

YouthBanks as a Model for Building Social Capital in Poland

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Abstract

Civil society developed in Poland in the late twentieth century as the result of the transformation of Central East European culture that followed the fall of Communism. Knowledge about charitable giving in Poland was very weak and mostly associated with a few well-known NGOs. For many Poles, philanthropy was understood as begging, and is met with a lack of trust especially among older people who believe that government and businesses can spend money more effectively. Building trust is a long-term process and requires increasing the public's knowledge about the third sector.

Against this backdrop, Zuzanna Komornicka focuses on the development of YouthBanks that have been introduced by Europe's growing community foundation sector. She maintains that philanthropic programs run by young people at community foundations can: promote a culture of giving at the local level; encourage new perspectives; and further the development of philanthropy. The first decade of the twenty-first century has shown that youth philanthropy is a growing movement which is visible in the spread of YouthBanks to Central and Eastern Europe where the third sector was relatively undeveloped. In regions where youth programs were launched, they have been embraced as successful initiatives, helping young people gain new experiences, improve their leadership and communication skills, and involving them in making decisions regarding initiatives taking place in their communities.

By explaining how a community foundation functions, how building social capital and cultivating relationships is crucial to the development of civil society and the culture of giving in Poland, as well as how grantmaking programs can empower society, Komornicka identifies issues significant to the promotion of philanthropy in Poland. She argues that the development of youth philanthropy and the promotion of YouthBanks in Poland will strengthen trustworthiness, which eases social life and strengthens relations in the community that are so significant to building social capital.

Komornicka reflects on how YouthBanks or other youth initiatives groups can learn new strategies and partner with community foundations to address the needs of the societies of Eastern Europe. Through re-granting programs, community foundations and youth philanthropy initiatives will promote a new focus on local participation and local needs resulting in a direct impact on the everyday life of the people concerned. The author concludes that, in this way, YouthBanks can serve to create a new generation of sophisticated philanthropists.

For the full version of the paper, please click [here](#).

