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Interpersonal interactions in building resilience to threats in local communities

Interakcje międzyludzkie w budowaniu odporności na zagrożenia w społecznościach lokalnych

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Abstract. A resilient society understands and is aware of the threats it is exposed to, prepared for their emergence and the changes that will occur along with negative events. Therefore, resilience is related to the ability to cope with sudden, unexpected changes and to recover smoothly. One of the foundations for building resilience in local communities is a high level of social capital. To achieve this, properly established and, more importantly, continuously maintained interpersonal relationships are needed. Building community resilience is a topic of great importance in the context of community safety management and social order maintenance. Activities related to building this resilience should be carried out both by community members, informal community leaders, services, inspections, guards and local authorities. The aim of this article is to establish the impact of interpersonal relationships on building resilience to threats in local communities. The research problem was presented in the form of the following question: What impact do interpersonal relationships have on building resilience to hazards in communities at the local level? In order to solve the above questions, a diagnostic survey method was used, implemented with a survey technique, using a survey questionnaire as a tool. In connection with the research, the general population were the inhabitants of the village of Nowa Iwiczna located in the Lesznowola commune in the Mazovian voivodeship, Poland.

Keywords: hazard resilience, social capital, interpersonal interactions, community safety management

Abstrakt. Odporne społeczeństwo rozumie i jest świadome zagrożeń, na jakie jest narażone, przygotowane jest na ich pojawienie się oraz zmiany, które wystąpią wraz z negatywnymi zdarzeniami. W związku z tym odporność wiąże się z umiejętnością radzenia sobie z nagłymi, niespodziewanymi zmianami oraz sprawnym powrotem do normalnego funkcjonowania. Jednym z fundamentów kształtowania odporności na zagrożenia w społecznościach lokalnych jest wysoki poziom kapitału społecznego. Do jego osiągnięcia potrzebne są odpowiednio nawiązane i, co ważniejsze, stale utrzymywane relacje interpersonalne. Budowanie odporności na zagrożenia w społecznościach lokalnych to temat mający duże znaczenie w kontekście

zarządzania bezpieczeństwem społeczności lokalnych oraz utrzymywania ładu społecznego. Działania związane z budowaniem tejże odporności powinny być prowadzone zarówno przez członków społeczności lokalnej, nieformalnych liderów społeczności lokalnej, służby, inspekcje, strażę, jak i władze lokalne. Celem niniejszego artykułu jest ustalenie wpływu relacji międzyludzkich na budowanie odporności na zagrożenia w społecznościach lokalnych. Problem badawczy wygenerowano w postaci następującego pytania: jaki wpływ mają relacje międzyludzkie na budowanie odporności na zagrożenia w społecznościach na poziomie lokalnym? Do rozwiązania powyższych problemów wykorzystano metodę sondażu diagnostycznego, realizowaną techniką ankiety, z wykorzystaniem narzędzia, jakim był kwestionariusz ankiety. Badaną populację stanowili mieszkańcy wsi Nowa Iwiczna, położonej w gminie Lesznowola w województwie mazowieckim. **Słowa kluczowe:** odporność na zagrożenia, kapitał społeczny, interakcje interpersonalne, zarządzanie bezpieczeństwem społeczności

Introduction

The term resilience was first used formally in the field of ecology (1970s), as one of the criteria for the ability of a particular system to accept change and continue to function smoothly. The concept has its roots also in psychology, physics or psychiatry. It has also found application in the field of security. What is a threat? Has the nature of threats changed, so that we could talk about contemporary threats? In simple terms, a threat is a result of a lack of sense of security. For humans it is an unfavourable situation that disorganises the established pattern of activities, these are unfavourable factors that contribute to the disruption of the socially recognised order (Ziarko, Walas-Trębacz, 2010). Threats introduce chaos in place of harmony.

According to philosophical assumptions, one is in danger when a person is threatened by some evil, because only evil evokes dread, fear, evil is the lack of due good (Kalinowski, 1987). A threat takes place when a given subject is threatened with the loss of a good that he possesses, or when the subject has a problem with the acquisition of a good that should be acquired (Kalinowski, 1987). Transferring the above observations to the field of defence and broadly understood national security, it should be considered that the threat is a situation in which there is an increased probability of the emergence of a dangerous state for a specific entity or environment.

