

SUMMARY

Advocacy of selected social problems from the sociological perspective

The dissertation aims to analyze advocacy as a social practice carried out in a democratic system by actors from public institutions and the sphere of civil society. The purpose of advocacy understood in this way is to protect the social rights of specific categories of citizens. The sociological framework of analysis adopted in the work allows us to look at advocacy in several essential dimensions.

In the first chapter, advocacy is divided into strategy and tactics. The basis for such a distinction was the possession of institutional power resources or lack thereof. Thus, the strategy covers advocates coming from public institutions, i.e., professionals exercising the prerogatives given to them by the institution they represent, who educate and strengthen the client-service provider relationship (Krzyszowski 2005: 180). On the other hand, tactics are activities described as democracy in action, as shown by entities coming from the civil sector that do not possess the institutional power resources. In this monograph, I present several such social actors, from independent leaders of the local community, through non-governmental organizations, to consultative and advisory bodies established at the interface between the third sector and local government.

In the second chapter, advocacy is posited as an expression of civic attitudes implemented in the public sphere, within the community, and for its own benefit. I emphasized the strong links between advocacy and civic attitudes. It is suggested that we perceive advocacy in an axiological dimension, in which certain ideological foundations become the basis for civic engagement. To explain the very nature of these relationships, the concept of citizenship (Polish: *obywatelskość*) has been introduced, which is defined in general terms as community orientation and identification of an individual with values such as social justice, equality, and solidarity. It is assumed that an individual will act according to these attitudes under two conditions. First of all, the individual ought to be convinced they can effect a social change, understood here as a sense of influence and effectiveness. Secondly, the functioning of the social-political order shall not limit this type of activity.

In Chapter Three, advocacy is described as an environmental practice. Here I refer to two models: Paul Freddolino and his colleagues (Freddolino, Moxley & Hayduk 2004) and the environmental practice model by Jack Rothman (2007). Each of them defined in a different way the tools of social intervention, the diversity of which extended from caring activities to involvement in social movements or self-advocacy practices.

In the fourth chapter, the perspective of perceiving advocacy as a differentiated practice is proposed, exceeding the form and content of support measures into the entities responsible for

their implementation and their functions. In this context, social work deserves particular attention as a practice that should be treated as an activity for civil rights implementation rather than meeting human needs (Ife 2008: 89). I understand the role of a social worker as a practitioner of social rights or, as Krzysztof Frysztański puts it, a social justice practitioner (Frysztański 2009: 271).

Social rights are a crucial concept for understanding the nature of social advocacy. Hence, Chapter Five deals with the nature of social rights. I start by highlighting possible meaningful interdependencies between the categories of civil and human rights. I frame it through Thomas H. Marshall's concept, who perceived full civic status in terms of an individual possessing three types of rights: civil, political, and social. Then, discussing selected contemporary sociological theories, I justify the perception of social rights as a set containing both social security entitlements and freedom of well-being.

In addition to describing advocacy in terms of practices, in this dissertation I have also set myself the exponential goal of explaining the nature of advocacy practices in advocates' daily activities, which became possible because of extensive empirical research. Therefore, I researched a regional sample in Greater Poland voivodship, the second-largest first-level administrative unit in Poland in terms of area and the third in terms of population. The respondents were "frontline workers" (Rymysza 2012: 12) performing their field duties.

Considering that the study's main goal was to capture the opinions of those in direct contact with recipients, it excluded consultants, supervisors, administrative staff, etc. Aiming for the highest possible representativeness, the study was initially planned to include staff members of all 226 such centres operating in the region. It transpired, however, that the survey was conducted in 218 of them. In the next stage, I carried out Individual In-Depth Interviews (IDIs) with a broad group of ombudsmen coming from the non-governmental sector (30 IDIs) and representing public institutions as proxy agents or social service managers (10 IDIs). The research was conducted among ombudsmen representing three problem areas: disability, long-term illnesses (including mental disorders), and domestic violence. The discourse analysis of citizens' petitions and general speeches of the Polish Ombudsman was also presented. I scrutinized petitions from 2015–2018, which were submitted to the Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy at that time. In total, 221 petitions were considered in the study. The analysis of the content of the general statements of the Polish Ombudsman also covered the years 2015–2018. During that time, the Ombudsman made a total of 1,589 general speeches.

When seeking an answer to the underlying question of what advocacy is for aid practitioners, during their in-depth interviews most third-sector representatives defined it as intercession, advocacy, or representation. On the other hand, social workers understood it through the prism of increasing the subjectivity of people at risk by facilitating access to services and benefits. Advocacy was least often perceived in the context of macro-practice, i.e., involvement in the process of systemic social change. Although advocacy as a macro-practice is not present in the respondents' minds, it is carried out through a broad spectrum of environmental activities described during in-depth interviews.

In light of the research, the respondents ascribed the most crucial role in protecting social rights to non-governmental organizations. Civil society institutions also establish integration structures, such as umbrella organizations, coalitions, new social movements, or senior councils, organized to represent particular citizens' interests. The rich advocacy architecture also includes, the aid workers' activities, proxy agents, or constitutional bodies, in addition to the non-governmental sector. However, I would like to point out that advocacy in social rights is rarely based on cross-sectoral co-operation. Co-operation deficits are particularly evident in the relationship between practitioners from the public and civil sectors.

In the empirical research carried out, particular attention was paid to social rights, the respect of which, and in many cases also the pursuit of their recognition, becomes the primary goal of the Ombudsman's activities. The empirical material analyzed allowed the entire spectrum of attitudes towards social rights to be indicated, which have been presented in three basic dimensions: from fundamental rights to freedom of well-being, from the universalism of ownership to the particularism of rights, publicized requests, and needs to silence and niches. It is also worth emphasizing that the vast majority of ombudsmen treat social rights as a conglomerate of rights guaranteeing, on the one hand, physical and economic security, and, on the other, rights related to the development of human subjectivity.

The empirical research also included an analysis of the public discourse generated by the Polish Ombudsman and citizens' activity in submitted petitions. General speeches of the Ombudsman and civic petitions addressed to the Ministry of Family, Labour, and Social Policy were studied. While the most crucial issue in the petitions was access to social security benefits, it was one of the least frequent topics in the general speeches. Conversely, the Ombudsman was the most frequent advocate of the right to social protection, especially the protection of detainees. In the case of petitions, the topic of social security was only in fifth place, and the issue of the rights of detainees was not publicized there at all.

To sum up, advocacy cannot be reduced to one common denominator. This monograph is an attempt to inscribe this issue within the framework of sociological research. Nevertheless, the theoretical proposal presented here matches only a few currents of sociological thought, overlooking its many sub-disciplines' achievements. The same is true of the research project, which is a particular recognition of the field of advocacy practices. Further research should focus on analyzing specific initiatives or projects for the protection of social rights. An equally important research path would also be comparative analyses to study any alternative social practices in this area.