

DESCRIPTION FOR THE GENERAL PUBLIC

Among the NGOs operating in the Polish countryside Voluntary Fire Departments (VFDs) have a consistently dominant positions – they are one of the largest categories and the most widespread (around 16 000 units), have the greatest staff facilities (around 690 000 members), absorb quite a big share of public funding dedicated to support entities of third sector (for many local governments in the Polish province they are the main social partner e.g. in the field of culture). It should be considered as a "residuum of rural civil society". Although listed features should make the VFD a primary object of interests of those studying the sector of Poles' social engagement and those analyzing the transformation on the Polish rural areas, it must be stated that there is a significant deficit-depth in sociological studies of volunteer firefighters (knowledge derives mainly from quantitative cross analyses - national or regional - and historical activities of active units).

The study will try to fill in the mentioned above knowledge gaps. The applicant wants to describe firefighting units in the perspective of progressive changes in the social ties in the Polish countryside. The presence of such phenomena as periphery depopulation, aging population, migration swinging, the decreasing importance of neighborhood institutions, new forms of socialization of youth suggests that the VFDs - traditionally highly integrated internally and rooted locally - are now facing unprecedented organizational challenges.

The applicant, conducting the research project in the convention of multiple case study inspired by the rich achievements of Polish sociology of rural areas (especially the method of monography of social problems initiated by Józef Chałasiński) wishes in particular to discover: (1) what helps VFDs to gain funds for activities in the highly-fledged market reality (how firefighters create and use their social capital); (2) what conditions the consistency in the units gathering people of different ages and sexes (what rules govern the process of internal integration?); (3) which of the traditionally undertaken initiatives affect particularly strongly the identity of the community in the modernizing rural areas (how we see and evaluate traditional functions performed by the VFDs units in local communities?).

The results of the study will make a contribution, to the still active discussion in the sociological theory about the transformation of social relationships and the nature of social capital in societies dynamically developing - will help to obtain answers to the question, and allows them to take joint action and chronic and multiply common good? Research results will help in addition to effectively plan the development of local Poland using existing resources (material and human), which the depositary for the Polish countryside are often VFDs, as the most common and most involved entities of civil sector.