

The importance of the NGO–municipal relations in developing local democracy. A case study of two Lithuanian municipalities

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Abstract The article deals with the problems of interaction between two Lithuanian municipalities (Vilnius city and Ukmergė district) and NGOs, mainly those working with social services. The article is formed of two parts: a theoretical one, where the model of five attributes of the NGO–local government relations was created; and the practical one, where the interview information from 22 municipalities, politicians, administration representatives and leaders of non-governmental organizations is analyzed according to the above-mentioned theoretical model. While analyzing the interview information, five attributes of the NGO–municipal relations were distinguished: institutionalization, intensity, functionality, mutual trust, and resource dependence. The model is based on normative assumption that institutionalized, intensive, functional, based on mutual trust and in terms of resource independent NGO–municipal relations sustain local democracy. The research conducted in municipalities of Vilnius city and Ukmergė district revealed that interaction between municipalities and NGOs is limited by those major obstacles which are possible to distinguish into three major problem groups. The identified problem groups have proximate relationship, where the first problem group (the attitude of municipal representatives) has an impact on the third one (functionality of cooperation); and the second problem group (NGO activity), as research results suggest, may have impact on the first and third problem groups. The research identified differences of interaction between municipalities and NGOs in Vilnius city and Ukmergė district; it was revealed that NGOs are more independent and forms of their activities are more varied in Vilnius than in Ukmergė district. Some problems that cause obstacles to the

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NGO–municipal interface are closely related to the work specifics of non-governmental and municipal organizations as well as civic culture, social psychology and mentality of the inhabitants of Lithuania.

Keywords Municipalities · Local democracy · Non-governmental organizations · Interaction attributes

1 Introduction

Lithuania, like other recently formed Central and Eastern European democracies, experiences a certain crisis of sociability. It gives rise to a question why consolidation of democracy and social justice is seizing up. As compared to other countries of similar economic development, macro-social indicators are relatively lower in Lithuania. For example, the country has one of the lowest birth rates and one of the biggest suicide rates in the world. Emigration is growing and the tendencies of decrease in civic activity and trust in political institutions as well as increase in social exclusion are being observed. Why?

Leonardo Morlino (2004:12) suggests that “...A good democracy can be considered the one that presents a stable institutional structure realizing the liberty and equality of citizens through the legitimate and correct functioning of its institutions and mechanisms. A good democracy, thus, first and foremost is a broadly legitimated regime that completely satisfies its citizens”. It is evident, that the inhabitants of Lithuania as well as other Central and Eastern European countries are not satisfied with the functioning of democracy, especially on the local level. Such insufficient degree of consolidation of democracy and social capital has a negative effect on the NGO–municipal relations and causes inadequate type of administration and this, in turn, conditions the problems of democratic consolidation. The authors of this article assume that in the present period of stabilization as compared with the initial period of market and political democracy, it is necessary to promote the NGO–municipal relations, which would in turn increase the level of democratic consolidation and social capital in Lithuania. Without that, the country will experience a certain crisis of sociability which may appear disastrous in the long-term perspective.

Many Lithuanian non-governmental organizations were established earlier than the state institutions of the independent Republic of Lithuania. They launched from the Lithuanian movement for independence “Sajūdis” at the end of the 9th decade. After the Restoration of Independence, the non-governmental sector developed. Organizations, the activities of which were terminated during the Soviet occupation, were re-established. New organizations seeking to solve the emerging social, environmental, cultural, and educational problems of modern society were founded. During the first decade of independent Lithuania, non-governmental organizations were funded by international foundations. Such organizations as USAID, Open Society Fund of Lithuania, Baltic–American Partnership Fund, and PHARE Programme of the European Union had a great impact on the NGO sector development in Lithuania. After Lithuania joined the European Union, a great momentum to the development of the NGO sector was given by the support from the

EU structural funds. The Non-Governmental Organization Information and Support Centre, which contributed a lot to the development of non-governmental activities, was established in 1994. A significant support to the activities of non-governmental organizations was given by the legally provided right to all inhabitants to donate 2% of their personal income tax to the account of a chosen non-governmental organization.

Lithuania does not have an integrated NGO database but different sources suggest there are about 6,000 NGOs in the country (Šedbaras 2005: 466). Starting 1994, there were attempts to create a unified regulative system but the situation changed only in 2004 after the Parliament of the Republic of Lithuania revoked the Law on Public Organizations and adopted the new Civil Code as well as new amendments to the Law on Associations, Law on Charity and Support Foundations, and Law on Public Institutions. Since then, organizations can be established and operate under the listed three or special laws (for example, the Law on Religious Communities, the Law on Professional Unions, etc.). NGOs that operate under the Law on Public Organizations had to be reregistered and reorganized agreeably to the valid legal base.

Several NGO types can be distinguished on the legal basis of the Republic of Lithuania. Association is legal person of limited civil liability aimed to coordinate the activities of association members, to represent and advocate their interests, or satisfy other public interests. The title of an association can reflect its activity directions: “association”, “public organization”, “alliance”, “confederation”, “union”, “fellowship”, etc. It should be noted that many NGOs which earlier operated under the Law on Public Organizations after the reform chose the activity regulations as provided by the Law on Associations.

