

CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY AND ITS PRACTICAL DIMENSION IN PROJECTS WHICH INCLUDE CROSS-SECTOR PARTNERSHIP

Cross-sector partnership can play a major role in initiatives which aim at solving present-day social issues. This article focuses on the possibilities and consequences of cooperation between the public and the social sectors. Higher education institutions – more precisely, one of the main Polish universities – are hereby seen as the representative of the first sector. The second, public sector is hereby represented by non-governmental institutions, those active in Poland as well as abroad.

Further presented in this article are the numerous benefits which stem from the inclusion of Cultural Anthropology in the debate concerning solving various social problems in regards to cross-sector partnership. By which – in terms of definition – I understand the cooperation of various sectors, which may result in unprecedented and revolutionary resolutions. Furthermore, anthropology has the potential to encompass all elements of cross-sector partnership, as well as to employ initiatives which are necessary for solving contemporary socio-political matters.

It is however necessary to clarify in a few words what exactly cultural anthropology is, and what its main assumptions are. The encyclopedic definition which can be found in most books today – which defines anthropology as the science which studies humans, the diversity and intricacy of their systems and cultures – seems to lack substance, and is quite unsatisfactory in terms of its practical dimension (Hann 2008: 3). All of the above mentioned characteristics are undoubtedly true, they do not, however, clarify how anthropology works in practice. Chris Hann, a British anthropologist, highlights the pragmatics of anthropology, as he notices that the discipline can prove helpful in choosing and applying scientific knowledge in a most-favourable way which suits the cultural context. Additionally, anthropologists have the ability to appreciate local knowledge not only because such knowledge facilitates technical problem solving in the natural, local environment, but also because it proves to have – in itself – major cultural value. Hann believes that anthropological research will prove extremely valuable on

the terrain of Eastern-Europe. One of his major examples is the isolation of ethnic minorities which dwell in most large European cities, especially London and Paris. According to him new research being carried out on this subject can have a more positive influence on the relationship between different ethnic groups than was the case so far (Hann 2008: 255, 256).

Such an approach may in some ways resemble the assumptions of applied anthropology, which in many cases treats the participants of an experiment as *objects of well-planned and developed tests, created by uninvolved, outside investigators/experimenters. The outcome of the tests is then being implemented (also from a superior position) into the lives of the participants* (Červinková, Gołębnik 2010: 13-14). Hann, however, notices how invalid such an approach is, in which anthropologists are seen as those who are actively engaged in the development of societies, in a way in which they should increasingly resemble themselves. *The main objective of an anthropologist is not to condemn the practices which have evolved as a part of some cultural tradition of a peoples. (...) Firstly we should support dialogue* (Hann 2008: 257). In this context, any change can be seen as a form of adaptation rather than deconstruction of culture. This means that anthropologists can learn as much from societies they research, as those societies can learn from the anthropologists.

Tomasz Rakowski is another important voice speaking on behalf of the practical aspect of the responsible role of anthropologists. Involvement, in his opinion, does not mean implementing values, which seem to be 'natural' and a given in one's own environment. Such an anthropological programme is completely different from typical modernising actions, in the sense that it attributes the greatest value to the experiences of the researched group. An anthropologist should *accept (...) this other, foreign way of functioning in a social group – full of social anxieties – as the existing one, together with its baggage. (...) The engagement in the problems of the groups in question requires a certain restraint from acting in the spirit of the obvious values of one's own, dominant culture, which could seem beneficial to foreign society* (Rakowski 2007: 156, 157).

In view of this context of the practical aspects of anthropology, I believe that anthropologists possess all the necessary tools for excellent aid in terms of cross-sector partnership. With a focus on respect for diversity, the understanding of the role which difference plays in society, as well as the fact that some elements which are acceptable in one sphere will not necessarily be effective or appropriate in a culturally different environment. Another aspect of an anthropologist's work which should not be overlooked – their disinterested and unbiased approach. This means that even if some project is financed by external sources, an anthropologist – in most cases – will attempt

to act in a way which complements the interests of the institution itself (Buchowski: 1995: 60-70; Firth 1965: 226-238).