The aim of this article is to establish the impact of interpersonal relationships on building resilience to threats in local communities. The main research problem was generated in the form of the following question: What impact do interpersonal relationships have on building resilience to threats in communities at the local level? In order to solve the above questions, a diagnostic survey method was used, implemented with a survey technique, using a survey questionnaire as a tool. In connection with the research, the general population were the inhabitants of the village of Nowa Iwiczna located in the Lesznowola commune in the Mazovian voivodeship, Poland.

In connection with the application of the formula for the size of the research sample, the author of the article calculated the size of a representative sample, which in the case of conducted research was 1351 people. The research was conducted from December 2018 to May 2019. It is important to note that the research was conducted before the SARS-CoV-2 virus pandemic. The research was conducted personally by the author of the article. To develop the results of the study the statistical package Statistica v.13.1 was used. 47.29% of men and 52.71% of women participated in the study. Most of the respondents (66.95% of them) have higher education, the rest claim to have secondary education. The most numerous group among the respondents were people aged 31-40 (38.75% of the respondents) and 25-30 (35.9% of the respondents). The third largest group were people aged 41-50 (20.51%). The least numerous groups were people at the age of: 18-24 (1.99%), 61-70 (1.71%) and 51-60 (1.14%). Another criterion that was taken into account in characterising the research sample was the workplace. More than half of the respondents indicated that they work in the public sector, while 37.04% – in the private sector. Over 6% are already retired and 1.99% are studying, learning. It is positive that nobody indicated that they are unemployed.

1. Local community and the concept of resilience – theoretical dilemmas

1.1. An attempt to define local community

When analysing the literature on the subject, it should be recognised that a local community is a type of socio-spatial structure constituted geographically, bringing together people living in a specific place, creating systems of connections in order to solve existing local problems and ensuring psychological identification of the population with the place of their existence (Starosta, 1995).

P. Starosta (2002), the author of the definition, therefore indicates that local community should be perceived in the aspect of:

- social (taking into account bonds, interpersonal relations and communication patterns);
- psychosocial (paying attention to social identity);
- spatial (referring to the occupied territory).

Moreover, P. Starosta (2002) takes into account two basic currents in considering the essence of local community: the current of community and the current of space. The former indicates that the essence of local community is expressed in living and sharing the same norms, values, symbols that reflect the organisational culture defined for a given group; objective relations that arise between people

and respect for the binding rules of communication and cooperation (Starosta, 2002, p. 97). In turn, in the second trend, the foundation is the space within which economic, cultural and social life is organised.



Fig. 1. Elements forming a local community

Source: own study

Referring to the subject of research, which are interpersonal relations, it seems justified to indicate that they are one of the elements constituting the local community (Podedworna, 2007). In relation to the above, the aspect of creating a local community becomes very important, which means nothing else than an “association” of inhabitants of a given area, who have a sense of belonging to the territory and this community. The formation of the latter also results from people’s responsibility for local affairs.

Local community is also the existence of a common, compatible consciousness of a local character, or the ability to self-organise in a moment of danger or simply the desire to achieve a common goal. It is also about being guided by similar values, solidarity and willingness to help neighbours.

1.2. How to understand resilience?

Attention to the concept of resilience is a result of the flexible nature of hazards and the increasing uncertainty among local communities. Resilience should be characterised in several aspects, e.g. (Sienkiewicz-Małyjurek, 2015):

- social (individuals, groups, cultural, political, economic systems);
- institutional (functioning of public administration bodies, first of all competences of officials);
- economic (use of private financial resources to respond to threats);

- natural (natural environment and natural hazards beyond human control);
- physical (technology, infrastructure, technologies used).

Viewing this concept in social terms, it is worth pointing out that it combines three elements (Paton, Johnston, 2001):

- building appropriate and permanent relations with other members of society;
- using and learning from experience;
- improving existing social practices.

A resilient society understands and is aware of the risks it faces, prepared for their occurrence and the changes that will occur with negative events. As such, resilience involves the ability to cope with sudden, unexpected changes and to recover smoothly.