The regulative forms of charity and support foundations differ from other NGOs, regulative forms ipso facto that they can be both charity and support givers as well as receivers. Although the Lithuanian legislation does not provide foundations with any other activities except charity and support, many NGOs of this nature engage in social project activities.

A public institution is a non-profit organization aimed at the benefit of the public and can engage in any activities which is not prohibited by the law and, thus, receive income that can be used for the benefit of the society whereas the activities of other NGO types are more severely regulated and it is illegal for them to receive income from their activities.

It is also possible to differentiate other types of NGOs that engage in the activities of specific and narrower areas (for example, religious communities, professional unions, artist organizations, etc.). They are established and operate under the legislation regulating a certain area.

Lithuanian municipalities have also developed during the sixteen years of the Lithuanian independence. Management innovations (strategic planning, internal audit, and quality management), public procurement and partnership between public and private sectors are being gradually implemented in Lithuanian municipalities. The provision of the Law on Public Administration envisaging that service rendering and administrative functions are to be separated have contributed to the promotion of municipal reforms as well.

The goal of this research is to evaluate the relations between NGOs operating on the municipal level and local state institutions by making an assumption that the

relations is an essential condition for local democracy. In the article, essential elements of the model which explains characteristics of NGO–local government networks and factors affecting them are discussed. One of the major research issues dealt with in the article is differences of cooperation among municipal institutions and NGOs in Vilnius city and Ukmergė district. Discussing this issue, focus is on those differences which affect autonomy and variety of NGOs' activities.

2 Explanatory framework

Local democracy is not a neutral concept in terms of value, although its normative content is not homologous. The conviction that democracy is the most legitimate form of administration dominates in the modern liberal democratic states; yet, attempts to elaborate what is meant by the concept “democracy” reveal different attitudes. Thus, in order to avoid misunderstandings it is expedient to provide the description of the concept “local democracy”.

The concept “local democracy” can be explained on the basis of the categories of participatory democracy, deliberative democracy, direct democracy, or representative democracy. Local democracy is concurrent with mature civic society, i.e., politically active citizens understanding their responsibility to take part in the local governance. Local democracy is effective when the following conditions are ensured:

- (1) inhabitants actively participate in local government elections;
- (2) inhabitants supervise how the municipal council members keep their promises, this way, ensuring their accountability;
- (3) inhabitants take an active stand while debating on important council solutions and provide constructive proposals;
- (4) local government institutions make decisions taking the opinion of inhabitants into consideration;
- (5) inhabitants have a right to participate directly in decision making through local referendums.

The concept “local democracy” is explained by invoking the typology of inhabitant participation form, developed by Sherry Arnstein and known as “participation ladder” (Arnstein 1969). An effective local democracy measures the highest stages of “participation ladder”: inhabitant control, delegated authority, and partnership¹.

Our interest in this article is the dependence of local democracy on NGO–municipal networks and factors that determine the formation of certain qualitative network attributes. To expose this we will refer to the norm theory of Hyden (2002) and the model of civic culture of Reese and Rosenfeld (2005).

¹ Sh. Arnstein in her article “A Ladder of Citizen Participation”, which was published in the *Journal of the American Institute of Planners* (1969), distinguished eight types of the degree of civic participation: citizen control, delegated power, partnership, placation, consultation, informing, therapy, and manipulation. In the first three stages of participation ladder, citizens have a real power; in the other three, their participation is symbolic; and the last two stages are defined as non-participation.

Hyden’s norm theory is based on the assumption that norms are determined by values, knowledge, and opportunities (Hyden 2002). These three norm elements are autonomic but closely interrelated. The values include individual and organizational attitudes and convictions determining the motivation of these players. Knowledge includes individual and organizational knowledge about norms and knowledge necessary for their implementation. Opportunities suggest legal, economic, and other boundaries for the individual and organizational activities. Norms are formed under the influence of different external factors such as historical tradition, reform initiatives, the processes of globalization and the European integration. On the grounds of Hyden’s norm theory, we suggest that the status of organizational and civic culture, the structure of political and inter-organizational networks, and concrete activity processes depend on norms (Fig. 1).

Reese and Rosenfeld (2005) developed a model explaining civic culture in local self-governance. They distinguished three components of civic culture: the system of community power, the system of community values, and the system of public decision making. The system of community power is defined as a system enabling individuals to organize themselves and realize their power. It includes groups and individuals having the decision-making power, opportunities, and mechanisms for managing the influence of citizens and different interest groups, relationship between local state institutions and other governance parties, competitive ability of local elections and the extent of turnover in the elected officials. Community value systems convey the standard provisions in terms of social problems as well as linguistic and aesthetic expressions. The system of public decision making includes formal structures that are applied in the process of decision making as well as financial and human resources used when implementing public policy and decision-making methods. Integrating Reese and Rosenfeld’s civic cultural model and Hyden’s norm theory, we suggest that three components of civil culture are the systems of formal and informal norms that have resulted under the influence of external factors (Fig. 2). Opportunities as an integrate element of norms determine the community power system and public decision-making system, values form a community’s value system and the three civic control components are dependent on knowledge.

