

# PUBLIC-SOCIAL PARTNERSHIP – A FRAMEWORK OF ANALYSIS FROM THE POINT OF VIEW OF MANAGEMENT STUDIES

Aldona Frączkiewicz-Wronka\*

## Abstract

**Background.** The logic of the democratization process determines an increased importance of parties, other than state owned ones, to join the process of shaping the basis for social-economic development. The scarcity of public funds causes a need to find solutions for organizing the public service delivery system, including social services, that it is both cost-effective and consistent with the principles of social justice. The need for organizations providing social services to achieve high efficiency has led both practitioners and theorists to take an interest in inter-organizational collaboration as a formula in which they can be implemented.

**Research aims.** There is a need for broadening a theoretical reflection on the construct of networks operating in the formula of partnership between public sector and social organizations.

**Method.** The paper is based on the literature review.

**Key findings.** Networks operating in the formula of partnership between public sector and social organizations are (a) a relatively new organizational phenomenon, and (b) by nature flexible, with ability to change rapidly and to achieve added value. They arise from the pursuit of high efficiency and the proper coordination of various undertakings within complex organizational and social structures operating in a certain geographical and administrative space. Such structures provide a better environment for solving social problems.

**Keywords:** Public-social partnership, Public management, Networks

## INTRODUCTION

Public management as a practice focuses on the effective provision of public services, including social ones, to citizens. As Kożuch and Kożuch state

“...in the field of management studies, in the sub-discipline of public management, the nature of public services is determined mainly by values of a given society, and the motivation to provide these services. It is thus important to define services of general interest, and to find their place in the system of services, as well as the conditions behind the implementation of these services, resulting in specific relations between public organizations created to provide these services” (Kożuch & Kożuch, 2008, p. 19).

From the point of view of this article, social services are of particular importance, especially the organizational aspects of their provision and its

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\* Dr hab. Prof. Aldona Frączkiewicz-Wronka, University of Economics in Katowice.



consequences for the research field of the emerging sub-discipline of public management. Social services are within the scope of local government units' responsibilities, and, in this dimension, they are defined as a specific type of public services, namely "...aimed at the development of the social life of a local community, at meeting the social needs of citizens (as opposed to their living needs)" (Dziarski & Kłosowski, 2003, p. 9).

The way in which they are provided determines the nature of the implemented social policy. By definition, social policy is the coordinated action for social cohesion and social inclusion, the effect of which is supposed to be the effective elimination of inequalities between individuals, social groups, regions and countries, expressed in the field of resources, rights and participation (Karwacki & Piątek, 2007, p. 12). Currently, the most desirable model is the so-called active social policy, the primary goal of which is the prevention of social exclusion (Rymsza, 2003, p. 30). Activation is to be conducted in occupational, educational, health and social dimensions.

Importantly, public management practice in the area connected with social services provision influences the means and results of fulfilling the ideas of active social policy (Szarffenberg, 2008, p. 402). The modern approach to the provision of services means that its essence is to use synergies resulting from stimulating inter-organizational linkages called networks, and to create and sustain social capital by reviving grassroots activity. From the perspective of public management pragmatics, promoting the idea of active social policy implies seeking a new way to perform services through a variety of organizational configurations, such as inter-organizational networks. The latter are slowly becoming a way of achieving innovative and relational pension (Niemczyk, Stanczyk-Hugiet & Jasiński, 2012, p. 10). As the authors of the book entitled *Inter-organizational networks. The contemporary challenge to management theory and practice* (original title: *Sieci międzyorganizacyjne. Współczesne wyzwanie dla teorii i praktyki zarządzania*) observe – referring mainly to business organizations – the concept is not clearly defined. In the literature, one might encounter notions such as: (a) network organizations (Phillips, 2010, p. 533 et seq.; Higgins & Maciariello, 2004, p. 203 et seq.); (b) inter-organizational network (Baker & Faulkner, 2002, p. 520 et seq.), (c) networked organization or network structure (Mukherjee, 2009, p. 23; Sproull & Kiesler, 1992, p. 132 et seq.), or (d) simply network. The phenomenon of a network means that organizations it comprises of might be perceived as structures that describe a specific form of operation, or rather cooperation of private and/or public entities, or as new structures created by these entities in pursuit of a common goal.

