PR AND MARKETING
OF SOCIAL POLICY INSTITUTIONS IN POLAND

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Abstract
The paper presents the problems of presence of social policy institutions in media messages (Internet, television, radio, press) as well as the use of media and new media (including electronic communication) in order to support activities in this area. Communication deficits and barriers occurring in modern Polish public institutions are discussed and compared with the possibilities of applying marketing and PR tools. The text also presents the concept of holistic joining of the activities in the social space with those in the media space, the latter including marketing and PR, in order to support and reinforce the functioning of social policy institutions.

Key words:
Media communication in social policy. Public relations of social policy. Social integration. Welfare institutions in media.

Introduction

For the last few years the interest in problems of public relations of social policy institutions has been growing among their managerial staff, as well as among researchers.[1] This way, attention is drawn to the issue of difficult presence of social policy institutions in the mass media and in social perception. The analysis of the reports on the functioning of the 1st sector institutions, published in audio-visual media (also in the new media) easily leads to a conclusion that – in the aspect of media communication – social policy is in a very difficult situation.[2] This problem is widely conditional. It is influenced by: stereotypes of social policy, historical and social conditions of institutions' image, low level of media attractiveness of the typical activities resulting in the lack of social interest, low prestige of welfare-related professions and – what I would like to particularly emphasize – the lack of proper marketing and PR in this industry.

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1   KUCHARSKA, B.: Wstęp. In KUCHARSKA, B. (ed.): *Rola mediów w aktywnej integracji.* Warszawa : Mazowieckie Centrum Polityki Społecznej, 2013, p. 7-8.

2   For more information, see: SZYSZKA, M.: *Kształtowanie wizerunku instytucji pomocy społecznej w mediach.* Warszawa : Instytut Rozwoju Służb Społecznych, 2013, p. 17; DUDKIEWICZ, M.: Jak nas widzą, tak nas piszą – wizerunek publiczny pracowników socjalnych. In RYMSZA, M. (ed.): *Pracownicy socjalni i praca socjalna w Polsce. Między służbą społeczną a urzędem.* Warszawa : Instytut Spraw Publicznych, 2012, p. 122; REK-WOŹNIAK, M.: Dobroczyńcy, biurokraci, kozły ofiarne? O społecznym konstruowaniu wizerunku pracowników socjalnych w Polsce. In *Kultura i Społeczeństwo*, 2012, No 1, p. 102.

1 The presence of social policy institutions in media messages

Opinion polls indicate that the society lacks knowledge and specific conception regarding the activities carried out in the area of social policy (e.g. by social workers) or active integration instruments.[3] This characteristic applies not only to public opinion but often also to journalists and media workers. The biggest number of mistakes in presenting the issues covered by social welfare and integration can be found in the messages published in electronic media.

In contemporary media messages, despite the dynamic transformations in the discussed matters, the functioning of public institutions is rarely presented in a positive light, and the vast majority of reports is of interventional character. Not many public institutions can declare a good cooperation with mass media, neither they use media and new media in work. Employees of welfare institutions are rarely prepared to contact journalists, build relations or to manage certain press services – e.g. as spokespersons or in communication departments.[4] It should not surprise then, that we can observe numerous antagonisms and misunderstandings between journalists and welfare institutions employees.[5]

Currently, in the age of mediatization of social actions, media image, and as a result, social reception of welfare institutions are composed not only of pragmatics of their functioning – very often efficient, based on some standards, possibilities, local resources and infrastructure. More often the problem is a luggage of negative stereotypes among which the rank of symbol was given to the term "social welfare",[6] and functioning of welfare and integration institutions is often determined in mass media merely as 'service'. In media message social policy institutions and social workers are most often presented as distributors of various social services[7] and the ones that "take care" of the dependent people who are deprived of help of family.

