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ENHANCING OF THE PARTNERSHIP CAPACITY OF LOCAL COMMUNITIES: SCIENTIFIC AND PRACTICAL APPROACHES

Abstract

The aim of the article is to analyse and assess the main scientific and practical approaches regarding the increase of partnership capacity of local communities.

In particular, an assessment of the level of partnership capacity of the Transcarpathian region communities was carried out on the basis of semistructural interviews with the heads of local communities of the region. The main stimulating and destructive factors preventing the partnership relations development in communities with other subjects, in particular representatives of business and the public sector, have been identified.

It was determined that when justifying strategic directions of partnership activation in local communities, the key element would be the deepening of synergy between all participants of partnership relations. The main directions of partnership activation in communities with a high, medium and low level of partnership capacity are suggested. On the basis of the analyzed experience of the activity of public organizations and the implementation of grant projects, tools are proposed for establishing

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effective partnership cooperation between communities and businesses and creating better conditions for conducting entrepreneurial activities in communities.

Keywords: partnership capacity, local communities, semistructural interview, business, local government, public sector.

JEL Classification: H790, R190, R580.

Introduction

Partnership capacity is one of the most important forms and manifestations of integration in the system of local government, which ensures the joint implementation of the interests and needs of government, business and the public. The given integration form contributes to a significant improvement in the quality of services provided to the population by authorities and a significant improvement in mutual understanding between the authorities and the community, between all subjects of territorial development (Olenkovska, 2013). Establishing partnership relations becomes one of the most important approaches in the activities of institutions on the way to achieving common goals, it is a key element to important changes in communities and society. Along with this, there are a number of problems and negative factors preventing the partnership relations development at the community level.

Within the framework of this study, the goal is to carry out an analysis and evaluation of the main scientific and practical approaches to increase the partnership capacity of local communities (on the example of the Transcarpathian region). The analysis is based on empirical methods of systemic, comparative and factor analysis, considering the development of basic scientific approaches to the activation of partnership in communities. Also when determining the main factors influencing the partnership capacity of territorial communities at the regional and local levels the method of semistructural interviews has been used. The outcome of the study is the developed proposals for activating the level of partnership capacity of communities, depending on the existing level of their partnership interaction with various groups of subjects, in particular, government, business and the public sector.

1. Assessment of partnership capacity potential of local communities is based on the results of semistructural interviews

When justifying the main approaches for the partnership capacity activation of local communities, the results of semistructural interviews with the heads of the regional communities of Transcarpathian region have been analyzed. Due to this it was possible to obtain information that directly characterizes the attitude of community leaders to partnership and to some extent may

reflect the potential of the local community to establish partnership ties and interaction with other business entities. Thus, during an interview, the goal was to determine the level of cooperation between local community and the heads. Therefore, the heads of the local communities were asked the following question "Is cooperation with the heads established in the community?", to which the majority of respondents gave a similar answer, "These are workflows. The heads may change. Working moments. Work in the "subordinate-employer" format". "There is no problem, everyone must provide what is required". The answer of another chairman to this question leads to the conclusion that cooperation with the heads is the result of the current work of communities and the need for them depends on the current situation in the community: "We don't have the heads. The public will decide whether they are needed or no".

Studying the opinion of the leaders of local communities regarding the level of participation in various types of projects and grants makes it possible to conclude that this area of community activity is insufficiently developed and is at the initial stage of formation. Thus, to the question "Do you elaborate local community development programs and take part in the implementation of the projects?" Do you apply for participation in grant programs?" most of the community heads answered as follows: "We work on it, but so far without results. We are not able allocate 30% for co-financing... And you still need to win a grant. If we allocate 10%, and someone – 30%, then they win..."

During the research and sociological interviews with the heads of the local communities, it was important to investigate the level of cooperation and partnership relations with the business sector which plays a significant role in the socio-economic development of communities and is the basis for the activation of entrepreneurship in the territory of the region as a whole. Thus, to the question "In which way your community interacts with the business sector? Was there cooperation with business representatives in the community?" the majority of the community leaders replied negatively: "There is practically no cooperation, because business assistance is so meager that it is irrelevant, ... and then you become dependent. I don't want that. I'm not trying to establish it".

Community representatives often noted that cooperation with business has been established, but is not effective enough. "There is an exchange of information if sponsorship is involved (City Day events, other events), then the business makes charitable contributions. If we are talking about landscaping, then only the private own territory is considered...". At the same time, there are leaders of the local communities with positive attitude who support relations with the business sector and encourage joint cooperation, in particular: "The community authorities are studying the issue of possible cooperation with local business, involving all available opportunities

to ensure partnership relations. The goal of cooperation with business is to promote the creation of work places, and as a result there will be the growth of tax revenues, which is the main source of community development”.

