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Hierarchy of Disposable Groups : the Sociological Context

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HIERARCHY OF DISPOSABLE GROUPS.
THE SOCIOLOGICAL CONTEXT

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ABSTRACT

The hierarchy in disposable groups, due to the specific nature thereof, is of significant importance for their proper functioning. Such a fixed sequence and order in this environment is essential as according to it someone performs managerial (command) functions, support ones or those positioned lower in terms of importance. Individuals holding certain positions must have relevant competences, skills and knowledge. Professional roles performed in disposable systems differ substantially from those played in a civilian environment. The differences result from the specificity of the tasks executed, responsibility for the specialised equipment and often for the lives of people.

Introduction

The turn of the 19th and 20th century is the time of extremely intense and not superficial social, economic, political and economic changes taking place on the national, European and world arenas. In respect of the

region of Central and Eastern Europe, these changes have been especially evident since the late 1980s and have had a particularly severe impact on the society that is subject to thorough and multidirectional changes. These transformations were initiated by the collapse of the communist system. Undoubtedly, issues related to providing citizens with functioning in a non-hazardous environment are the priority in the activity. Such behaviours force decision-making authority centres to take action towards providing citizens with permanent internal and external security for citizens.

These objectives, especially today in the face of events in Ukraine and the Middle East, have become a priority for governments and international organisations. People determined to search for new solutions of ensuring national security more and more often become aware of their unreality and uncriticality, particularly in the context of the emerging opinion on deviating from conducting wars in the traditional sense. Apart from conflicts carried out with the use of conventional weapons (Russia – Ukraine), there is a growing problem of other threats which have been termed 'asymmetric operations'. They mean that the opposite party is often unknown or difficult to define and combat methods used against regular troops are not suitable towards it. Such tactics are taken up, among others, by members of the so-called Islamic State, that use large-scale, for example, terrorist actions. As Jan Maciejewski rightly notes, *the development of civilisation implies the uncontrolled growth of various types of threats that were previously unknown*[1].

The process of globalisation, which also affects social change, together with the development of information and communication technology fosters such situations. Globalisation is the gradual worldwide spread of the territorial scope of the social labour division and market exchange, connections and interactions between human collectivities in all spheres of life. This means the increasing pace of the global flow of techniques, goods, services, capital, labour force, means of communication, information and ideas. This includes the development of supranational institutions and technical, economic, social, political, cultural, scientific and

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[1] J. Maciejewski, *Science in the Study of Dimensions of Security: Based on Disposable Groups of the Sociology Department at the University of Wroclaw*, [in:] *Different Faces of Security From Knowledge to Management*, K. Raczkowski, W. Kegö, M. Żuber (ed.), Institute for Security and Development Policy, Stockholm – Nacka 2010, p. 70.

artistic organisations. It puts an end to the isolation of individual societies and causes the intensification of external influences on all spheres of their lives[2].

In the present reality, national security is not only protecting the nation and the territory before the physical attack but also the protection – by various means – of vital economic and political interests, the loss of which would threaten the existence and the fundamental values of the state[3]. It is a good that is also the sought object as well as systematically analysed one by the competent organisations, institutions and social groups.

Security emphasised these days is identified with disposable groups of the Polish society. In order to determine them, it is appropriate to define the term *availability* which means the readiness to carry out duties at any place and time[4]. It is the action resulting from the needs of functioning of an institution (a company) or also achieving high-level goals. This is the case for performing professional roles by soldiers, firemen, policemen and officials of other groups that can be classified as disposable.

Relations between the Elements in Disposable Groups

Disposable groups are also often called disposable strata. Sometimes – as Zdzisław Zagórski specifies – the point is to distinguish them from classes, professions and any other groups, e.g. social, hierarchical-prestigious located appropriately in various spheres of reality, as well as from the so-called segments of civil society. It is excluded from: drill, command and a barrack living or far-reaching daily "availability" characteristic for the highly formalised, hierarchical, militarised and uniformed groups (...)[5].

Zdzisław Zagórski places disposable strata among political issues and they include people belonging to organised groups such as the army, the police, the municipal police, the fire brigades, etc. It should be noted,

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[2] See: B. Szacka, *Wprowadzenie do socjologii,* Oficyna naukowa, Warszawa 2003, p. 103–104.

[3] W. Łepkowski (ed.), *Słownik terminów z zakresu bezpieczeństwa narodowego*, AON, Warszawa 2002, p. 13.