The importance of inter-organizational collaboration for forming the basis of development was also observed in the public and social sector, as



evidenced by the European Union's promoting – in a formal way, through the transfer of aid funds – public service delivery in the network configuration involving organizations from different sectors, often referred to as local, regional, public-private, or public-social partnerships. Creating networked organizations is the answer to the challenges of practice, where it was noted that, more and more frequently, solving complex problems requires a variety of skills and resources that are normally possessed by many actors of economic life – not only companies but also public institutions and organizations in the NGO sector (Czakoń, 2005, pp. 429–437). Therefore, a proper arrangement of cooperation between various entities can lead to an appropriate formulation and solution of current issues emerging from the social realm. New forms of cooperation between various entities, and primarily partnerships and alliances, require a particular type of management, the mission of which is to catalyze processes of clashing interests as well as to coordinate joint activities – hence the need for theoretical reflection on the problem of inter-organizational networks.

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## REVIEW

### **Social Capital as a Premise for Creating Organizations of a Public-Social Network Character**

The systemic transformation started in the 1990s in Poland has revealed, on the one hand – a far-reaching lack of ability to adapt to the changing environment, and on the other – the weakness of compensation mechanisms undertaken by state entities in view of increasing exclusion and marginalization. Social exclusion or exclusion risk means limiting the opportunities to participate in public life, use fundamental rights, goods and services, and most of all limiting social roles. People are becoming more and more anonymous, focusing on their own problems, as Turowski wrote

“...Human is a social being. It is the life in a society that allows people to create and refine culture, and to achieve the fullness of humanity. In all aspects of human nature – the moral, the intellectual, the physical – a human being is inextricably linked with society” (Turowski, 2001, p. 13).

The method designed to stimulate community members to work for their local community is social activation, defined as the process of discovering and revealing needs, desires and problems, establishing relations between people and their activities, as well as facilitating creativity and innovation in the approach to the living environment. As a result of



a proper activation of a local community, sustainable development is achieved, or, in other words, a form of action serving to connect the effort of a given community's residents with the efforts of state-owned and other entities, which together aim to improve the economic, social and cultural situation of a community. In this context, local development should be understood as a process involving positive change. This process should encompass activities of a local government nature, a local community gathered in organizations which serve to represent it, and, if appropriate, business sector organizations. Local authorities should set their decisions, actions and development projects in a general, recognized mechanism of change; influence the behaviour of public space users, directly or indirectly, according to their decision-making and administrative powers, and authority; within the system, create negotiation and cooperation mechanisms, in which there is a potential for common, strategic thinking about the future of the system; create a platform for understanding the differences of interests, through anticipatory conflict elimination, and, most importantly, stimulate joint implementation of development projects (Kuźnik, 2002, pp. 19-20). Several factors are conducive to local development:

1. A local leader able to form a vision of development, and possessing an ability to gather a local elite around him/her;
2. A local elite, which brings together the most active, significant people, local government officials, social activists, local entrepreneurs;
3. Local institutions, which stabilize the actions of a leader and elites;
4. An integrated business community, willing to cooperate with local authorities;
5. An active local community, participating in local undertakings and manifesting an initiative to work towards the common good, and above all;
6. A formal and informal network of relations between organizations, which are local scene actors.

The quality of activities undertaken in a community and especially in networks of organizations working on its development depends on its latent social capital. Social capital, which refers to characteristics of social engagement and activity such as networks, norms, and social trusts, helps to achieve multiple benefits from cooperation, coordination and partnership. High levels of cooperation, trust, reciprocity, civic engagement and shared prosperity determine the quality of a civic community. Social capital is a collective resource, which enables the development of community members' individual potential, and its main value lies in the fact that it combines the social and the individual (Niesporek & Wódz, 2003, p. 131). According to the definition, social capital is crucial in pursuing an active social policy because "...communities endowed with a diverse potential of



social and civic relations are more likely to deal effectively with poverty and helplessness, to resolve conflicts and to use opportunities opening out before them” (Mendel, 2007, p 190).