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3   For more information, see: RUDOLF, A., PRZYBYŁ, C.: *Ocena oddziaływania emisji drugiego sezonu serialu „Głęboka woda" na promocję działań finansowanych z Europejskiego Funduszu Społecznego. Raport końcowy.* Warszawa : Agrotec, 2013. [online]. [2015-12-01]. Available at: <http://www.kapitalludzki.gov.pl/download/gfx/kapitalludzki/pl/defaultmultilistaplikow/173/14/1/rk_gleboka_woda.pdf>; *Komu i jak pomagać? pomoc społeczna w opinii polaków komunikat z badań BS/140/2008.* [online]. [2015-12-01]. Available at: <http://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2008/K_140_08>).

4   Information based on the author's own nation-wide questionnaire research study conducted among social welfare and social integration employees. (Remark by M. S.).

5   WALOTEK-ŚCIAŃSKA, K. et al.: *New media in the social spaces. Strategies of influence.* Praha : Verbum, 2014, p. 45.

6   The current legal system in Poland does not recognize such institutions as social welfare; the regulation identifies the care system as one of the institutions which realize social policy of the government. (Remark by M. S.).

7   In media messages the activities of social workers are most frequently presented as distribution of social benefits and "taking care" for the dependent. (Remark by M. S.).

Most representative examples of presenting the false image of social workers and welfare institutions are provided by tabloid media,[8] especially their Internet editions. Social welfare institutions are most often presented in the perspective of scandal exposure (e.g. reports from integration trips or trainings for institution staff, costs of which are compared to the number of free meals and social benefits distributed by those institutions) or looking for sensation e.g. showing real or false negligence of the staff, inability or inefficiency of the social security system etc.[9]

In the context of mediatization we need to point out to the great power of negative impact the stereotypes have in media and social space. The image of passive and ineffective social policy, especially the one created in electronic and social media, is without any doubts a cognitive simplification. However, one should not forget about the great power of stereotypes in public image space – as simplified cognitive structures they often become a part of public attitudes. A good example may be the image of a social workers sitting behind their desks. It is a very harmful and – to some extent – false stereotype, indicating the official character of social policy. Nevertheless, this is the image of welfare institutions employees that is the most frequently presented in media message: in pictures, television materials, on the Internet and in interviews. The images of "clerks sitting behind their desk" are very often an element of visual auto-presentation of the institution: they are present on institutions websites, in information materials, interviews and videos uploaded on YouTube.[10] Creations of this kind, which function in electronic media, clearly reinforce the impression that workers operate mainly within the walls of institution facilities (offices), not in local environments, or that they treat their work as an official, administration procedure. Social work, instead of being field-work, is perceived as clerical duties, handling the documents (which may be indicated by the pictures of documents piling up on the desks.

2 Deficits in the area of PR, marketing and information policy

Despite various and wide conditions impacting the image of social policy institutions, there is one other significant reason for the current state of things, which should be considered. It is the failure to take advantage of the presence in media and electronic media as well as inefficient use of public relation tools. This refers especially to wide opportunities of promotion and support of actions, which are provided by access to public and media space, including new

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8   In Poland e.g. "Fakt", "Super Ekspress". (Remark by M. S.).
9   However, the nature of this type of press releases should be indicated. Tabloids are not opinion-forming media, they rather reflect the opinions and views of their readers. (Remark by M. S.).
10   *Praca w MOPS*. [online]. [2015-12-01]. Available at: <http://www.youtube.com/ user/kpssbielsko>; <http://www.mops-zywiec.pl>; <http://www.przywidz.pl>; <http://www.mops.zgorzelec.eu; <http://www.dpsplock.pl; http://www.socmag. net>.

media. Using these opportunities should be easy due to the public character of institutions and their functioning within the matter of so called public good.