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Taking into account the volume restrictions of this article it briefly summarises the most important characteristics of anthropology, which can prove useful in the process of implementing cross-sector projects. In a further section of the text I would like to share my experiences in terms of the practical use of anthropology. Therefore, I present two international projects which exemplify cooperation between the first sector represented by The University of Wrocław Department of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology and the third sector represented by non-governmental institutions (NGO) from Lithuania and Moldavia. The main aim of the aforementioned project was social integration in the broadest sense of the term. In many cases the implementation of practical as well as theoretical anthropological experiences had a positive influence on the effect and character of undertaken actions.

The first of the described projects involved a seven-day stay of Polish and Lithuanian groups in a small village in the Vilnius region. Glinčiszki – the location of the project was a village inhabited mainly by Poles. During preparation we realised that in the place we visited, there were various disagreements between members of the local community. By taking action in order to integrate different national groups in such an environment, continuous change associated with the influence of the environment was a logical assumption to be made. Therefore, the project – which originally assumed the integration of two specific groups – evolved. Methodology used in this project made it possible to *draw* the local community into participation. It should be noted, however, that in the same way that the project had an impact on the environment in which it was implemented; the environment influenced the entire project. The effect of this treatment was an improvement in dialogue between Poles and Lithuanians living in Glinčiszki. With each day the project became increasingly more open to participants from outside. The original design, which focused on the integration of the twenty-four people, eventually transformed. However, the target remained unchanged, while the number of people within the coverage of the project expanded. The project proved too short to become a thorough examination of the origins of conflicts between ethnic groups – it even became doubtful whether this conflict was based on ethnic issues, or whether this was just our initial impression. In view of these uncertainties we decided to limit the activities which allowed for situations in which dialogue between all the

inhabitants of the village was possible. Our goal was not to solve all existing conflicts but to stimulate further changes. We expected that, after we left, some changes might appear that would have a positive impact on the relationships within the local community. The project had become a kind of *spark* for action. Such an effect could only have been achieved by using methods which assume active involvement on the part of the local environment in the realisation of previously planned objectives.

The participants of the discussed project all agreed that the best way to integrate with others were activities that required working with a partner. This confirms the belief that any goal pursued within a group of people brings them together. This seemingly trivial issue was crucial for the development of the methods used during our stay in Gliniszki. It is important to note that nobody imposed the nature of activities on the participants. The only requirement made by the organisers was that the groups be mixed in terms of ethnicity. All members of the groups debated together to find something that really interested everyone. This approach allowed us to create a number of focus groups in which participants performed activities which were pre-scheduled by them.

One group decided that it would focus on the preparation and execution of a film, which would provide both project documentation as well as introduction of local reality. The process of collecting audiovisual material in a group, searching for the best shots and all other related activities proved to effectively bring the Polish and Lithuanian youths together. The second group contacted a local kindergarten and offered their assistance with entertaining children. The project participants made sure that the children – while having fun together – sought to achieve a particular purpose. The organisation of such activities had an immensely positive impact on the mutual integration of the participants. The third group was responsible for organisational issues, which increased the level of mutual trust between all groups. As it turned out, the fourth group proved to have the largest impact on the project. Its members were to venture out and approach the local community in regards to their interest in the subject of Polish-Lithuanian integration. Taking into account the specific space in which the project was implemented, we realised that we should be particularly receptive to the environment. With this in mind we were able to contribute to such changes, which would bring tangible benefits. This was also reflected in the methods that were used for integration. We all agreed that interviews with the Gliniszki community would be the best option. The use of traditional anthropological methods had an excellent outcome. This allowed not only for the mutual integration of the project participants, but also allowed them to get closer to the local commu-

nity. The recurring themes of the conversations were issues related to the relationship between Poles and Lithuanians in the Vilnius region. Furthermore, the researchers gathered all sorts of items, which would then become exhibits in local ethnographic museum. Eventually, due to the activity of *anthropological groups* the residents of Gliniszki opened up and willingly participated in all activities.

The process of integration between Polish and Lithuanian groups was not only limited to group activities. In fact, these young people set a common goal which would be the organisation and execution of a festival (residents of the area participated in the festival as well). The event was a nice finishing touch to the entire undertaking. The members of the project had the opportunity to observe the extent to which they were able to integrate within a few days. On the other hand, for the local community a picnic was a great opportunity to meet one another – the perfect situation in which dialogue between Poles and Lithuanians became possible.