In order to determine the resilience of a community, it is first necessary to diagnose and explore the level of preparedness and ability to respond to specific risks among individual members and the group as a whole.

Resilience should increase with the learning process initiated after a hazard has occurred. This process helps to increase the community's adaptive capacity and resilience to subsequent potential hazards.

The basis for building resilience to hazards in communities at the local level is their adaptive capacity, which includes (Paton, Johnston, 2001):

- economic development (through which it becomes possible to reduce the negative impact of various types of adverse events on the functioning of the local community);
- information and communication (selection of appropriate ways of conveying information and media responsibility);
- social capital (sense of belonging to a group, trust, local patriotism, social durability);
- social competences (ability to cooperate, joint problem solving, flexibility, creativity in interpersonal relations).

In view of the conducted scientific research, the author of this article points to the importance of interpersonal relations in building the resilience to threats described above.

2. Meaning of the term interpersonal relations and basic principles of their creation

2.1. Concept of interpersonal relationships

Analysing the literature on interpersonal relations, group behaviour and interpersonal cooperation, one can read that the most difficult skill to acquire nowadays is group work. Referring to the above – building a resilient local community

is nothing else than group activity, and thus the creation of appropriate interpersonal relations. The latter is perhaps not yet as complicated as maintaining and nurturing these relationships. On the other hand, Aristotle’s theory of man indicates that he is a so-called social being who is able and even needs to participate in social life (Aristotle, 2007).

Interpersonal relations are nothing else than mutual relations of two or more participants. These relations may take a positive form (interpersonal attraction) or a negative one (personal hostility). The type of these relationships depends on the personality and attitudes of the participants and the environment in which they take place (common social problems, common goal, etc.).

There are several elementary factors that affect the quality of interpersonal relationships. The first of them, and according to the author of this article the most important, is communication, therefore it will be described more extensively than the others.

Communication is the process of passing information from one person to another person or a group of people. It is important for communication to be effective, i.e. the message received should have as close meaning as possible to the message sent. In this type of communication the recipient should hear and at the same time understand the information.

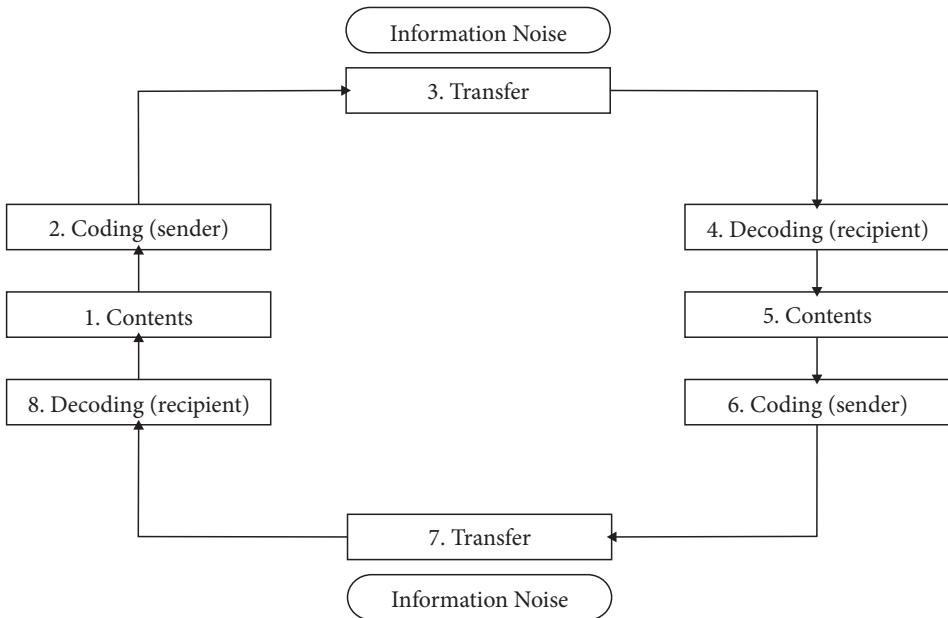


Fig. 2. Communication process

Source: own work based on the example of R.W. Griffin (Griffin, 2017, p. 556)