The focus of this article is not the level of civic culture (and not the process level presented in Fig. 1) in so far as the network level. If conceptualizing civic culture, it

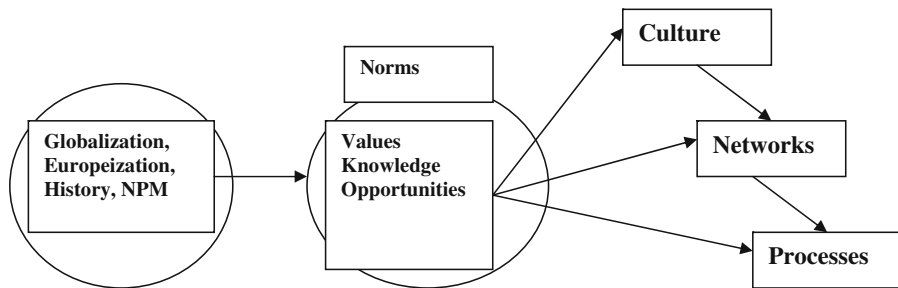


Fig. 1 The status of organizational and civic culture, the structure of political and inter-organizational networks, and concrete activity processes

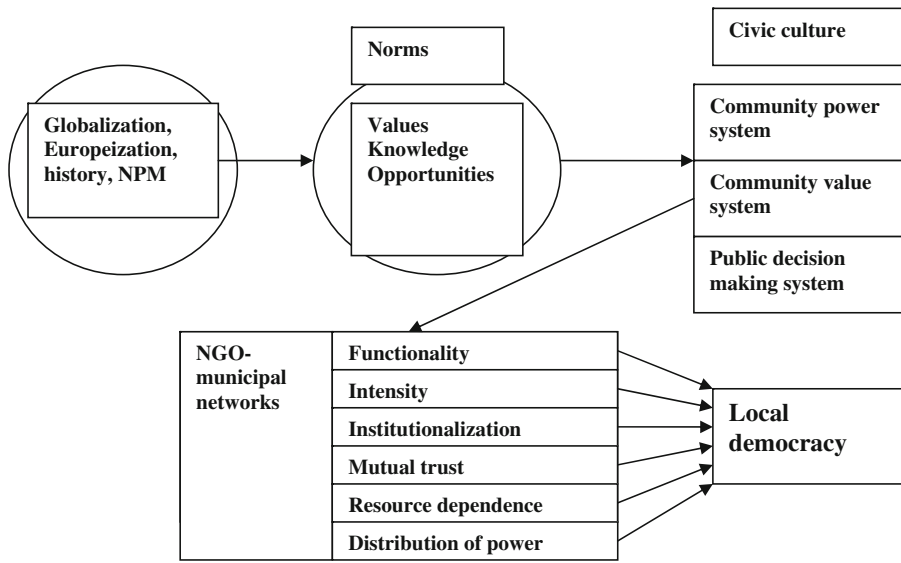


Fig. 2 Components of civil culture are the systems of formal and informal norms that have resulted under the influence of external factors

is attempted to present versatile definitions of local governances; networks can be perceived as a concrete manifestation of civic culture. Networks can be defined as ongoing interfaces between individuals, groups and organizations. They can be analyzed by exposing their structure and various attributes. In this article, our interest is namely networks as interfaces between non-governmental organizations and local authorities.

As it is presented in Fig. 2, NGO–municipal networks are directly dependent on dominating civic culture in a municipality. Yet, researching case studies in two Lithuanian municipalities, we neither attempted to reveal this dependence nor to present the description of civic culture in the municipalities. In the process of the interview information, we discovered six categories which may be interpreted as general attributes of NGO–municipal networks. We assume that the quality of local democracy is dependent on the attributes of NGO–municipal networks.

3 Attributes of NGO–municipal network

Following, some attributes influencing the performance and results of an NGO–municipal network are considered:

3.1 Institutionalization

Our argument is based on the assumption that the degree of NGO–municipal network’s institutionalization may be different. Formal and informal norms shaping NGO–municipal relations can be more or less elaborated. If a degree of institutionalization is high, the relations between NGOs and municipalities are more

stable and there are more formal opportunities for the relationships. If a degree of institutionalization is low, changes can be more easily implemented and the relations are on the process of development. The model of NGO–municipal relations is also grounded on the assumption that a higher level of institutionalization contributes to stronger local democracy.

3.2 Intensity

Relations between NGOs and municipalities can be more intensive or less intensive. Intensity is defined as the amount and deepness of interactions between a particular municipality and NGOs acting on its territory. Higher intensity means that there are more NGOs interacting more times with various local government institutions or spending more time for a single interaction. It is possible to argue that higher intensity of NGO–municipal network conditions stronger local democracy.

3.3 Functionality

Functional relations between NGOs and municipalities are those which produce added value to both interacting agents and are mutually effective. The relations are not always functional (for example, conflicting relations are not functional). Functionality of NGO–municipal relations is one of the crucial factors to strong local democracy.

3.4 Mutual trust

Another important attribute of NGO–municipal relations is mutual trust. If NGOs and municipalities treat each other with suspicion or some kind of negative attitude, the degree of mutual trust is not high. We can assume that high mutual trust between NGOs and municipalities is an important condition for strong local democracy.