Analysing the conflict existing between Polish and Lithuanian minorities was only possible through a longer residency in their village. The time limit, however, prevented a more thorough analysis of their problems. Therefore, the participants decided not to look for the solution to each conflict, but rather for ways of activating the local population. This meant the creation of platforms which would enable dialogue between the groups that previously did not get along very well. Joint participation in the festival as well as taking part in interviews with *the anthropology group* are examples of activities which made this possible. Even if we did not manage to resolve all disputes, these activities certainly had a positive impact on the residents of the village. The project made interaction possible, although many of its positive effects may not appear until sometime in the future.

The second example of a partnership project which I would like to present as an example of cross-sector partnership took place in Moldova. The project was carried out under the Youth in Action Programme which took place in June 2012 with the cooperation of fourteen students from the Department of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology of the University of Wrocław and ten Moldovans from one of the NGO's in Moldova

Two groups of Polish and Moldovan students both decided to carry out a project, whose main goals would be: integration of youth, with a focus on the role of diversity in different cultures and an indication of some crucial characteristics of the European Union. Amongst the many methods which could allow for the achievement of the objectives the students chose cooking. Preparing meals together not only integrated the groups, but also made the achievement of other goals possible. Discussions on the nature of the dishes

combined with analysing the broader cultural context associated with their preparation made for a starting point in the discussion of both cultural similarities and differences. Dishes from different parts of Europe could also prove to be a valuable contribution to the discussion on the values characteristic to the individual countries of Western Europe, as well as those essential for Moldovans. Although cooking and cuisine were the main themes of the project they were not simultaneously the only priority. Yet, cooking remained an important element of the implementation of the initiative as issues related to the process of preparing food and the ingredients used often times provoked discussions on cultural differences and similarities.

I do not wish to further analyse the goals as well as the course of the project, since this is of no relevance to this article. However, I will focus rather on the methodology used throughout the project, and what significance joint activities in the kitchen had on the realisation of the project and its goals.

Activities concerning cooking are characterised by one basic principle which had a major impact on the nature of this project. It is primarily the desire to achieve a common goal while predicting and planning the actions ahead. This necessitated constant dialogue between the participants in the study. The preparation of meals not only worked as an integrating method, but also allowed for the free expression of cultural diversity thanks to mutual learning about different culinary habits. Another important feature of such initiatives is their openness factor. Preparing meals together out in the open air met with a live response from the local community. The dishes prepared together were then served during the nighttime festival. Thanks to such a structure, the local community initiated interaction with members of the project. No one motivated anyone to start a conversation. The preparation of meals and working together towards a common goal brought as many positive outcomes as the spontaneous reactions of the local community did. Joint preparation of meals created a platform on which completely natural and unconstrained interaction took place.

It is the spontaneity factor which may turn out to be the main value of projects that involve cross-sector partnership as it allows us to learn about specific problems directly from those involved. In an ideal world – after consulting the local community – we would be able to develop a solution model to specific problems which we could then implement. In practice however, this is difficult to achieve. The reasons could stem both from financial or time limits. Therefore, even if it is not possible to prepare a specific solution, one should consider how to lead to a situation in which after one's departure the problem will eventually be solved in the framework of the local community (Kammis, McTaggart 2010: 810). One should of course keep in

mind that all solutions must be implemented on a level of dialogue and mutual understanding.

Undoubtedly, such a project may have a beneficial effect on the local economy, which – in the case of the poor environment of Moldova – is of utmost importance. Additionally, the participants had the opportunity to get to know completely different circumstances. Moldova is a country which aspires to closer relations with the European Union. Such an initiative could allow for the community to learn about the European Union, about its advantages and disadvantages. Thanks to such an initiative the EU stopped being known for its political speeches, and became something which could be directly experienced by the people. Anthropologists had the opportunity to learn about the local reality. Within the framework of the project, interacting with the local community became much easier. The project made activities such as collecting material during a simple conversation more natural than through a formal interview. The effects of such meetings are research inspirations as well as written articles describing, for example, Moldovan cuisine (Bandyga 2012: 1-43).

The examples of the aforementioned projects prove that it is possible to implement such an undertaking which requires cross-sector partnership while using the theoretical and empirical basis of such an academic discipline as anthropology. Cooperation between academic institutions with NGO's can have an extremely beneficial effect on social integration. The above mentioned examples of projects prove that, nowadays, anthropologists, in addition to performing their own tasks and objectives – as it was somewhat inscribed in their discipline – have a rich multitude of experience that they can successfully contribute to solving current social problems.

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Summary

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Key words: cultural anthropology, project, cross-sector partnership