The communication process begins when a sender wants to convey a thought, an opinion, a fact, a message to another person. This thought, opinion, etc. usually has a specific meaning for the sender, who starts the communication process deliberately, for a specific purpose, usually to obtain a specific result. The next stage in the process is the so-called encoding, i.e. the sender decides whether the message is to be conveyed verbally, through a gesture or e.g. facial expression. The described stage is determined by a number of factors, i.e. interpersonal relations (formal, informal), situation, time, etc. The next stage in the communication process is the choice of the communication channel. The sender should consider whether she/he wants to convey the message on paper, write an e-mail, convey it verbally through a face-to-face meeting or a telephone conversation. Using the appropriate medium, the message is decoded by the recipient into the form which means something to her/him. Therefore, at this point, the information transmitted may be distorted or not be received as it should (taking into account the motivation of the sender) or may not evoke such emotions or effects.

At the moment when the content of a given message forces an immediate response from the recipient – the process continues. To sum up the discussed process, it is worth adding that the information passing through its stages is exposed to distortion caused by the so-called information noise, e.g. lack of electricity, discharged battery in the phone, loss of range, sudden lack of the Internet, too quiet voice of the sender, noise, etc.

There are two elementary forms of interpersonal communication i.e. oral and written communication. Oral communication is the use of the spoken word to convey a message. Written communication is based on the written word. The question is often asked, which form of communication is better? This depends on the type of relationship between the sender and receiver and the importance of the information being conveyed. In many situations, it is advisable to combine these forms, i.e. to have direct conversations with written confirmation or consolidation of findings. Each form of interpersonal communication has its advantages and disadvantages. Oral communication allows for quick feedback, is very easy to use, allows for less sophisticated language, using everyday words, but through this it can be inaccurate and does not leave a permanent record. Written communication is more accurate than described above because of its formal vocabulary, leaves a record, but is time-consuming, does not allow for quick feedback or for monitoring of interlocutor's behaviour.

A community that understands the importance of interpersonal communication should consider how to communicate effectively, i.e. what barriers need to be overcome in the first place. Problems in communication may occur on the part of the sender, the receiver, they may arise as a result of inadequate relations between one and the other, as well as they may be independent of them and arise from the environment.

The sender may send inconsistent or contradictory information. For example, a mayor of a municipality who announces that s/he is available for the community on a given day of the week, while in reality no one can find her/him on that day. It also lacks credibility, which also negatively influences the communication process. Such behaviour of the mayor may be a result of general reluctance to establish and maintain contacts, which is also considered as a barrier to effective communication.

The biggest problem in the communication process on the part of the recipient is the lack of ability or sometimes willingness to listen to the sender and the initial negative attitude towards the information provided. Incompetent reception of content results in its misunderstanding.

A certain disproportion between the sender and the receiver also leads to many communication mistakes. Semantics - this is one of them, consisting in the fact that a given word means something completely different to both parties, e.g. a temporary tax increase for the community in a given area. For the head of the municipality it is an opportunity to implement an investment needed by the society, while for the local community it is a signal of increased spending. Another problem may be the exaltation of, for example, the local authority or individuals in the local community. As a consequence, the official managing a given area may not take into account the demands of society and manage it according to his own vision; the local community does not participate in the management of a given area; more affluent citizens are treated differently by the authorities.

Another factor influencing the form of interpersonal relationships is the so-called consistency of the message with one's own philosophy. If you want to establish and maintain a relationship in society, you have to be yourself. This is an extremely simple statement, colloquial in terms of the importance of the content presented, but it is extremely important in this topic. Being oneself allows one to present sincere, true theses, which testify to the world view, professed philosophy, authorities, the way the interlocutor perceives the world. In interpersonal relations, we should not build an image of someone we are not, because such action, yes, will allow us to establish a relationship, but certainly will not allow us to maintain it and continue in the long term, or our partners will not treat us seriously. Therefore, also you should not adapt your views and behaviour to the interlocutor, you should be in tune with yourself.

