is no activity-based reason for such contacts. It is most rare for NGOs to maintain contacts with political circles (the survey result has for many years been at the same level). It is a surprise, and not a very pleasant one, that 80% of the NGOs maintains no contact with any of the many institutions responsible for preparing Poland for membership of the EU.

VII. Problems of the voluntary sector

Assessment by NGOs of the problems of the NGO sector

In addition to questions regarding the organisations' individual problems, we also asked about the difficulties of the sector as a whole. We assumed, rather boldly, that NGOs have drawn certain conclusions regarding the entire sector. We are aware, however, that in many cases we are dealing with a simple projection onto the sector of problems that the individual NGOs face.

The first position on the list of problems is taken by the issue of insufficient tax breaks for sponsors. This is clearly a paraphrase of statements already appearing in this report regarding a lack of funding. Clearly the majority of organisations feels that greater tax relief would lead to an increase of sponsors and as a consequence a rise in the amount of funding available to NGOs. Unfortunately comparison with other countries shows that a simple increase in, for example, the tax thresholds has little effect. It needs to be noted in addition that whatever the popular view may be among NGOs, Poland (with the exception of certain significant technical problems of the tax system) has a relatively benign legal environment for philanthropic activity (especially as concerns encouraging the giving of donations). A qualitative change may be brought about by the introduction of the 1% tax principle¹⁰. It should, however, be stated very clearly at this point that the 1% tax principle is basically not of philanthropic nature. It is at root the democratisation of the decision regarding the allocation of what are *de facto* public funds (owed as taxes).

Over 60% of the organisations state that the principles of cooperation and allocation of tasks with public administration are poorly designed. This brings back an issue often raised and never satisfactorily resolved regarding the practical implementation of the constitutional principle of subsidiarity. In addition the high percentage of organisations mentioning this issue may be explained by the emotions still fresh in everyone's mind following the review of public finance legislation (especially the unfortunate formulation of article 118)¹¹. It is obvious to everyone who has studied the part regarding the funding of NGOs why such importance is placed on this point.

A significant place is also taken by problems linked to unstable regulations regarding NGOs. It can be assumed that the general and understandable conviction regarding the changeability of Polish legal regulations is transposed onto the recent and painful problem for many NGOs regarding the new regulations concerning the State Court Registry (KRS)¹².

From this it would seem that the greatest third sector problems regard the legal and formal environment in which organisations function. Certain hope for their resolution can be placed on the expected implementation of the law on public benefit organisations and voluntary work.

The middle ground in the list of problems is occupied by issues that concern relations between organisations – especially conflict or, to put it more gently, a lack of coordination. This issue is noted by over half the organisations. Although this question is very complex and in effect extremely important, we will limit ourselves to stating that there are increasingly hopeful signs here. To a certain extent the improvement in quality comes down to the creation of mechanisms to exchange information. In this area, especially thanks to the internet, we have seen tremendous progress.

The issue of coordinating actions is more complex. This can be emotional, while the arguments used in discussing it are very varied, often revealing for the first time the particular interests of some NGOs. For some the need for structured and institutionalised common action needs no further discussion, for others the opposite is true – it cannot be defended and runs counter the very idea of civil society.

At the very end of the list come those issues that are related to the activities of individual NGOs. For 31.4% of the NGOs it concerns a move away from their mission, for 37.9% it means cases of abuse or seeking private benefit as well as the resulting poor media image (32.8%). These results give rise to differing reactions. On the one hand these issues are raised least frequently, and we

can be pleased with that state of affairs. On the other hand they are not marginal and should not justify such contentment (especially if we make the risky assumption that these issues are subject to projection). We cannot simply ignore the fact that almost 40% of NGOs feel that abuses and pathological behaviour are a problem of the NGO sector. This is both good and bad. Good, because within NGOs there is less and less denial of this problem. Bad, because the problem exists and it is difficult to ignore its scale. From this point of view it is interesting to note that this issue is now raised more frequently than that of poor image in the media. Until now the opposite was true – journalists were at fault. It seems that opinions on this point are shifting, although we are convinced that NGOs have grounds to believe that the poor image of the sector is due to the caricature of the NGO sector created by media out to sensationalise. The question is whether the NGOs have changed, whether their activists have now seen the light, whether what they perceive is really the image created by the media but consider it to be reality. We have no answer, but the issue is interesting and important.

Problems of the voluntary sector as seen by NGOs	% of answers
Insufficient tax benefits for donors	80.5
Faulty, unclear, unstable legal regulations regarding NGO actions	67.6
Unclear rules of cooperation with public administration	67.3
Overblown public administration leaving little room for NGO action	62.6
Political bent to NGO actions	45.8
Poor communication and coordination of actions with other NGOs or conflict between organisations	45.2
Cases of abuses in the NGO sector and seeking of private gain	37.9
Poor general image of NGOs in public opinion and the media	32.8
Departing from the mission for which the NGO was set up	31.4

VIII. Concluding remarks

Having read this report, and in spite of the enormous number of facts described in it, it is still possible to have trouble in determining what, exactly, the condition of the Polish voluntary sector in 2002 is. We would have liked to give an unambiguous answer to this question, but that seems impossible. We can only try to sum up certain issues brought up without being able to provide simple answers of the type “things are fine” or “in a bad way”.

