

FEATURES OF PERCEPTIONS OF EXTERNAL SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT OF UKRAINIAN AND THE USA GRASSROOTS COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS' PARTICIPANTS

Стаття присвячена виявленню особливостей зовнішнього соціального середовища громадських організацій організації низового рівня України та США.

Було опитано лідерів та членів низових некомерційних самоврядних об'єднань США та України з метою з'ясування їхніх оцінок ступеню емпauerменту їхніх організацій як суб'єктів соціальної дії, взаємозв'язків з представниками зовнішнього соціального середовища у площинах залежність – незалежність, стримування – підтримка, незадоволеність – задоволеність, а також доступу до різних груп ресурсів – фінансових (матеріальних), людських (якість та кількість) та інформаційних (якість та кількість).

Дослідження показало, що громадські організації обох країн у цілому досить активно взаємодіють з різними соціальними групами та інституціями їх зовнішнього соціального середовища. Але, разом з цим, виявлено відмінності щодо оцінок громадських активістів обох країн стосунків їх організацій з зовнішнім середовищем і впливу, який вони чинять на суспільне життя.

Аналіз отриманих даних довів, що низові громадські організації США мають більш визначену «нішу» в суспільстві та роблять більш відчутний вплив на життя своїх громад, ніж їхні українські колеги. Американські громадські організації більшою мірою центровані на своїх клієнтах, мають тісніші стосунки з їхніми цільовими соціальними групами, меншою мірою залежать від політичних сил, більш успішні в отриманні фінансових ресурсів і інформації, необхідної для виконання діяльності. Більша «зрілість» американського третього сектору, порівняно з українським, пояснюється багаторічними традиціями демократії в США.

Ключові слова: *зовнішнє соціальне середовище, психологічний емпauerмент, громадські організації, значимість, компетентність, автономія, впливовість, ресурси.*

Introduction and problem formulation

The USA and the European Union countries are currently characterized by transformation of representative democracy to direct (participatory) democracy which is based on direct citizens' participation in the

affairs of their local communities. It is pronounced a very important direction in modern Ukrainian society. Most of the adopted regional development programs provide for the activity of the population, usage of local social capital. The Constitution and the relevant laws entitle citizens to participate in the local level affairs, the decentralization laws has been adopted. But the legal opportunities are not used fully, the third sector organizations has not become key players in the socio-political life of Ukraine.

Individual and collective actions designed to identify and address issues of public concern are defined as civic engagement, which, according to M. Carpinì [1], can include efforts to directly address an issue, work with others in a community to solve a problem or interact with the institutions of representative democracy.

The problem of civic engagement is not left aside the attention of the psychological science nowadays. The importance of civic engagement and psychological aspects of community has become evident among scholars from different countries. But relatively little is known about the factors that affect civic behavior in community organizations. Better understanding of these factors can facilitate the implementation of more purposeful community development strategies. Cross-cultural comparative studies of functioning o NGOs in different countries can potentially provide models for fostering participatory democratic principles in nascent democracy countries.

Purpose of the research – to reveal features of perceptions of external social environment of Ukrainian and the USA grassroots community organizations' participants.

The USA part of the research was conducted within the US government program Fulbright Scholar Program 2014 in 2014-2015. The Ukrainian part of the research was conducted in 2015-2016.

Results of theoretical research

Community organization never functions as the closed system. In fulfilling its tasks and achieving its goals it interacts with wide range of institutions that represent its social environment: clients, partner organizations, government agencies, businesses etc. During these interactions community organization changes its social environment according to its goals and, on the other hand, experiences the influence of the other community groups and institutions.

Process and result of interaction of civic organization with its external social environment can be expressed in terms of such category as empowerment.

Within modern management theory and practice empowerment refers to power division: it is considered as synonymous with peoples' participation: a process, through which power is divided among the individuals [3], granting more organizational power to employees [5; 7].

J. Rappaport [9] defined empowerment as a process by which people, organizations, and communities gain mastery over issues which are of concern to them. N. Wallertstein [13] thinks it is “a social action process by which individuals, communities and organizations gain mastery over their lives in the context of changing their social and political environment to improve equity and quality of life”.

Psychological approach representatives consider empowerment as motivational and cognitive concept (psychological empowerment) which is based on a person’s perceptions of his environment, the process and the result of his interaction with it.