To the question “Is there a problem that can be suggested to the business to be solved by attracting funding from the community?” the community leaders replied ambiguously: “There was cooperation at the beginning of the previous term, but certain powerful businessmen, taking into account the difficult economic situation, refuse such cooperation”. To the question “Does the community create preferential conditions for business for the social partnership development?” the majority of local community leaders gave negative replies: “These were grant projects implemented jointly with the authorities. The specificity of our business is such that it does not involve joint social projects. At the beginning of the pandemic, there was a charity project, and the businesses provided support to people – they brought food and delivered it to residents. This was the only project implemented on the territory of the community”. Among the main obstacles to the development of social partnership, the local community heads indicated low activity, passivity, unconscious public position of representatives of various spheres, reluctance to participate in joint measures of social and economic development of the community. At the same time, the analysis of the opinion of the community heads regarding internal incentives for partnership development showed that a large part of the heads are ready to develop partnership cooperation in their community. In particular, when they were asked “What are you willing to invest/are investing in the development of partnership relations in your community?”, the community heads marked such points as financial and informational support, participation in project development, exchange of knowledge.

Based on the results of semistructural interviews with the local community heads, it was determined that when justifying approaches and interventions for the activation of partnerships in local communities, the key element will be the deepening of synergy between all participants of partnership relations.

In particular, as it was noted (Lasker, Weiss & Miller, 2001, p. 184), “the synergy that all partnership participants seek to achieve through collaboration appears to be a much broader concept than a simple exchange of resources. By combining future plans, individual resources, knowledge and skills of all partners, the group creates something new and valuable all together – an overall result that is much greater than just the sum of the individual elements of the partnership”. According to the statement of the author cited above, the degree of involvement and personal contribution of each partner to effective partnership cooperation characterizes their ability to (Lasker, Weiss & Miller, 2001, p. 188):

- work with a creative, holistic and practical approach;

- implementation of realistic goals that are understandable to a wide range of individuals and have support;
- planning and comprehensive intervention that integrates different programs, services and sectors;
- understanding and documenting the impact of each of the partner's actions;
- inclusion of perspectives and priorities of community stakeholders, including targeted population groups;
- communication as to how actions of partners would influence the solution of community problems
- community development support.

Along with this, Lasker considers the following points to be the main determinants of partnership synergy: resources (money, premises, equipment, relationships between people, organizations and groups), main characteristics of partners (diversity, level of involvement), relations between partners (trust, respect, conflict, differentiation of power distribution), characteristics of partnership interaction (leadership, management, administration, efficiency), environment (public and organizational policy) (Lasker, Weiss&Miller, 2001, p. 189).

2. Strategic directions and tools for activating the partnership capacity of local communities

Intersectoral partnership at the municipal level as a manifestation of social capital includes three main components. The first one is the reliability of the social environment, which implies the confidence of partners and the local community as a whole, that obligations will be fulfilled, and constructive proposals will be considered and accepted for implementation. The second significant component is the possibility of obtaining complete and reliable information about partners, as well as their openness to the local community. The third aspect would be norms that encourage partners not to seek benefit only for themselves, but to strive for the achievement of a common goal: improving the quality of life of the local population and local communities, ensuring sustainable territorial development (Olenkovska, 2013).

Based on the above mentioned statements, the main directions of strengthening partnership capacity for different types of communities can be identified as follows:

- for communities with a high level of partnership capacity, it is suggested to apply measures that would support their development at the achieved level, as well as contribute to the further activation of their partnership cooperation, taking into account various exogenous and endogenous development factors, including force majeure

situations. The given type of community has "internally determined intentions and objective prerequisites for the growth of its own potential, as well as economic, social and ecological development, and also possesses the necessary information, skills and authority. The model for the development of such an association includes available resources (internal and external), positive processes (which enable capacity building) and performance results (achievements)" (Ilyina, 2018, p.56). In the future, this category of communities should pay more attention to the development of partnerships with international municipalities, which will allow them to share experience and implement joint projects (U-LEAD, 2022). As it was noted by Yu. Polishchuk "international partnership is an equal relationship between local communities interacting with each other to achieve a common goal. A quality partnership is built precisely on the interest of each of the parties" (U-LEAD, 2022);