3.5 Resource dependence

Municipalities can provide NGOs with financial and informational support and provide NGOs with premises for rent. This way NGOs become dependent on the resources provided by municipalities. On the other hand, in rare cases, municipalities can also become dependent on NGOs, their financial support or human resources (for instance, NGOs' experts may take part in municipal work groups or provide consultations to the leaders of municipalities). Pfeffer and Salancik (1978) developed a theory explaining such relations of dependence which is known as the resource-dependence theory. It provides an explanation that resources disposed by an organization condition power relationship between organizations which means that some organizations have bigger power over others when disposing the resources others need. An assumption can be suggested that local democracy is stronger when the degree of dependence on resources between municipalities and non-governmental organizations is lower. Although in reality absolute independence is almost impossible, non-governmental organizations that are less dependent on municipality's support can cooperate with municipalities more constructively and have more freedom in choosing their activities and criticizing the activities of municipalities.

3.6 Distribution of power

This attribute of NGO–municipal network marks the distribution of power and influence in maintaining relationships with non-governmental organizations between the institutions of political and executive government in municipalities. In some municipalities, political government—mayors, members of municipal councils, leaders of political parties that form the INS coalition—may take an active stand in making decisions regarding cooperation with non-governmental organizations. Officers of executive government—directors of administration or heads of administration—in other municipalities may be more active in maintaining relationships with NGOs. In terms of the development of local democracy, this attribute of the NGO–municipal network is neutral, i.e. there is no strong presumption to claim that bigger impact of political government on the relations with NGO strengthens local democracy and vice versa.

4 Research methodology

The article presents the results of the research carried out in autumn of 2006 in two Lithuanian municipalities: Vilnius city and Ukmergė district. Vilnius is the capital city with 542,000 inhabitants living in the territory of Vilnius municipality. Forty seven thousand inhabitants live in the territory of Ukmergė district municipality and 28,000 inhabitants in Ukmergė town. These municipalities were chosen as examples of big (big city) and small (country type) municipalities. Interviews with heads of municipality administration, politicians, and heads of NGOs providing social services in the territory of the municipalities were carried out. Eleven experts representing bigger and 11 smaller municipalities took part in the research. Seven experts (four administration officers and three politicians) from each municipality and four representatives of NGO sector² operating in the territories of the municipalities were interviewed.

The research results have indicated that by analyzing the relations between non-governmental sector and the municipalities with respect to local democracy, it is possible to distinguish factors that are integrate parts of the relations and have impact on local democracy and its intensity.

5 Discussion on results

5.1 Institutionalization

By analyzing the institutionalization of the relations between municipalities and NGOs, it is possible to separate two types: formal, i.e., legally based, and informal, based on the formation of communication tradition. In order to establish relations between the parties, information about the participants of relations and conditions for

² Seeking objective work evaluation of the municipality NGOs providing social services were chosen, i.e., politically neutral non-governmental organizations.

formation of the relations is needed. Moreover, for communication and cooperation to take place, parties' activity and transaction, the transmission of information from one party to the other and feedback, is also necessary.

Based on the research, municipality representatives think that the amount of information about non-profit organizations and their activities is accessible and sufficient for cooperation. All legal entities in Lithuania are registered in the database of the State Enterprise "Centre of Registers" which is available to citizens. Different catalogues on non-governmental organizations published by various organizations are also available. Thus, in terms of information, there is a formal basis for institutionalization. However, the research results have revealed that only the respondents working in specific areas (children right protection, social support, etc.) use this information and have direct contacts with the non-governmental sector. It should be noted that municipality representatives make NGO lists. After establishing contacts with an organization, in most cases, municipalities cooperate only with them and do not look for the new ones. Personal relations are very important (in order to become a party to the relations with a municipality, new organizations have "to fight their place under the sun").

According to the results of the representative survey, the legal basis (conditions) are to be sufficient for municipal communication with the non-governmental sector, promotion of community activity and NGO influence to the development of local democracy. Representatives of the municipalities listed many ways of communication between municipalities and NGOs (written hearings, hearings—meetings, study groups, involvement in budget formation, conferences, membership in committees and geographically located committees—in sub-districts, usage of "open hour" at the beginning of municipal meetings—we have all open meetings, personal interviews, e-network, receive deputations, etc.). It should be noted that respondents from Vilnius municipality highlighted the implementation of the "one-stop" principle and "e-government", while respondents from Ukmergė district municipality emphasized regular meetings with the community. Thus, although officially, non-government organizations were provided with many conditions to influence the development of local democracy, in reality, in the opinion of municipality representatives (especially members of Vilnius city council), not all conditions are effective (for example, NGO participation has weak impact on decision making on important issues such budget allocation).

It is interesting that a majority of politicians from Ukmergė district municipality that took part in the research, unlike those from Vilnius city municipality, have intense, though informal relations with NGOs. In general, relations in a city are more of a formal nature.

In short, relations institutionalization for the development of democracy is not cultivated enough and functions only in some specific areas (for example, social services). In this case, informal level of institutionalization is more intense than the formal one.

5.2 Intensity

As it was mentioned earlier, players' activity, which can be evaluated quantitatively and qualitatively, is needed for the effectiveness of relations. Quantitative evaluation

discloses the distribution of intensity and the number of active contacts. Qualitative evaluation rates the nature of relations (for example, partnership, equivalence, etc.) and the results of the relations (for example, creation of public good).

All research respondents expect higher activity from the opposite side. Municipality representatives expect that communities and non-profit organizations were more active and representatives from non-governmental sector (especially from Vilnius) claim that they look for at least minimal activity from municipalities. It should be pointed out that relations intensity is bigger in the smaller district (Ukmergė) than in the big city (Vilnius).