The limited presence in media and new media results in failure to use the wide ranges of possible operations coming from a variety of functions of media and journalism.[11] In practice, the most typical functions are: information and opinion-forming, criticism and control, and also the one dominating in tabloid press and electronic media – entertaining function. However, one must remember that the spectrum of possibilities, and also the range of roles fulfilled by media, including electronic media, is much wider and involves also education and integration. In the context of functioning of social policy organizations, it is one of more important perspectives of media and journalism, allowing reinforcement of actions promoting open, tolerant and social integration attitudes and for the benefit of local, national, ethnic societies, religious minorities, people with disabilities, marginalized and disfavored environments.

The presence of institutions (and promotion of their activities) in media allows not only to build the positive image of the former, but may also support social integration processes or actions aiming at inclusion and mutual help. Integrative function of media is often set with the postulate of creating social ties and wide possibilities are created by social media. This perspective – in the area of social integration and assistance – is intensively and widely applied by non-government organizations. The majority of recognized NGOs, as well as commercial institutions that provide social services, carry out effective marketing and PR activities. This results, at least, in coherent visual communication, clear and visitor-friendly Internet websites, activity in social networks as well as press service that deals with information release and cooperation with media.[12] In this context public institutions present themselves – by means of contrast – rather poorly.

Two important – from the perspective of actions of social assistance and integration – functions of electronic media should be mentioned, namely information and promotion. Media channels may be used both to inform about actions and programs carried out, as well as possibilities of cooperation and participation; such informing provides opportunities to reach the beneficiaries of these activities.[13] The second perspective is connected with the possibility to promote institutions and their activities: media presentation, gaining public support, creating a positive image. This perspective is connected with the chance

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11 CHYLIŃSKI, M., RUSS-MOHL, S.: *Dziennikarstwo.* Warszawa : Polskapresse, 2008, p. 18.
12 GRZYBEK, M.: Odpowiedzialny marketing w organizacjach pozarządowych. In ĆWIK, N. (ed.): *Wspólna odpowiedzialność. Rola marketingu*. Warszawa : Forum Odpowiedzialnego Biznesu, 2012, p. 154.
13 *Na czym polega wzajemne informowanie się i konsultacje między urzędem i organizacjami?* [online]. [2015-12-01]. Available at: <http://poradnik.ngo.pl/x/525339>.

to gain additional resources (i.a. financial, material, volunteers, cooperation etc.) allowing to implement such activities. Information and promotion actions are often hard to distinguish; they are realized concurrently, by means of identical channels and media on the web; similar mechanism applies to social marketing which connects information, promotion and persuasive activities.

When referring to the issues of application of PR and online PR tools, the presence in electronic media and – wider – in the media space, we need to assume definitely that public institutions experience deficits in this area and that they face the specific challenges. Research and author's own studies indicate that these deficits involve, on one hand, such basic matters as electronic communication (e.g. coherent website),[14] visual communication (e.g. using company colors and proper graphics, proper quality of graphic content in institution's self-presentation), the use of classic PR tools: developing cooperation with social and institutional environment as well as media relations including active presence in the new media space.[15] The research and experiences during contacts with the representatives of social policy units indicate that, on one hand, the role of marketing and public relations tools as well as the necessity to apply them while building positive image and support network are underestimated. On the other hand, institutions' managers do not always have adequate tools at their disposal (the base of good practices, access to trainings, guides). Another reason is the lack of resources (human, material, poor infrastructure) to conduct certain activities. The barrier arising from political conditions of social policy institution management also plays a very significant role. This refers especially to the social welfare institutions the specifics of which is sometimes perceived by local authorities as "inconvenient".[16] There is also – justified to some extent – the fear of the unknown, that is, aversion to media and online activities accompanied by the lack of adequate competencies. Employees of social policy institutions traditionally associate the efforts towards creating the positive media and social image with commercial institutions, including NGOs, e.g. the ones that operate in the area of social services in the conditions of free market competition.