Another element which is the basis for a good interpersonal relationship is empathy, i.e. the ability to empathise with the situation and the problems of the other party. Special attention should be paid here to the so-called cognitive empathy, i.e. temporarily looking at reality from the perspective of the partner in a given relationship. Empathy is very important if we talk about building resilience to threats, because it allows us to notice the elementary needs of individual, weakest units of the local community, e.g. those struggling with various pathologies.

The last element the author would like to point out is co-responsibility. Each of the parties should show willingness to establish a relationship, but also each of them should do everything, try to maintain it. A passive attitude on the part of one of the parties in a relationship leads to a decrease in the quality of the relationship, or to its termination.

2.2. Social competences as a determinant of building interpersonal relationships

Interpersonal competences, otherwise known as social competences, are complex skills which determine the effectiveness of coping with particular social situations and are acquired by a person through experience (Sidor-Rządkowska, 2011). This type of competence is associated with the ability to cooperate with another person, understand their behaviour and the ability to motivate.

J. Borkowski stated that interpersonal competences are “skills that enable establishing, maintaining and developing interpersonal relations, creating and co-creating an effective, mutually beneficial atmosphere of coexistence, cooperation between particular people, and at the same time ensuring common achievement of important goals, solving tasks, mutual satisfaction of individual needs and development of social personality” (Borkowski, 2000, p. 15).

According to Markley and Rinn, the elementary skills forming the model of social competence include (Oleś, 1998):

- assertiveness;
- communication;
- cooperation;
- giving support to the other party;
- expressing oneself.

However, it seems justified to mention the so called 8 elements for improving the condition of interpersonal relationships according to Argyle (1999):

1. Empathy.
2. Rewarding, related to positive motivation. It refers to verbal approval (encouragement, approval of initiative, praise for achievements, views, etc.) and non-verbal approval (approval through a smile, friendly tone of voice, thumb up, curiosity in the eyes, etc.) of what the other party does.
3. Being extroverted, i.e. a socialised person, open to the world and people.
4. Assertiveness.
5. Verbal communication.
6. Non-verbal communication.
7. Social intelligence.
8. Self-presentation.

Man develops social competences only by building interpersonal relationships and analysing messages from the environment. Feedback is the basis for modifying inappropriate habits and eliminating behaviours that have a negative impact on contacts with the environment. The effect of such actions is the improvement of the quality of these relations and the feeling of satisfaction from continuing them, as well as the increase in motivation to improve and maintain them.

Basing on social experiences, building stable interpersonal relations allows for better assessment of the social situation in which we also participate, and immediate reaction at the moment of occurrence of various threats, which builds resilience, mentioned in the title of the article.

3. Human relations in local communities – practical dilemmas

Considering the approach to interpersonal relations, which are one of the most important components of social capital, characterising the inhabitants of the Lesznowola commune, it should be stated that for all of them good relations with family and closest neighbours are very important. Good relations with other inhabitants of the locality they live in are very important to them. In building resilience to threats, it is also satisfactory that 88.32% of the respondents claim to have participated in collective help for a neighbour in need. This shows that residents do not close themselves off to the other person and would probably be able to integrate in mutual aid in a moment of emergency. More than half of the respondents also claim that it is very important for them to be in constant contact with residents of neighbouring villages in the municipality. The results are presented in table 1.

Table 1. Interpersonal relations in the opinion of commune residents

Statement	Percentages				
	1	2	3	4	5
Good relations with family are very important to me.	100	0	0	0	0
Good relations with immediate neighbours are very important to me.	53.56	46.44	0	0	0
Good relations with other inhabitants of the town I live in are very important to me.	1.14	70.37	11.68	16.81	0
Regular contact with inhabitants of neighbouring villages is very important to me.	0	58.97	9.12	21.94	9.97
Good relations with visitors (temporary) are very important to me.	0	58.97	9.12	15.10	16.81

Legend: 1 – Definitely yes; 2 – Rather yes; 3 – Hard to say; 4 – Rather not; 5 – Definitely not

Source: own study

Due to the fact that the basis for building any relationship with another person is trust, the author of the article decided to verify its level among the inhabitants of the commune and on the basis of the obtained results she can state that it is very high. Of course 100% of the surveyed indicated that good relations with their closest family are a priority for them, but they also want to make neighbourly friends (over 60% of them), because they trust their closest neighbours (79.77% of the surveyed). More than 65% of respondents assume that people need to be trusted because good interpersonal contacts depend on it. The results are presented in table 2.