The research results have indicated that although the relations exist, their intensity is low (it is higher in the smaller district) and they are often unidirectional. It was observed that relations intensity in terms of partnership is very low.

5.3 Functionality

By evaluating the cooperation between municipalities and NGO, the possibility to list concrete results of active NGO and local community initiative was noted. For example, a café was opened employing people who had used psycho-active substances, social public establishments were found, cultural events were organized, and privatization issues were resolved for the benefit of the community.

By generalizing the answers of the respondents, it is possible to point out NGO activities that would be very useful in cooperation with municipalities:

- Priorities identification (discernment of themes and problems that are interesting to target groups);
- Participation in strategic planning by formulating goals and tasks;
- Budget allocation;
- Result assessment.

However, the research results revealed that although formally, the identified activities are possible, in reality, they have a small impact or are not carried out at all. NGO and citizen activity is not very high, respondents from the municipality claim. The same persons work and they change every 2 or 3 years. New active citizens join only when new problems emerge or before the election.

It should be emphasized that NGOs that are active and apply the methods of public relations management achieve a higher response from municipality.

5.4 Resource dependence

The representatives of both municipalities pointed out that during the last years the funding of non-governmental sector has increased. Funding is not limited to short-term projects, municipalities started to apply public procurement from NGOs and NGOs' activities became more qualitative. The increased funding contributed significantly to the development of the non-governmental sector.

The research results revealed the relations between funding and the attitude towards funding, i.e. NGOs that receive direct funding from municipality (for example, two areas are financed the most—country communities and the disabled) have more exclusive rights in relations with the municipality and have more

favorable attitude than their colleagues. NGOs operating in Ukmergė district and receiving a constant funding from the budget think about municipality particularly favorably. It should be noted that a benevolent attitude does not reflect the real situation of the relationships, i.e., the relations between Ukmergė municipality and NGOs are not based on partnership and parity.

Therefore, the financing of the non-governmental sector indirectly influences the development of democracy, but dependence of the subject (NGO) from one financing source (municipality) increases the impact of the patron and does not promote democracy in the NGO–municipal relations.

Economic calculations revealed that one Lithuanian litas (1 US\$=2.5371 litas), allocated to the support of Vilnius non-governmental organizations in the area of social services provides social services for the amount of 3.5¹⁰ litas. Because the efficiency of non-governmental support excels the efficiency of the services provided by the municipality—in 1999–2003 NGO in Vilnius managed to provide social services three times as efficiently as the municipality (Guogis and Gudelis 2003: 32), Vilnius inhabitants enjoyed more and more qualitative services for the same amount of money. Furthermore, after inclusion of more volunteers into this activity, new activities were launched.

While allocating support to the non-governmental organizations in Vilnius, a problem that support was given only for 1 year emerged. It caused difficulties for NGOs in planning their activities for the middle period. At that time, there were many professionals having the knowledge of NGO project management. The municipality could have made contracts with NGOs on project financing or public procurement for the period of 3–5 years and delegated a part of its functions (visiting care, for example).

Going deeply into the method of financing, it became evident that simple form of project proposal submission, which was very advanced in the beginning, has become too formulaic. Project proposal forms frequently did not correspond to project particularity, thus, the order of NGO project financing had to be reformed.

“Some non-governmental organizations for several years were submitting the same project proposal for the day-care services for children with dysfunctional intellect. They were valued under the same stencil as the project for the creative initiative centre aiming to organize an artistic training camp for the disabled children. People started to realize the necessity to separate public procurement from non-governmental organization and project financing. Starting the year of 2002, an order for organizing public procurement according to the Law on Public Procurement was prepared. It included a detailed description of the services purchased, their duration, volume, price, minimal and average standards and other information” (Abaravičius 2001: 106).

After Lithuania joined the European Union in 2004 and support to non-governmental organizations from international foundations was decreased, a necessity for a more rational use of resources emerged. Municipalities and NGOs faced some problems. Communication was impeded by the fact that municipalities had too narrow an attitude towards NGOs providing social services and did not qualify the relevance of their activities to the society. NGOs, on the other hand, viewed municipalities not like partners but as a source for their project funding.

“NGOs often addressed municipalities in written form describing the problems of their clients, the activities of an organization and its difficult material standing. Because the municipal budget was already formed for the financial year and the funds were allocated (some small amount of the funds were provided to partial funding of the NGO projects), municipality officials usually answered to the non-governmental organization’s request for support in form letters: we approve your activities but the funds are already allocated, the budget was decreased and we are sorry for not having possibilities to support your project” (Abaravičius 2001: 107).

Mr. Žilvinas Abaravičius (2001: 107), the Head Inspector of Vilnius municipality Social Support Centre, claimed that “the situation will not change until non-governmental organizations will be funded not from a separate line of the city budget, but, like in Vilnius, from other expenditure. If this concept is not sealed, non-governmental organizations will continue to be only money users dependent on an officer’s favor and not equivalent partners/players of the same system. Their position in Vilnius will not be stable”. Aiming to maintain closer contacts with NGOs under the lead of the Social Support Centre, an NGO initiative group that met twice per month was established. This group operated under the principle of oval table and was expected to be the driving force that would promote innovative changes in cooperation between NGOs and municipality.