The example which depicts the indicated tendency may be a comparison of institutions' websites. For organizations from the non-public sector, the basic platform for information exchange is website ngo.pl which is multi-surface site connecting functions of message box, data base, forum, a source of many useful

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14   MIŚ, L., SZEPSKI, M.: Pomoc społeczna w Internecie. Wykorzystanie nowoczesnej technologii przez pracowników małopolskich ośrodków pomocy społecznej. In *Problemy polityki społecznej*, 2012, Vol. 3, No. 19, p. 110.

15   Own questionnaire study. (For more information, see: GIEDROJĆ, K.: *Public relations w administracji.* Ostrołęka : Wydawnictwa Profesjonalne AlphaPro, 2004, p. 31).

16   RUDOLF, A., PRZYBYŁ, C.: *Ocena oddziaływania emisji drugiego sezonu serialu „Głęboka woda" na promocję działań finansowanych z Europejskiego Funduszu Społecznego. Raport końcowy.* Warszawa : Agrotec, 2013. [online]. [2015-12-01]. Available at: <http://www.kapitalludzki.gov.pl/download/gfx/kapitalludzki/pl/defaultmultilistaplikow/173/14/1/rk_gleboka_woda.pdf>.

information, legal documents, guides; it is also a regular, multi-topic Internet newspaper. Functioning of the website requires material and intellectual resources, huge amount of organization effort; yet the results are impressive – the website successfully fulfills its role and is a main Internet medium of the 3rd sector organizations: materials and data bases are constantly used by visitors and a number of newsletter subscribers amounts up to over 100.000. What is important, this website has taken over a function of information portal created for public institutions *Pierwszy Polski Portal Pomocy Społecznej (First Polish Portal of Social Assistance).*[17] The comparison of the quality of the website, information structure, number of resources and users is a definite advantage of this 3rd sector portal.

3 The perspectives of enhancing communication in social policy institutions

Returning to the main issue, the role of communication tools – in such a specific category as social policy institutions – should be properly understood and further determined. The point is not to create a definition but to identify the place, the role and the useful tools. Discussing the issue of social marketing and public relations, and their role in supporting welfare, integration, educational activities or widely understood safety and prevention, one needs to begin with the general idea of social policy. The latter becomes each time the framework which outlines the scope of functioning of certain institutions, implied activities and programs. The directions of adopted policy, based on the factual diagnosis both institutional and social deficits and resources, should concentrate around the important issues (areas and demands) and allow the functioning of various subjects (also between the sectors). This should be done in a coherent and complementary manner that would allow to implement the adopted strategies, and enable different mechanisms and solutions to complement one another. It is not without reason that we, at present, talk about multi-sector social policy: in Europe we can observe the growing tendencies to assume subsidiary attitude toward the realization of public tasks, including social services.[18] Legal and institutional solutions as well as financing mechanisms more and more frequently fit into the pluralistic concept of thinking about social policy as the activities carried out not only by public subjects on the central and local level, but also by non-public subjects: non-governmental and private organizations that provide widely understood social services. Pluralism in the social policy – based on identification and strategic planning – allows the implementation of programs that involve partnership and participation of various subjects, in broad

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17 *Pierwszy Portal Pomocy Społeczne.* [online]. [2015-12-01]. Available at: <http://www.ops.pl>.

18 GREWIŃSKI, M.: Od systemu opieki przez politykę pomocy do aktywizacji i integracji społecznej w Polsce. In GREWIŃSKI, M., KRZYSZKOWSKI, J. (eds.): *Współczesne tendencje w pomocy społecznej.* Warszawa : MCPS, 2011, p. 9-10.

areas and within various target groups. This should translate into the cohesion and complementarity of the undertaken actions. In order to remain effective, efforts initiated by social policy institutions should complement one another, overlap in mutual correlations, "surround" beneficiaries. They should be carried out in a scheduled, systematic and diversified manner.