It is defined as a motivational structure which is based on employees’ perception with regard to their work environment [8]. J. Conger and R. Kanungo [2] define empowerment as a process of enhancing feelings of self-efficacy among organizational members through the identification of conditions that foster powerlessness and through their removal by both formal organizational practices and informal techniques of providing efficacy information. M. Zimmerman [15] depicted psychological empowerment as a construct that integrates perceptions of personal control, a proactive approach to life and a critical understanding of the socio-political environment. K. Thomas and B. Velthouse [12] and G. Spreitzer [11] consider this concept in terms of the cognitions: sense of impact, competence, meaningfulness and choice or self-determination.

Empowerment occurs on three levels: individual (the transformation of individuals’ lives in achieving goals and reaching targets), organizational (organizational processes and structures that enhance member participation and performance and eventually improve the achievement of organizational goal) and community (collective action to improve the quality of life in a community and to the connections among community organizations and agencies) [4; 6; 10; 14].

Our research is centered on the third level of empowerment – interaction of community organization with the wider community (external social environment). Based on this, the “third level” psychological empowerment is considered as the belief by organization members in the ability of their organization to use the expertise and experience of members to complete successfully its tasks with a sufficient degree of independence, making positive impact on community life.

Also understanding the influence of external social environment on the organization is possible by considering: a) relational factors (relationship of the organization with external social environment representatives characterized by dichotomies: independence – dependence, constrain – support, dissatisfaction – satisfaction); b) access to resources (quantity and quality of financial and material, human resources and information).

In the **empirical research** we focused on the differences in percep-

tions of external social environment of Ukrainian and the USA grassroots community organizations' participants.

Method. The author's external factors survey was used to explore a) perceptions of relationship with the representative of the external environment in terms of independence – dependence, constrain – support, dissatisfaction – satisfaction and b) access to resources. The “community level” scales of Psychological empowerment survey constructed by the author were used to measure participants' perceptions of their organizations as the subjects of community life – the general level of empowerment of the organization and its four principal components: impact, competence, meaningfulness and autonomy. Five point Likert scales were used in both surveys. Variables of age, gender, length of participation and participation intensity were also included.

Participants. 287 leaders and active members of grassroots community organizations – nonprofessionally self-governed non-for-profits working for members' collective self-interest – took part in the research. Among them are: a) 173 leaders and active members from the USA, that represent 61 grassroots of Charlotte area, North Carolina; b) 114 leaders and active members from Ukraine, that represent 48 grassroots of Chernihiv city area. The types of represented organizations are: neighborhood / homeowners associations (the USA), apartment house associations (Ukraine), organizations aiming improvement of particular field of community life (ecological organizations, organizations advocating voting and civic rights, helping particular society groups, non-profits of ethnic groups). *Gender distribution:* 53% - females. *Age groups:* 18-25 y.o. – 12%, 26-39 – 29%, 40-54 – 27.5%, 55-65 – 14%, over 65 – 17.5%. *Duration of participation:* less than 3 months – 6%, 3 months to 1 year – 10.5%, 1 to 3 years – 28.5%, 4 to 7 years – 22.5%, more than 7 years – 32.5%. *Intensity of the participation:* leaders – 45%, participant of majority recent meetings and events – 34%, participant of some meetings and events – 21%.

Results of the empirical research

As it was stated above, features of interaction of civic organization with its external social environment can be expressed through its empowerment. Based on K. Thomas and B. Velthouse [22] and G. Spreitzer [20] approach we defined four components structure of empowerment of community organization as a subject of social action:

1. Meaningfulness – the value of organizational goal judged in relation to ideals or standards accepted in community. The proposed verbal representation for it is “My organization is meant to make positive changes in our community”.

2. Competence – a belief in a organization's ability to perform activities well. Verbal representation: “My organization is capable to complete its tasks”.

3. Autonomy – admitting choice in regulating actions, autonomy over the initiation and continuation of work behaviors and processes. Verbal representation: “My organization is free to decide what and how should be done about its work”.

4. Impact – the perceived organization’s ability to make a difference in community. Verbal representation: “My organization really contributes to positive changes in the community”.

The empowerment results are represented in Table 1. Maximum number of points for the scale “Empowerment” is 40, for the rest of the scales – 10.