[4] Comp. J. Maciejewski, *Grupy dyspozycyjne. Analiza socjologiczna,* Wyd. Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, Wrocław 2014, p. 51.

[5] Z. Zagórski, *Grupy dyspozycyjno-mundurowe w toku transformacji. Struktura segmentacyjna a kondycja społeczeństwa Trzeciej Rzeczypospolitej,* [in:] *Wojsko i inne grupy dyspozycyjne w perspektywie socjologicznej, Zeszyty naukowe, Poglądy i doświadczenia, Wydanie specjalne,* T. Leczykiewicz (ed.), Z. Zagórski, WSO im. Tadeusza Kościuszki, Wrocław 2000, p 14.

however, that membership in these groups is also a source of income for members and their families. *The functional–disposable location of the army as a segmentation category of the society transformation has changed significantly and is quite clearly oriented on the integration with the NATO structures*[6]. Soldiers, police officers, firefighters and other members of the disposable strata *are bound by their work with groups of a formal structure that take the form of complex structure organisations. These organsations and their structure are formed by a greater part of the society, that is the global society organised in the state (…)*[7].

Structures of disposable groups comprise different elements and relations between them. Such connections concern the following three categories of formal ties:
- subordination, i.e. a non-commissioned officer – an officer, a constable – an aspirant, an operator – a manager,
- equivalence (a manager – a manager, a lieutenant – a lieutenant, a specialist – a specialist),
- superiority (an officer – a non-commissioned officer, an aspirant – a constable, a manager – an operator)[8].

In addition to the above, in daily contacts there can be distinguished ties that do not arise from the position held and the role performed in an occupational group. These will be first of all individual or group relationships based on closeness, alienation as well as social neutrality. It is not about issues related to the space separating individuals. People working in one team (group) can simultaneously be very far in terms of opinions, beliefs, attitudes, belonging to the same group or interests. The situation may be completely different when individuals perform work at a considerable distance. They can be very close to one another, provided that there are ties between them in the aforementioned categories. In turn, indifference can occur when individuals are not satisfied as to the closeness and alienation in relations to one another[9].

Relationships in disposable groups are formed as a result of functioning of the information and communication system. The information system

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[6] Z. Zagórski, *Społeczeństwo…*, p. 74.

[7] Z. Morawski, *Prawne determinanty pozycji, roli i statusu warstw dyspozycyjnych społeczeństwa Polski na przykładzie trzech organizacji formalnych*, Wyd. Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, Wrocław 2005, p. 7.

[8] See: J. Sztumski, *Socjologia pracy*, GWSH, Katowice 1999, p. 124.

[9] See: *Ibidem.*

is associated with maintaining official relationships, that is vertical ones. This is an arrangement between a manager and his subordinates. An example of the communication system is maintaining social relationships that allow communication with one another. They are not, however, necessary for the proper functioning of an occupational group. It is important that these two types of social relations are supplementary and complementary to each other in all existing social systems[10].

Looking at the above, one can see that communication between members of disposable groups may take place in a formal or a non-formal way. While the first of the ways is characterised by officiality, the exchange of written correspondence, in the latter people communicate directly with one another without the use of artificialness and patheticness.

Hierarchical Nature of Disposable Groups

The social system occurring in the institutions performing disposable functions is characterised by the hierarchy appearing in them. It is two-fold. Therefore, one can speak of a hierarchy having a serial system (linear) and a staff one.

In the first case one deals with the presence of official positions from the highest to the lowest. Obviously they differ among themselves taking into account the scope of rights, duties, and above all the positions held by individuals (Fig. 1).

A staff system is different since the dominant role is played by departments specialised in the activities, forming the organisation of the institution. These departments are organisationally subject to the common management, and through disposing of competences in the field in which they operate, they support the operation of positions belonging to the linear system (Fig. 2).
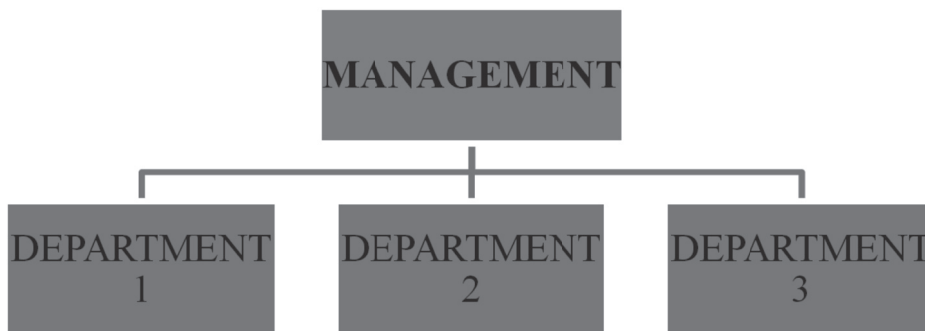
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[10] See: *Ibidem*, p. 97.