Goals and assumptions of marketing and public relations fit into such concept. The above mentioned complementarity requires activity not only in the area of traditional approach to social policy but also complementary actions – innovations – in the area of information policy, promotion and encouraging activities, attitudes, behaviors, values, building social trust, support and cooperation. Social policy involves certain steps undertaken by institutions on various levels, especially in such areas as shaping population's living and working conditions, creating social order: health care, protection of employment, social insurance and social security, education etc.[19] These steps however, due to the demand of effectiveness which in each case entails an important condition of social participation, must be complemented by information and persuasive activities: information, educational and promotion programs and campaigns carried out in open spaces (among local communities, in institutions, in media etc.). In this context, social marketing is a very important tool. It involves the range of instruments and possibilities to inform, to shape social images, behaviors and attitudes of individuals, groups and institutions. It also provides the perspective for applying innovative, non-standard, even experimental solutions in order to win the public opinion, its support and involvement.[20] To be effective such activities must be conducted in a systemic manner – in heterogeneous environments and by various institutions, for larger groups of beneficiaries, for people with disabilities, their environments and entrepreneurs as potential employers,[21] while information and promotion programs should accompany the certain legislative and organizational solutions and facilities. Thus, the effectiveness and building social trust requires not only creation and development of the infrastructure, applying favorable legal and organizational solutions as well as widely understood media and social activities (including social marketing and wise PR).

Cooperation development and creation of positive image of social policy institutions is a great and serious challenge. Due to its scale and current deficits this work should be carried out on regular basis and with an increased intensivity, not as an activity in itself but as the element of systemic actions of institutions on all levels. In this context, it is worth to emphasize the necessity to prepare and conduct the activities oriented on developing relations with

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19 AULEYTNER, J.: *Polityka społeczna w Polsce i na świecie.* Warszawa : Dom Wydawniczy Elipsa, 2011, p. 124.
20 ĆWIK, N. (ed.): *Wspólna odpowiedzialność. Rola marketingu*. Warszawa : Forum Odpowiedzialnego Biznesu, 2012, p. 6-7.
21 DYCZEWSKI, B.: Kampanie społeczne jako szansa w przeciwdziałaniu społecznej defaworyzacji. In HIRSZEL, K., SZCZEPANIK, R. (eds.): *Psychospołeczne uwarunkowania defaworyzacji dzieci i młodzieży.* Warszawa : Difin, 2010, p. 143-153.

media and local communities, building reputation, transparency and providing complex information to the public – all this according to the idea of rational public relations[22] and adequate to the place, tasks and roles of public institutions. Many initiatives in this area have been already launched: we can point out to the activities of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy financing image development projects or the controversial television series about social workers *The Deep End* directed by Magdalena Łazarkiewicz.[23] An important role belongs to actions and campaigns initiated e.g. by regional social welfare centers;[24] however, social policy institutions functioning on local and regional levels play a special role here. The tendency to take initiative in organizing social campaigns and social, information and media activities by the social policy units, regardless of their size and resources available, is undoubtedly worth supporting. Effective communication activities undertaken on this level strengthen social policy and may translate into the effectiveness of operations. Simultaneously, they contribute to the increase of citizenship awareness, enhance social activity and relations between institutions and communities, which in turn is in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity and the ideals of civil society. To summarize, professionalization of activities should be accompanied by broad implementation of PR activities: building image and developing public relations and harmonious cooperation with the environment. This is especially due to the fact that – within the scope of operations of social policy institutions – these activities do not require extra resources and the effectiveness of media-related activities that complement actions undertaken in the social space is significant.

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22 KNECHT, Z.: *Racjonalne public relations. Budowa działu, instrumenty, studia przypadków.* Warszawa : C. H. Beck, 2005.

23 *Głęboka Woda.* [online]. [2015-12-01]. Available at: <http://www.tvp.pl/seriale/obyczajowe/gleboka-woda>.

24 For example, media campaigns promoting the image of social welfare conducted by the Mazovian Social Welfare Center in Warsaw or information and promotion campaigns by the Center of Social Policy in Łódź. (Remark by M. S.).

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