Table 1

Level of organization’s empowerment and its components

№	Scales	Points		Significance of group differences, U
		US	UKR	
1	Empowerment	34.69	33.24	$p \leq 0,05$
2	Meaningfulness	9.11	8.77	-
3	Competence	8.44	8.40	-
4	Autonomy	8.54	8.14	-
5	Impact	8.60	7.93	$p \leq 0,01$

We can see from the Table 1 that the perceived general level of community organizations empowerment is high for both countries – the participants are rather optimistic about their organizations’ competency, autonomy and impact on community life, the organizational goals correspond to the community values. As for the group differences, the American community activists perceive their organizations as more empowered on all the components, but statistically significant differences can be observed only on two scales: empowerment in general and impact on community life. So the conclusion can be made that the US participants perceive their community organizations as making greater positive impact on the life of their external social environment

Let us observe the participants’ perceptions of their organizations’ relationship with the other community groups and institutions in terms of independence – dependence (table 2).

We can see from the results that the members of the US grassroots community organizations believe that they are most dependent on clients, served people and the least dependent on political parties. We have quite the opposite picture with Ukrainian community organizations – according to their participants, they are most dependent on political parties and least dependent on clients, people served by of the organization. To our opinion it is the evidence that the “third” sector in Ukraine has not become the full member of social and political life.

Relationship of the grassroots community organizations with the other community groups and institutions (independence – dependence)

№	Community groups interacting with the organization	Independent— Dependent min 1 - fully dependent, max 5 - fully independent		
		USA	UKR	Significance of group differences, U
1	Clients, people served by the organization	2.27	3,67	$p \leq 0,01$
2	Other members of the community. people from neighborhood, not those directly served by the organization	2.71	3,22	$p \leq 0,01$
3	Collaborating organizations	2.72	3,27	$p \leq 0,01$
4	Other community organizations	3.05	3,22	-
5	Government agencies	2.87	3,11	-
6	Funding agencies	3.05	2,80	-
7	Political parties	3.94	2,21	$p \leq 0,01$
8	Businesses	3.03	2,86	-
9	Consultants. other professionals	3.31	3,42	-
	General index (max – 45, min – 9)	26.95	27,80	-

It is less oriented towards the served society groups and much dependent on politicians. We received significant group differences on four community groups interacting with grassroots organizations: the US grassroots are significantly more dependent on clients, people served by the organization, other members of the community, people from neighborhood and collaborating organizations; the Ukrainian grassroots are significantly more dependent on political parties.

We also discovered the degree of support (constrain) the organizations receive from their external social environment representatives (table 3).

The results prove that the organizations from both countries receive rather support than constrain from their external social environment. The US grassroots receive significantly higher support from their clients, people served by the organization than their Ukrainian colleagues. And Ukrainians, in their turn, get more assistance from consultants, other professionals. So, again, we have the evidence of a more firm alliance of US community organizations and their target groups – clients.

The third relational factor we discovered was satisfaction

(dissatisfaction) of community groups with the organizations' activities (table 4).

Table 3

Relationship of the grassroots community organizations with the other community groups and institutions (constrain – support)

№	Community groups interacting with the organization	Constrain – Support min 1 - constrain strongly, max 5 - support strongly		
		USA	UKR	Significance of group differences, U
1	Clients, people served by the organization	4.14	3,85	$p \leq 0,05$
2	Other members of the community. people from neighborhood, not those directly served by the organization	3.71	3.70	-
3	Collaborating organizations	3.91	3,79	-
4	Other community organizations	3.75	3,76	-
5	Government agencies	3.41	3,26	-
6	Funding agencies	3.38	3,36	-
7	Political parties	3.02	2,84	-
8	Businesses	3.61	3,37	-
9	Consultants. other professionals	3.53	3.9	$p \leq 0,01$
	General index (max – 45, min – 9)	32.46	31,83	-

Table 4

Relationship of the grassroots community organizations with the other community groups and institutions (dissatisfaction – satisfaction)

№	Community groups interacting with the organization	Satisfied – Dissatisfied min 1 - fully dissatisfied, min 5 - fully satisfied		
		USA	UKR	Significance of group differences, U
1	Clients, people served by of the organization	4.27	4,03	-

2	Other members of the community. people from neighborhood, not those directly served by the organization	3.88	3,74	-
3	Collaborating organizations	4.03	3,74	$p \leq 0,05$
4	Other community organizations	3.84	3,61	$p \leq 0,05$
5	Government agencies	3.72	3,39	$p \leq 0,01$
6	Funding agencies	3.5	3,27	-
7	Political parties	3.21	3,06	-
8	Businesses	3.71	3,3	$p \leq 0,01$
9	Consultants. other professionals	3.52	3,76	$p \leq 0,05$
	General index (max – 45, min – 9)	33.68	31,90	$p \leq 0,05$

We can see from the table that the grassroots organizations receive more or less positive feedback from the other society groups. Clients of both countries are satisfied with the organizations' activities more than the other community groups. Politicians' attitude is perceived as neutral. In general, American activists receive better feedback from almost all the external social environment groups. Statistically significant differences between the two countries can be observed on such community groups as collaborating organizations, other community organizations, government agencies, businesses (the Americans are more satisfied) and consultants. other professionals (the Ukrainians are more satisfied). Difference on the general index of satisfaction is also significant.