- for the second group of communities, which are characterized by a sufficient level of partnership capacity, it is advisable to apply measures of a stimulating nature that would contribute to the further realization of their potential and the deepening of partnership cooperation. In addition to the need to attract external resources, capable communities should focus on mobilizing their own assets, internal forces (investments, skills, experience), and communication (improving relations between residents, associations, institutions, foundations, etc) [Ilyina, 2018, p. 56]. Specifically, as noted by L. Chabak "when developing partnerships, it is necessary to involve representatives of all levels of the organization in this process. The communication component plays a significant role, so it is necessary to pay a lot of attention to it. Communities cannot delay the development of partnerships. They should consider the situation and act according to the principle of "here and now". The main thing is to have a strategic understanding of the need to develop such a partnership" (U-LEAD, 2022). At the same time, "the active participation of community members in solving various social problems of the local community allows them to consolidate efforts based on awareness of common interests, increases the effectiveness of interaction between social institutions operating within the local community" (Basyuk, Bezpalyko & Bratus, 2006, p. 4).
- for communities with a low level of partnership capacity it is suggested to apply a set of measures which must be actively implemented to strengthen their partnership interaction with other entities, involving all residents of the community. As it was marked by I. Zvereva "the involvement of people in the process of social changes planning related to the improvement of the situation for different members

of the community is possible due to unequal levels of their participation. The whole community needs to be aware of the changes. Proactive representatives of the community have the opportunity to give their suggestions, which are accepted by representatives of local authorities, institutions and organizations implementing various directions of social policy in the local community" (Basyuk, Bezpalyko & Bratus, 2006, p. 4).

According to (Makhnachova, 2018, p. 6), when studying the partnership, it is necessary to take into account the current context of relations between the residents of the local community, business representatives and local authorities. The formation of such social interaction should be based on the analysis of the state of public opinion, target audiences and their information requests. It is obvious that any development should take into account previous achievements and experience, including those of civil society institutions and experience of cooperation in international projects. Based on the results of the mentioned below author's research being a part of the analysis of the implementation of the project "Local development focused on the community" (Makhnachova, 2018), the level of influence of partnership cooperation on the development of local community has been determined. As it has been noted by the author, the indicative result of the study was the answers to the question "Who should solve the problem that worries the community?", where the causal relationship could be observed: representatives of those communities, where the "community-government-business" cooperation mechanism worked more effectively, more often selected the option "community" (39%) and the option "village head", regional, district (i.e. local) government (39%). Thus, active communities are communities that believed in their own strength and in their ability to change the quality of life in the localities with their skills, perseverance and joint efforts (Makhnachova, 2018, p. 4). At the same time, among the practical recommendations for enhancing of the local community activity and strengthening its partnership capacity, the experts single out the following: arranging public hearings, community meetings; work of advisory commissions, consultations, committees and councils; availability of ombudsmen – defenders of citizens' rights at the local level; informing about the work of "hotlines"; holding surveys, questionnaires, public debates, "round tables" meetings to resolve important issues; community education – holding free trainings, seminars, forums; holding contests within the community having clear goals and transparent intentions; creating a box for suggestions and working with letters of appeal from the community; printed, Internet, television, radio interviews with the community, and other activities (Burylo, 2022).

The main tools for establishing effective cooperation with business and creating better conditions for conducting entrepreneurial activities in communities are:

- promotion and sales (exhibitions, festivals, stimulation of local production in local community, including industrial tourism);
- cooperation between entrepreneurs (creation of marketing and production cooperatives, clusters, organization of business forums and conferences);
- training and consulting (creation of business incubators, banks of business ideas, organization of seminars and master classes for beginner entrepreneurs);
- development of business infrastructure (stimulating the opening of co-working spaces, business hubs, giving priority to the development of information and transport infrastructure in the business objects locations);
- finance and fixed assets (grants for business expansion, partial repayment of % on loans, reduction of tax rates, preferential lease of industrial premises and communal facilities, development of public-private partnership);
- support for the human capital development in communities, in particular youth (organization of personnel retraining courses, active collaboration with recruiting agencies, stimulation of the creation of youth spaces and development of youth leadership projects);
- development of the community image (development of the local community own brand, availability of community website and an active page in social networks, active presentation of the community at forums, conferences and seminars) (U-LEAD, 2022).

Conclusions

Based on the results of semistructural interviews with heads of local communities, it was determined that when justifying approaches and interventions for the activation of partnerships in local communities, the key element would be the deepening of synergy between all participants of partnership relations.

It was determined that for communities with a high level of partnership capacity, it is suggested to apply measures that would support their development at the achieved level, as well as contribute to the further activation of their partnership cooperation, taking into account various exogenous and endogenous development factors, including in force majeure and crisis situations. For communities characterized by a sufficient (average) level of partnership capacity, it is advisable to apply measures of a stimulating nature that would contribute to the further realization of their

potential and the deepening of partnership cooperation. In addition to the necessity to attract external resources, capable communities should focus on mobilizing their own assets, internal forces (investments, skills, experience) and communication. Communities with a low level of partnership capacity are suggested to apply a set of measures that must be actively implemented to strengthen their partnership interaction with other entities, involving all residents of the community, in particular, it is necessary to take into account the current context of relations between local community residents, business representatives and local authorities.

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