Part of the information presented here does not need interpretation or does not in any way lend itself to interpretation. We simply have to accept it. In those cases where it is proper to ask

questions, we need a point of reference. This poses a problem, for this is the first such survey to have been conducted using this method and there are no comparable data. The comments below are thus not necessarily related to specific tables describing the results of the research. They are rather an attempt at a concise summary that blends what we can glean directly from the data and what stems from the observations of the report's authors.

There is significant divergence of opinion within the NGO sector. You come across catastrophic visions of a collapse of the dynamics of the non-governmental movement, of internal conflicts, abuses, of a lack of integrity and values, of an exodus of sponsors (especially foreign ones), of the departure of staff and a lack of fresh blood, of insufficient space for the development of NGOs squeezed out by increasingly strong public administration and business, of the reduction of NGOs to a decorative role etc. There are also far more optimistic voices: the number of NGOs keeps growing, the sector's internal organisation is improving and we see the basic elements of an infrastructure and representation taking shape, there are significant European funds appearing that will be able to address almost all deficits, NGOs are more willing to take a stand on public issues and it is becoming increasingly difficult to ignore this voice, the legal aspects of work and the principles of cooperation with public administration will improve etc. The truth, as usual, probably lies somewhere in between the two, although it is worth noting that the result of the research indicates there are more optimists than pessimists.

At times it seems, however, that this optimism is worryingly distant from reality. This is particularly true when asking for an indication of the source of difficulties facing organisations: the majority of NGOs consider them to be external. External to the sector, but most certainly also external to "my" organisation. We wish we were mistaken, but this seems a bit overoptimistic.

Compared to the other countries in Central and Eastern Europe and Eurasia (put more simply – the former Soviet bloc) the Polish NGO sector comes out relatively well, or even very well. Of the 28 countries whose NGO sector's development and stability are subject to an annual review (the so-called NGO Sustainability Index coordinated by USAID), Poland lay in second place in 2001 (*ex aequo* with Estonia and slightly behind Slovakia).

This favourable result no longer gives rise to great satisfaction, for the point of reference in comparing the Polish NGO sector has shifted. It is no longer enough to know that things are better than they were twelve years ago, nor that things are better than they are for the majority of our neighbours to the East. We no longer wish to measure up to our own past. We put greater

emphasis on our aspirations. We want to see how we compare to countries that have a long-standing as well as – most importantly – an uninterrupted democratic experience. In this case we have a lot of ground to make up, although there aren't all that many reasons for having a chip on the shoulder. True, there are aspects that are far worse for our non-governmental sector: access to funds, the scale of employment, the position in fulfilling public tasks etc. On the other hand organisations in Poland are very dynamic, generally willing to cooperate, open and conscious of the purpose for which they were established. For obvious reasons the majority of NGOs is currently in a learning phase which, though sometimes painful and eventually not always fruitful, is very exciting.

Generally, however, this type of international comparison always calls for particular care. There is no universal, proven doctrine describing the non-governmental sector and its functions. There is no ideal model that we could aspire to. It is even difficult to speak of any common standards among EU countries (except for the obvious, such as the freedom of association). The German sector differs hugely from that in Scandinavia, the U.K. or the Netherlands. The US sector is also very different from those just mentioned. And to complicate matters even more, we must add that the most interesting analogies to our mind exist with countries such as the Philippines and South Africa (where, as is the case in Poland, civil society played a significant role in the move from an authoritarian to a democratic system).

Civil society, of which NGOs are a part, has become a topic of frequent discussion in Poland of late. It is not just an area of research, but is also a term used to describe and express the aspirations of many societies in countries extricating themselves from authoritarian systems, as it is in those where the benefits of democracy have been about for a long time. In practice, however, the concept of civil society and in particular its concrete social shape can take many different forms. We can also add that they are not always as beautiful and idealistic as the prophets of civil society would like to have us believe. It is clear that civil society can have variable quality.

And although there are similarities in the process of creating and recreating the fabric of civil society there is, to our mind, no universal recipe that would be particularly helpful to us here. Some believe in such recipes or at least seek inspiration, and they often look at Poland in their quest. Paradoxically, while we in Poland do not seek comparison, we are subject to it, mainly because events that took place in Poland also brought about a renaissance of civil society (starting

in the mid-1970s, continuing with the experience of *Solidarność*, and currently through the non-governmental movement and other civil society institutions).

Can we continue to be an inspiration for others? We seriously doubt it. There is much to indicate that in Poland nostalgia for the state and its omnipotence are on the ascendant, for a state to which we can direct our demands and for a state that delivers solutions. Public debate is wilting, the authority of institutions is undermined, the common weal is deafened by the noise of battle for individual or group interests, democracy is lifeless and taking on a solely procedural form. A self-governing Republic of Poland, as a republic of citizens, a community acting for the common good, is increasingly weak.

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