We measured also participants' estimations of the resources their organizations receive from the external environment (Table 5).

Table 5

Resources the organizations receives from the external environment

№	Types of resources the organization receives	Points (max–5, min–1)		
		USA	UKR	Significance of group differences, U
1	Financial and material resources	3,8	2,32	$p \leq 0,01$
2	Human resources – Quantity	3,46	3,57	-
3	Human resources – Quality	4,2	3,89	-
4	Information – Quantity	4,4	3,79	$p \leq 0,01$
5	Information – Quality	4,4	3,93	$p \leq 0,01$

	General index (max–25, min–5)	20,26	17,50	p ≤ 0,01
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The results make it explicit that the US grassroots organizations are more successful in obtaining the necessary financial resources and information from the external environment than the Ukrainians. The general indexes are 20,26 (the USA) VS 17,50 (Ukraine), the difference is statistically significant. No significant difference is observed in terms of quantity and quality of human resources. The biggest problem of the American community organizations in terms of the resources is the quantity of human resources – number of people willing to participate in organizations' activities but the results of the US and Ukrainian grassroots on this parameter coincide. And the biggest problem of the Ukrainian community organizations is the lack of financial and material resources necessary to perform the activities.

Discussions and future perspectives

As the subjects of participatory democracy, the civic organizations provide direct citizens' participation in the affairs of their local communities and direct influence on the government policy. The strength of civil society is defined by a wide, well-developed, independent and viable net of self-governed volunteer-based grassroots community organizations.

The research demonstrated that the NGOs of both countries do not operate as closed systems, but actively interact and have close relationship with various community groups and institutions of their external social environment. But, together with this, their members' perceptions differ in terms of their organizations' relationship with this environment and the impact they make on community life.

Analysis of the received data and the authors' observation of the community processes during the attended events and meeting of the organizations-participants suggest that the US grassroots community organizations have a better defined "niche" in the society and they make bigger impact on the life of their communities than their Ukrainian colleagues. Also the US grassroots are more client-oriented, have closer relationship with their target social groups, less depend on politicians and succeed better in obtaining financial resources and information necessary to perform activity.

Such situation can be explained by the fact that in Ukraine during the decades of Soviet Union period all the civic initiatives had been restricted, the generations of people had been raised as obedient implementers of the ruling political party's orders. After the USSR collapse the new political forces consisting of the former soviet leaders, representatives of oligarchic and criminal structures were not interested in democratic changes and sharing the power with the citizens. Since those times the Ukrainian third sector has had some growth but, at the same time, nowadays it is

hardly possible to state its “maturity” and its significant impact on public life, compared to government institutions and business. Particularly, it concerns civic associations and organizations of “grassroots” level, life in local communities.

It is planned to explore of the external social environment factors that affect psychological empowerment in Ukrainian and American NGOs.

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Волеваха С.В., Волеваха И.Б. Особенности восприятия внешней социальной среды участниками украинских и американских общественных организаций низового уровня

Статья посвящена выявлению особенностей внешней социальной среды общественных организаций низового уровня Украины и США. Были опрошены лидеры и члены некоммерческих самоуправляющихся объединений США и Украины с целью выявления оценок уровня эмпауэрмента их организаций, характера отношений их организаций с представителями внешней среды, доступа к внешним ресурсам, необходимым для осуществления организационной деятельности.

Ключевые слова: *внешняя социальная среда, психологический эмпауэрмент, общественные организации, значимость, компетентность, автономия, влияние, ресурсы.*

Serhii Volevakha, Iryna Volevakha. Features of perceptions of external social environment of Ukrainian and the USA grassroots community organizations' participants

The article is devoted to revealing features of external social environment of Ukrainian and the USA grassroots community organizations. Leaders and members of the US and Ukrainian non-profit self-governing associations were surveyed to identify their perceptions of the organizational empowerment, relationship of their organizations and the external environment representatives, their access to external resources necessary to perform organizational activities.

Key words: *external social environment, psychological empowerment, civic organizations, meaningfulness, competence, autonomy, impact, resources.*