It is possible to talk about cooperation between non-governmental organizations and municipality in Ukmergė district starting 1996. On the basis of the data provided by Ukmergė district municipality, it is possible to observe how municipality funds, allocated to NGO financing, increased. In 1996–1997, they increased ten times: from 2,000 litas to 20,000 litas (Sabaliauskienė 2001: 101). In the beginning, funds were allocated on the basis of individual project proposals. The situation changed in 1999 when contests for NGO project proposals were started and the jury assessing the projects according to their quality, relevance, etc. was formed. By the end of the same year, an officer started to work in Ukmergė municipality Social Support Centre, who, alongside her direct work, provided consultations to NGOs as well. Ukmergė municipality provided NGO with free use of transportation for various trips and other events, let them use municipality’s premises, etc. As the number of NGOs increased, so did the funding. However, the biggest problem remained—shortage of funds in the municipal budget. Because the greatest number of NGOs operated in the social area, almost all funding was allocated to them. NGOs working in social area working were satisfied with the situation but other areas were left without any financing.

5.5 Mutual trust

In recent years, trust in the NGO sector has grown. Due to the increased work quality of the NGO sector and the changing attitude of municipality representatives, the amount of services purchased from the non-profit organizations (which are not limited to short-term projects) has expanded. Although the attitudes of officers have changed, the representatives of municipalities have claimed that NGOs duplicate activities and require municipalities to pay salaries to their employees. It indicates

that there is still viable attitude towards NGOs as initiative groups operating on voluntary basis that are not able to work like organizations of other sectors (state owned or private) and in competitive environments.

The research results have revealed that representatives of both sectors analyzing the mutual relationships expressed the lack of understanding; especially NGO representatives operating in Vilnius desiderate understanding and trust. Representatives from Ukmergė district receiving financing from the municipality think of it more favorably.

It should be noted that in general, municipality representatives do not consider NGOs as equal partners but respondents from the big city (Vilnius) have a more “democratic” attitude than their colleagues from a smaller district (Ukmergė). The majority of the representatives from both groups in Ukmergė consider municipality more like a patron and not an equal partner. One of the biggest problems of NGO cooperation with municipality and with each other is that most often, communication takes place on the personal level.

5.6 Distribution of power

Representatives of both Vilnius and Ukmergė district NGOs sustain relations with municipality specialists working in the same social areas as NGOs (they have cooperation agreements, contact each other with reference to certain issues, etc.). Ukmergė district NGOs having relations with the political parties also constantly communicate with heads of the municipality.

Respondents of NGOs operating in the area of both municipalities claim that politicians often use the non-governmental sector for the achievement of their own goals (for example, elections or establish new NGOs for their own benefit) and are more active only during the elections.

In the opinion of Vilnius, NGO representatives and politicians should be more active and seek closer cooperation and partnership. They expressed an idea that politicians should consider NGO as equal organizations providing social services and take their opinion into consideration when making strategies on providing social services.

It should be noted that Ukmergė NGOs that maintain relations with political parties thought favorably about the present situation of cooperation while the NGO that does not have the relations expressed a greater need for partnership.

In short, politicians communicate with NGOs according to political situation while only officers working in specific areas maintain relations with NGOs that are stronger than that of politicians.

5.7 The impact of the NGO–municipal network on local democracy

The representatives of Vilnius municipality (members of the Council and officers) predicated that democracy is lacking in practical activities. A part of them emphasized that there are formal conditions for democracy.

The opinion of the representatives of Ukmergė district municipality differed. Majority of them (four out of seven) claimed that situation is positive and “there is no need for more democracy” (a 59-year-old member of the Council), while three

respondents believed that there should be more democracy. The analysis of the attitudes, the real situation, and the factors having an impact on the development of democracy indicate that the level of local democracy in the area is pretty low. The difference in attitude can be explained in two ways: the lack of information about the concept of democracy and the standing relations (high degree of informal institutionalization) that were established before the restoration of the Lithuanian independence.

Despite the differences between Vilnius city and Ukmergė district, the representatives of the municipalities agreed that in order to develop democracy, the communities need to be activated and the development of the non-governmental sector has to be promoted. In the process of the research, the municipality representatives expressed their opinion on how to promote the development of local democracy. The representatives of Vilnius municipality claimed that it is necessary:

- to provide municipalities with as much freedom as they are given in other states of the European Union (a 43-year-old officer);
- to improve citizen activity in sub-municipalities and the relationship between inhabitants and local government (a 38-year-old officer);
- to influence communal activity and to include their representatives into municipalities (a 44-year-old officer);
- to change the election system into majoritarian, to decrease the number of officers by increasing their salaries and separating their responsibilities according to the areas, to increase the importance of sub-districts and communities (a 55-year-old member of the Council);
- to explain the role and functions of municipality to the citizens (a 40-year-old member of the Council);
- to make pikes for narrow interest groups to make profit and to parasitize at the expense of others—majority of people (a 47-year-old member of the Council).

Representatives of Ukmergė District Municipality have listed:

- the importance of direct elections of the mayor (52 and 59-year-old members of the council), the lack of political culture, poor argumentation of decisions (a 52-year-old member of the Council);
- the importance of the public spirit of the society and the empowerment of people to express their opinion, for instance through population surveys (a 41-year-old member of the Council);
- the improvement of legal regulation of local governance and prevention of populists (a 59-year-old member of the Council);
- “the need for more new politicians” (a 37-year-old officer);
- provision of municipality with more functions and the application of all methods of communication with the community (a 42-year-old officer).