Table 2. Trust in the opinion of commune inhabitants

Statement	Percentages				
	1	2	3	4	5
People need to be trusted, good relationships with others depend on it.	39.89	25.93	22.51	11.68	0
I trust my closest neighbours.	1.14	78.63	10.26	9.97	0
You should not open up too much to your closest neighbours.	0	11.68	11.11	77.21	0
I never make friends with my neighbours.	0	0	39.87	26.21	33.90
Good relationships with my closest family are a priority for me.	90.03	9.97	0	0	0
The inhabitants of my town can be trusted.	0	51.0	49.0	0	0

Legend: 1 – Definitely yes; 2 – Rather yes; 3 – Hard to say; 4 – Rather not; 5 – Definitely not

Source: own study

Considering the issue of cooperation, collaboration and thus the cohesion of the Lesznawola community it should be noted that more than 85% of the surveyed denied the statement that “everyone should deal only with themselves and not interfere in the affairs of others” but half of them said that “with the residents of my village you can’t organise something together”. More than 30% of the respondents do not devote their free time for the benefit of the inhabitants, and 60.11% indicated the answer “difficult to say” in this regard.

The author of the article decided to ask the respondents what values they think are the most important in building interpersonal relations. The research shows that such values include:

- respect (86.04% of the respondents);
- trust (62.39% of respondents);
- tolerance (61.82% of respondents).

It is also worth considering what are the motivations of the respondents in the discussed scope. The benefits that residents expect from appropriate interpersonal relations are mainly the feeling that they can feel needed by someone (32.76% of respondents), while more than half indicated that they do not expect any benefits from it.

Respondents also stated that thanks to good neighbourly relations they can gain new friendship (57.83% of respondents) and small help in case of need (e.g. borrowing a hammer; watching over a child) – indicated over 25% of respondents. The majority of respondents (76.35%) stated that they most often continue their relationships with their immediate neighbours by physically meeting at home. No one indicated a response of “I do not maintain relationships with my neighbours”.

More than 90% of the respondents also indicated that their so-called psychological well-being is strongly influenced by very good relationships with their partner and very good relationships with their children (77.21% of them). More than 40% of the respondents thought it was important to have one true friend they could always count on. However, no one indicated having a large number of friends, and for only 3% of the respondents respect among neighbours is important.

Regarding interpersonal relations at the level of citizen – local government, the results are not satisfactory. Unfortunately, this type of relationship is crucial for building resilience to threats in local communities, as it is the local government that has a number of resources (especially financial) with which this resilience can be increased. Lack of adequate communication in the public-authority relationship results in lack of knowledge on the part of the authorities and an increase in threats to the public.

In response to the question “whose opinion counts most in matters concerning the municipality and its inhabitants”, 67% of respondents said it was the opinion of the inhabitants. Therefore, it may be concluded that the mayor of the commune demonstrates an appropriate attitude and management style, remembering that the commune is first of all its inhabitants with their needs and problems. Unfortunately, the next question showed that the commune inhabitants do not appreciate this fact, as many as 99% of them do not attend the commune council sessions, which are open and accessible to everyone. In addition, 87% of the respondents have never attended meetings on community problems and thus have never reported problems related to functioning in the municipality. However, 71% of respondents engage in informal discussions about municipality problems – with neighbours “in the backyard”.

Conclusions

Building appropriate interpersonal relations is a difficult art, maintaining them is even more difficult. In the literature there is a lot of advice on how to behave in order to be proficient in this area. Unfortunately, it is not that simple, especially when the topic of our deliberations is community safety, anticipating threats, building resilience together. However, it is worth examining four elements that are central to the topic at hand. These are:

- communication;
- self-compatibility;
- empathy;
- co-responsibility.

Developed and constantly practised social skills are also very important. Building resilience to threats is strongly influenced by social capital, and one of its components are, after all, interpersonal relations. Only cooperation between people, joint action, one common plan, goal and proper communication will allow us to monitor, analyse and prevent potential threats, or to prepare for them together when we cannot eliminate them.

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