Social capital is currently regarded as a key factor for success in life, hence also for professional success. Since its conception many authors have tried to find a proper explanation of the term, although this very conception remains unclear. However, all the authors agree that it describes primarily some intangible capital, which, properly operated, grows and benefits, also financially (Kazmierczak & Rymsza, 2007, p. 39). Each of the social capital conception classics puts an accent on slightly different defining category elements. For instance R. Putnam (1995) treats social capital as “...establishing cooperation by organizations at the local level...” by using “...high level of trust and civic community cooperation...”, and F. Fukuyama highlights the influence of social capital on economic growth, claiming that “...the prosperity of a country, its economic ability to compete are dependent on the level of trust among citizens...” (Grewiński, 2009, p. 65-67).

In summary, it might be concluded that social capital can be understood as social relations, social networks, involving an individual and a collective. Social capital includes such characteristics of public policy as trust, norms, social relations, and is an essential condition for public networks' functioning, as it enables spontaneous cooperation important in the life of a collective as well as individuals.

### **Conceptualization of Networks for Action in the Public Sector**

The aim of public management is to seek effective ways of managing organizations (Kotarbiński, 1975, p. 104). With regard to public organizations, this means effectively meeting the needs considered important for shaping the basis of socio-economic development of a given territory. These activities include planning and organizing public services, and encouraging the people involved to provide the services at a high level, considering the rational use of resources, as well as the use of such control tools that allow an evaluation of the action, together with the level of utility of activities for stakeholders.

The definition worded above emphasizes three essential conditions necessary for the efficient management of public organizations. First, innovation, understood as a creative process the nature of which is using existing capabilities in order to create something new, is necessary. Repeating existing organizational models, types of activities or processes are important managerial endeavours, but until something new, some new quality is created as a consequence, one cannot talk about real innovation. Creating social value is the second condition. This is a fundamental dimension that distinguishes the management in public organizations from



the management in business organizations (Austin & Wei-Skillern, 2006). Whereas both forms of activity (i.e. business and public) are socially useful, creating social value is a clear, central causal factor, as well as the strength of the concept and practice of public management. The third key requirement is the ability to transcend the boundaries of sectors and organizational forms, for social purpose and innovation constitute a basis of success. Organizations working together and sharing decisions regarding how to allocate their resources often gain a capability to create new structures, able to generate greater social value than either of these organizations individually. The specific combination of existing organizations and their resources is a sign of innovation, as defined by J.A. Schumpeter. Therefore, inter-organizational collaboration and partnerships (e.g. local and strategic) might be regarded as a particular organizational form, which is more and more frequently used within sectors and across them (Austin, 2000).

The literature exploring issues of inter-organizational collaboration/networks is not strictly assigned to only one discipline, nor deeply set in geographic space. The scientific work on this subject arises in the areas of social policy, public administration, sociology, and economics and management. Mostly, however, such work is interdisciplinary, since the complexity of the matter requires such a perspective. The answer to the question of the identification of the reasons that determined the growing popularity of reflections on inter-organizational collaboration/networks is complicated. One possibility is the presence of early research and theoretical work on the problem of inter-organizational management (Levine & White, 1961, pp. 583-601; Litvak & Hylton, 1962, pp. 395-420) and politicking (Dahl, 1961; Truman & Knopf, 1964), which was conducted back in the 1960s in the stream of political and management studies. However, their usefulness in explaining regularities appearing in the management of public organizations – due to it being different from the current definition of state functions, as well as the scope of its intervention in social life – is limited. What appears to be more significant are the consequences of introducing new public management principles into the practices of public organizations, and the development of the concept of society of network – and thus the growth of interest in co-governance – as an instrument for the effective implementation of public policies and the efficient delivery of public services, including the social and theoretical reflection on them. The statement above emphasizes the need for exploration mainly carried out theoretically: society of network and inter-organizational collaboration/networks, and new public management and inter-organizational/network management. In describing the first indicated reason for an increased interest in the concept under discussion, one finds that, according to some theorists, an element of particular importance for the study of inter-