When comparing the research results in Vilnius and Ukmergė, it is possible to mark certain tendencies. So, unlike the province, the city can be characterized more by formal institutionalization level and communication between non-governmental organizations and municipality is based more on bureaucratic elements, formal procedures and legal means whereas the relations are less formal, based on personal contacts and, at the same time, more intensive in the district.

Financial dependence on municipality is also different: NGOs in Vilnius have a greater variety of financing sources whereas in Ukmergė municipality, it is the major supporter. It should be noted that financing is more stable in the district than in the city (in Ukmergė, unlike in Vilnius, a part of non-governmental organizations receive funding every year without any contests, they have a projected line in the municipal budget).

It should be noted that the lower level of formal barriers, higher intensity of relations, and more stable financing facilitate the process of NGO activities (Ukmergė case) but does not condition greater functionality in the area of major concrete results, i.e., cooperation between NGOs and municipality is crowned by large piece-rate achievements that have an impact on the society not only on municipal but also on the national level. This can be explained by the different volumes of goals to be achieved and approaches to partnership-based relations. The research results have indicated that NGO representatives from a smaller town are less oriented towards change and are more satisfied with status quo. NGO as well as municipal representatives consider municipality more like a support giver and NGOs are believed to be humble patrons of persons belonging to social risk groups or means for free-time occupation but not equal partners that can solve social problems together with a municipality. Respondents from Vilnius emphasized partnership and democracy and envisaged opportunities for cooperation.

5.8 Other problem groups identified in the NGO–municipal relations

Other important obstacles in the interface between NGO and municipalities can be contracted into five problem groups; they are more related to the particularity of non-governmental organizations and municipal institutions and their works as well as civic culture, social psychology, and mentality of inhabitants.

- (1) In the past, Lithuanian non-governmental organizations did not have sufficient authority and impact to represent their interest groups more widely and strongly. Inhabitants often thought of NGO activities only as an opportunity to make profit from various foundations and did not see the possibilities for the continuation of NGO activities. Municipal officers also had the same attitude towards NGOs and judged them as constant applicants for financial support.
- (2) The inhabitants did not trust the competence of non-governmental organizations because, usually, their staff consisted only of one person and activities were based on volatile volunteer activities. The lack of competence, especially in the province (in our case, Ukmergė district), was also mentioned by the municipality administration and politicians. The opportunities for project preparation and implementation were not completely used and they were much better than NGOs could have taken advantage of them.
- (3) The real decentralization and often devolution of the government was either absent or worked in a limited extent, the Lithuanian municipalities were too big, small in number (only 60), too far away from people, and alien to them. Many NGO leaders, especially in bigger cities (Vilnius in our case) were very critical in regard to municipalities because of the unapplied promises and

not carried out activities. In the province (in our case, Ukmergė district), a part of NGO leaders evaluated the municipality's work as if currying favor, being afraid to lose the opportunities and financing provided by the municipality.

- (4) Inhabitants did not trust state institutions, including municipalities, and did not believe NGOs could somehow direct or influence state policy. Majority of people thought of government in general and, specifically, municipality politicians and administration as an opposing, adversarial, depersonalized, and bureaucratic power.
- (5) Lithuanian civic movement historically used to be as a national liberation movement and it has never been characterized by civil organizations, including NGOs, which play an important role in the Western tradition. Many NGO initiatives in Lithuania still remain as imported, promoted, and financed from the West (especially up to the year of 2004). Lithuania can also be characterized by the lack of local civic initiatives; specific to this country, organizations are not being established.

6 Conclusion

While analyzing the interview information, five attributes of the NGO–municipal relations were distinguished: institutionalization, intensity, functionality, mutual trust, and resource dependence. A theoretical model of NGO–local government relations was formed on the basis of those characteristics. The model is based on normative assumption that institutionalized, intensive, functional, based on mutual trust and in terms of resource independent NGO–municipal relations sustain local democracy.

The research conducted in municipalities of Vilnius city and Ukmergė district revealed that interaction between municipalities and NGOs is limited by those major obstacles which are possible to distinguish into three major problem groups:

- Intolerant attitude of municipal representatives towards NGO;
- The lack of activity of NGOs and citizens in general;
- Different attitudes towards cooperation among representatives of municipalities and NGOs which negatively affect functionality of interaction.

The identified problem groups have proximate relationship, where the first problem group (the attitude of municipal representatives) has an impact on the third one (functionality of cooperation) and the second problem group (NGO activity), as research results suggest, may have impact on the first and third problem groups. The research identified differences of interaction between municipalities and NGO's in Vilnius city and Ukmergė district, it was revealed that NGOs are more independent and forms of their activities are more varied in Vilnius than in Ukmergė district. Some problems that cause obstacles to the NGO–municipal interface are closely related to the work specifics of non-governmental and municipal organizations as well as civic culture, social psychology, and mentality of the inhabitants of Lithuania.