Fig. 1. The example of a linear system
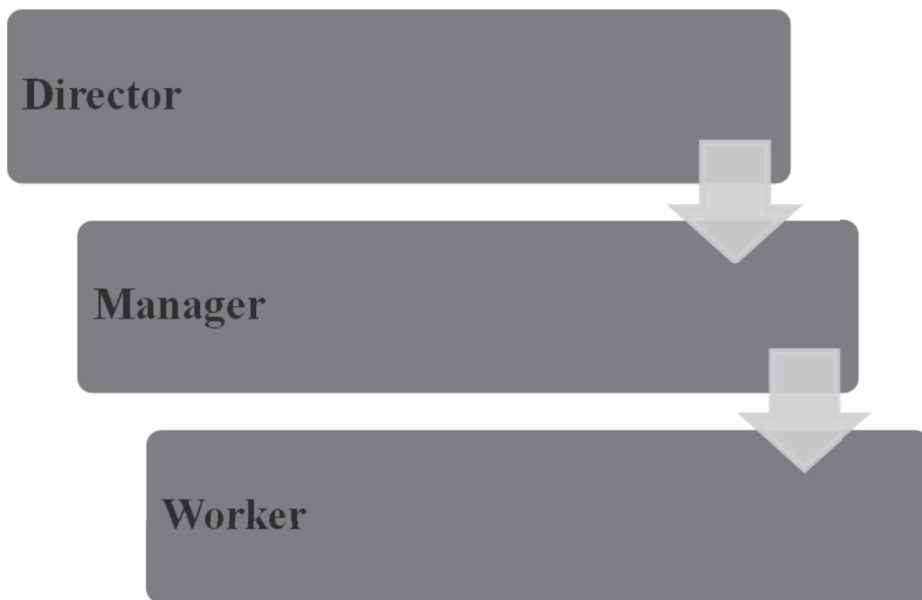
Source: M. Liberacki, own study

Fig. 2. The example of a staff system

Source: M. Liberacki, own study

The operating of disposable institutions is the composite result of the two above outlined solutions and based on the organisation, both linear and staff. Considering large institutions that include the police, the armed forces, the prison guard, the municipal police or fire brigades, the developed staff system dominates in them. Such a solution is necessary for the

proper functioning of the organisation, even from the point of view of the extent of issues carried out by them. This requires a broad group of experts in a variety of fields, from the supply of basic stationery, through legal advice, finance, "the acquisition" of specialised equipment or planning military action. Then, the departments in institutions having such a wide organisation perform advisory and planning functions necessary for the management decision-making process.

Each institution is a kind of a group having a specified hierarchy that results from the organisational structure which takes account of all elements while retaining reporting relationships. Among disposable groups there can be distinguished the following groups of positions taken by their representatives:

- command (management) – related to responsibility for making decisions concerning a broader spectrum of people who are members of the group. They entitle to decide on the scope and type of a subordinate's work. They allow assigning tasks, methods and the order of their implementation, they often can influence the level of remuneration. Their essence lies in the fact that every leader (a manager, a head, a commandant, a chief etc.) is accountable to a superior body,
- staff (functional) – concerning issuing opinions, evaluating, preparing expert opinions, drawing up plans, options of decisions, designing improvements and simplifications of processes necessary for performing functions by the institution. Their existence derives from the high complexity of the process of managing large institutions. They often combine elements of functioning of the organisation with issues of advisory nature, e.g. legal, financial,
- executive – representing the lowest level in the organisational hierarchy of the institution. In the army, for example, the group includes positions occupied by privates, in the police – constables, etc.

Leadership styles performed by commanders, supervisors, chiefs, heads or other competent persons have evolved in disposable groups. They are necessary to enable the organisation to meet the expectations and tasks imposed. Methods of governance ensure the implementation of the institution's activities with the optimum system of its administration. The management bases on the leading styles related to such the exercise of the tasks that is preferred by the decision maker, in order to effectively pursue tasks which the organisation faces. Basically, the classical approach

distinguishes three basic styles of managing work: autocratic, democratic and liberal[11].