organizational collaboration and inter-organizational management is the development of the concept of society of network, and thus the appreciation of horizontal relations between organizations, the increasing role of information technology, and progressive specialization. Some authors also point to progressive individualization, perceived as an extremely important aspect characterizing Western societies (Social Cultureel Planbureau, 2000, p. 95), the essence of which is the downgrading of traditional social relations, the gradual disappearance of social capital (Putnam, 1995), and the need to reverse the emerging trend. Castells (2000), one of the well-known theorists dealing with the issues of society of network and network organizations, shows dramatic changes in the social fabric as the first reason for an increased interest in the concept of networks in the public domain over the last decade of the twentieth century. These changes might be seen as a development towards networking, as a consequence of an increase in horizontal relationships between process participants, an increased role and significance of ICT, increasing specialization, and the tensions arising from the bipolar relationship between the need to build joint actions and individualization. The result of such trends has led to an increase in government pressure to build inter-organizational structures, in both the profit sector (Faulkner, 1995; Nooteboom, 1998) and the non-profit sector (Osborne, 2000). The emerging networks might contribute to the effective implementation of planned objectives. Therefore, a growing number of strategic alliances between companies, surging importance of the value chain/management and relations between organizations (Graeber, 1993), and an interest in the problems of co-governance clearly militate in favour of the recognition of Castells's thesis as justified.

The second reason for the popularity of the concept, particularly in the practical area, is the need to develop partnerships between sectors: public, social and private sectors, as noticed by many modern governments. The tendency to modernize the ways and methods of governance became evident when the Labour Party won the election in the UK (Newman, 2003). After the Party had come to power in 1997, Tony Blair suggested the so-called "Third Way" of tackling public problems. The basic principle was to launch market mechanisms in meeting social needs, with the strong support of regional and local power structures, and social empowerment. Actions aimed at strengthening the partnership between entities across all the three sectors, and as a consequence using emerging synergies, were considered the primary means of achieving social objectives. This action is much needed in order to fulfil the commitments made towards stakeholders, and the literature points to a number of positive aspects of the development of network relations, particularly effective in solving social problems. If public entities intend to get involved in solving these problems (and this is a natural consequence when accepting the



burden of governing), they need to understand the resources and capabilities of other actors in the process, and use them for their purposes (Hanf & Scharpf, 1978; Rhodes, 1997; Agranoff & McGuire, 2001).

By definition, a network might be described as a collection of independent units, forming a common structure in order to carry out specific and agreed actions. It is a group of autonomous organizations, oriented towards achieving an objective that cannot be achieved by any of them individually (Chisholm, 1998, p. xxi). A network is a form of integrated structure, which consists of a number of entities interconnected by multiple relations. Networks are composed of organizations which are linked by structural interdependence, in which one organization is not subject to any other because of its formal position (O'Toole Jr. & Meier, 2004, pp. 681-693); a network may consist of an entire organization or parts thereof. Networks might be formal (organized by formal mechanisms of inter-organizational agreement or statutory activities), or informal (informal in terms of law, yet consistent, organized and mission-oriented) (Agranoff & McGuire, 2001, pp. 295-326). Networks are not the same as organizations, but they are not completely different from them either. According to Chisholm (1998), the main distinguishing feature of networks is their focus on a common objective. The second aspect is the freedom of participation in networks. Their members belong to different organizations and are often geographically dispersed. Further distinguishing features are the possibility to connect network resources from various sources, and the absence or low penalties for withdrawal from a network. The key difference between organizations and networks is the lack of hierarchy in the latter. A pattern of interdependence existing between various social actors is meant, in which at least a part of their relations represent structures other than hierarchical is meant by a network. Networks are therefore rather horizontal than vertical organizations. None of the members are subject to or superior to others. Voluntary, horizontal network connections mean that a network is controlled by its members. According to these assumptions, organizations which form a network should therefore have equal bargaining power, and most decisions should be taken by consensus. However, networks need some form of organization and principles of operation, which makes them similar to organizations. Many of them have a mission as well as goals, and try to shape this specific form of organization; therefore, a lot of discussion is devoted to various forms of networks (Agranoff, 2006, pp. 56-65). Networks are usually beyond one sector, take many levels of management into account, apply to a given policy area or a specific problem, and their kind of action determines their outcomes (Provan & Kenis, 2008, pp. 229-252).