Appendix

Vilnius city municipality

Vilnius is the capital of Lithuania founded in 1323. Vilnius city municipality is situated in the south-eastern part of country, in Vilnius County, and consists of the city of Vilnius, the town of Grigiškės, and some rural areas. The Vilnius city municipality is the most populous municipality in Lithuania and is one of the most diverse municipalities, with Lithuanians making up less than 60% of the population. The population of Vilnius in 2006 was 542,000 inhabitants, 252,464 men (45.58%) and 301,440 women (54.42%). In 2006, because of Vilnius City achievements, GDP level of Vilnius County, 1.5 times surpassed the average Lithuanian level, unemployment was among the lowest and average wage among the highest in Lithuania. Because of the political climate and other factors, the municipality has thrived economically, but some people oppose the way this economic success has been obtained. Therefore there has recently been more polarization, and many people in the 2007 municipal elections have chosen to vote for the opposition. Coalition of liberaldemocrats (14), socialdemocrats (four) and Polish election action (six) are ruling the city. Important votes are of Liberalų sąjūdis (four), who is supporting this coalition. Totally municipal council consists of 51 politicians.

Some of the actions of the municipality government were pioneering the ideas in Lithuania or even in the world. The innovative actions were such as letting people always see the mayor's office online over a webcam, giving people free bikes to ride with and otherwise promoting bike travel (which was not popular before), banning of any public alcohol consumption (previously not done in Lithuania), installing TV sets in public transportation, allowing tall skyscrapers near the city centre (previously not done in Lithuania), and others. There are many old architectural monuments in the city which are under good supervision.

The structure of Vilnius city municipality Council consists of fractions, committees, and commissions. The mayor and administration directors are the political and policy implementation heads in Vilnius municipality. The administration director is supervising eight departments—Department of Economics, Department of Energy and Economics, Department of Culture, Education and Sports, Department of Health and Social Security, Department of City Development, Department of Public Order and Common Affairs, Department of Law, and Department of Personnel. There are also eight units which are not included in the structure of departments: Unit of Analysis and Strategic Planning, Unit of Foreign Relations, Unit of Development of Information Technologies, Unit of The European Union's Support Coordination, Unit of Book-keeping, Unit of Public Purchase, Unit of Internal Audit, and Unit of Environment. Territory of municipality is divided into 21 small administrative geographical sub-districts that have a head.

It is necessary to extract five main aims in Vilnius city municipality's strategic plan of 2005–2007:

- (1) to ensure education for everybody and its quality, to lessen social exclusion and enhance the health of community;

- (2) to form favorable conditions for business development and creation of knowledge society;
- (3) to safeguard and form Vilnius city's peculiarity, to ensure its sound environment;
- (4) to develop engineering and communication infrastructure; and
- (5) to enhance quality of city's management.

For all these aims, there are foreseen 17 programs. In 2005, 659 million litas from the city's budget was planned to use for social purposes. For social assistance, it used 121.5 million litas. For social services, it used 41.7 million litas. Three million litas was allocated for public procurement from non-governmental organizations.

Ukmergė municipality

Ukmergė district municipality belongs to the County of Vilnius. The town of Ukmergė was founded in 1225. Total population of the district is 47,223 inhabitants, 28,006 in urban areas and 19,217 in rural areas. In 2004, mortality was higher than the average in the country and it makes 13.1–15.0 deaths per 1,000 of population. The prognosis to 2015 states the negative increase of population with 20.1% of over working-age population. Based on population structure, the municipality is one of the oldest (together with almost one-third (19) municipalities per country). In 2001, 8,718 inhabitants were over 65 years (17.9%). One of the largest environmental problems in the district is the presence of illegal dumps. In the district, there are situated 54 objects of cultural heritage under state supervision.

The budget revenue of the district in 2006 surpassed the planned level of the revenue significantly. The level of unemployment in the district is 6%. There are many metal processing, timber processing, sewing, and other enterprises in the district. Among the biggest, which were known also abroad, were "Vienybė", "Izobara", "Aukmergės baldai", "Vilkma", and others. Regardless of many progressive undertakings, it was difficult for Ukmergė district to catch up with other districts. The reason for that is the lethargic sleep during the previous years. One of the most interesting and unusual undertakings in the future is to build up the big amusement park in the former military town, which could attract also foreign tourists. It could be very important for Ukmergė because the district is not very distinguished among the other districts. Unfortunately, there is big social exclusion in the district. Young people leave Ukmergė. The reason for that is important: monthly salary in Vilnius County reaches 1,300 litas, 1,200 litas in Lithuania, and only 900 litas in Ukmergė. But for the reason of leaving the district there is no shortage of living apartments in Ukmergė. More and more people are buying houses and flats, and from Ukmergė, getting to work to Vilnius every morning.

The municipal Council consists of 25 politicians. The mayor is a chairman of Council and his/her responsibilities include: to organize Council meetings; to supervise the application of the laws and Government regulations and decisions of the Council. Municipality committees are for the following areas: country-side (rural) affairs and environment protection; control; culture, education and sport; municipality economy; health and social affairs; economy, budget and business development. One commission ensures ethics and procedures. The district is divided

into 12 seniūnijos. The municipality is the main organizer of social service provision.

There are tens of non-governmental organizations in the district. The unions of disabled and old-age people are very active. Country-side population is uniting into communities which are registered almost in every bigger village. At present, there are registered more than 30 country-side communities, which are united into Ukmergė Regional Community Union.

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