The autocratic style is characterised by the fact that the person in a leading position imposes his or her goals, ways of solving problems, prefers the direct way of managing and controlling the activity of all subordinates. He or she achieves this by issuing orders and commands. He or she establishes the directions of changes, affecting the subordinate staff so as to implement them in the organisation. The only thing the subordinates can do is to submit to his will. In this approach of the manager of such a nature, disapproval and the lack of acceptance of revisions applied by the subordinate staff is noticeable. The director – autocrat is usually severe and demanding, since such an attitude can help to accomplish tasks and achieve goals. The autocratic style is characterised by more frequent applying penalties rather than recognitions and compliments to his subordinates.

The democratic approach is characterised by the possibility of making co-decisions by the personel or a subordinate group in matters related to achieving objectives of the organisation. In this approach subordinates often participate in the decision-making process as well as their responsibility and autonomy in the activity is frequent. Due to creating the right conditions, the manager aims to increase the degree of subordinates' involvement in the work. Employees are pleased to devote their skills and energy to achieve objectives that are, moreover, recognised as their own. The democratic approach allows the subordinate members of a group to present alternatives and their own opinions regarding changes proposed by the management. This is the basis for active participation in the functioning of the organisation. In such situations a team member is able to be inventive, aware and diligent in performing duties. On the basis of such executives' actions there are shaped proper attitudes in the social system of the organisation that promote the formation of appropriate work culture and increase trust in interpersonal relations. It is characteristic for this style that the manager sets operating goals. Details and decisions on performing a particular task are determined directly by group members, thus they are fully accepted. In contrast to the authoritarian style, awards, praise but also critical remarks are formulated based on supervisor's specific and impartial criteria and observations.

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[11] See: W. Kieżun, *Sprawne zarządzanie organizacją*, Wydawnictwo SGH, Warszawa 1997, p. 322–333.

The liberal style is the third one listed by the management personnel. It is often characterised as a non-interfering type which, by its activity, gives employees the freedom in choosing ways of making decisions, fulfilling tasks or the direction of making changes. It deviates from interference, it does not manifest creativity, is passive in evoking motivation for the subordinates' activity. The role of a manager is limited to verifying achieved solutions compared to intended objectives. Information is provided by him or her only in case when asked to do so by members of his or her occupational group. Any changes are perceived by the manager as undesirable and constitute a last resort. A liberal is not interested in modification, powers and simplifications of developed methods of operation of his or her organisation. He or she very often does not discuss work done by subordinates or assess their activity.

The presented management styles are not the only ones, because it is hard to imagine decision-makers operating in such a structured theoretical framework. In social practice these discursive types do not occur. Most often one deals with a combination of the three presented options. Among them sometimes elements of the autocratic style may prevail, sometimes democratic, or liberal ones in other situations.

The hierarchical nature of disposable groups refers to holding in them a position that is identified with the rank visible on elements of uniforms of a representative of the formation. These signs are recognisable on uniforms worn by representatives of the armed forces, the police, the fire brigade, the border guard, the customs service, the prison service and the municipal police. In disposable groups there are signs appearing in the form of stars, stripes, bars and other graphic indications occurring in specific configurations. Military ranks clearly indicate and point to the place occupied by an individual in the hierarchy of the group[12].

They fulfil an important role as they make an individual distinguish from other social groups, on the other hand they are a sign of competences, skills and knowledge. A Polish armed forces soldier promoted to first officer rank – lieutenant, is a person having, among others, a tertiary level education of the second degree (master – equivalent), speaking a foreign language on a communicative level (usually English) and holding a formal power to command a platoon or lead a team of people in a comparable positions. Along with a higher and higher position they occupy in the

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[12] J. Maciejewski, *Grupy dyspozycyjne…*, p. 115.

structure of a disposable group formal requirements necessary to promote its members also increase.

Conclusion

A disposable group, as well as any other, has a defined hierarchy. Such a fixed sequence and order are important to the extent that in accordance with them someone performs managerial or auxiliary functions or those positioned lower in terms of importance. People holding certain positions must have a relevant competences, skills and knowledge. In addition to these qualities, it is crucial that commanders, chiefs (managers, etc.) have leadership skills, as they provide achieving pursued objectives and performing tasks. Management roles in disposable systems differ substantially from those that are played in civilian systems. Differences arise from the specificity of carried out tasks and great responsibility entrusted. The proper selection of individuals to positions classified in the hierarchy has a direct impact on the proper functioning of the entire group and the lawful use of powers that belong to its members. Very often these are the powers that enable to take action where human life is at stake.

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