In summary, I conclude that the public-social partnership is becoming one of the key concepts in the public sphere of management. Successful





partnerships require clear rules and relations between the public authorities and economic and social actors, as well as inside the created network; it is therefore justified to examine the rules and routines present in their management. The issues of efficiency and its measurement are of particular importance.

## CONCLUSIONS

In the public sector, network organizations working in this partnership formula are a relatively new organizational phenomenon, the origin of which is associated with the transformation of the instruments of management in business organizations for non-profit organizations. The concept of management tools (instruments) is understood in the context of the new realities of public sector activities, in which a search for competitive advantages becomes the chief paradigm of operation, for it determines an organization's ability to change rapidly and to achieve added value. The analysis of the literature on the key success factors of organizations supports the conclusion that the organizations which possess significant opportunities in conditions of growing competitiveness are the ones characterized by the following characteristics:

1. Flexible – capable of rapid investment and disinvestment, with low fixed costs, managed using expertise and projects;
2. Cooperative – seeking cooperation rather than competition, establishing a number of contracts with suppliers and customers, and alliances with competitors in order to build a full range without their own resources;
3. Intelligent – having extensive intellectual (rather than material) resources, investing in employees, research and development, possessing business intelligence.

Networks operating in the formula of partnership between public sector and social organizations are by nature flexible because they arise from the pursuit of high efficiency and the proper coordination of various undertakings within complex organizational and social structures operating in a certain geographical and administrative space. The essence of their activity comes down to skilful cooperation and use of resources at the disposal of partners in a network. They are based on human and social capital, which together determine the capacity and effectiveness of interventions. As a result of limiting the formal organizational power (corporate relations), structures based on a variable division of labour are formed, in which tasks and roles for each of their constituent organizations are clearly defined. The uniformity of coordination is achieved through delegation of an authority entity's powers. As a result of this conceptualization outlining the framework for action, such structures provide a better environ-



ment for solving social problems/issues. The knowledge of specialists with different functions in different organizations is used, at the same time increasing their job satisfaction by engaging them in task teams, and by participation in potential success. Focusing on the tasks most essential for the development and operation of a local community, and the organizations involved in the network acting as a partnership, might be seen.

In the Polish public sector, network organizations working in this partnership formula are a new and unique form of relations. Their value in shaping the basis of socio-economic development of a given territory is significant, hence the need for increased research attention directed to the search for such management instruments that – when used adequately to needs – increase the effectiveness of their activities.

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## PUBLICZNO-SPOŁECZNE PARTNERSTWO – RAMY ANALIZY Z PUNKTU WIDZENIA NAUK O ZARZĄDZANIU

### Abstrakt

**Tło badań.** Logika procesu demokratyzacji państw decyduje o wzroście ich roli w procesie kształtowania podstaw rozwoju społeczno-gospodarczego. Szczupłość środków publicznych powoduje konieczność poszukiwania takich zasad organizowania systemu świadczenia usług publicznych w tym społecznych aby był on efektywny i zgodny z zasadami sprawiedliwości społecznej. Konieczność efektywnego dostarczania usług doprowadziła zarówno praktyków jak i teoretyków do zainteresowania się międzyorganizacyjną współpracą jako formułą w której mogą być one świadczone.

**Cele badań.** Wzbogacenie teoretycznej refleksji nad konstruktem organizacji sieciowych działających w formule partnerstwa między organizacjami sektora publicznego i społecznego.

**Metodyka.** Artykuł opiera się na analizie literatury przedmiotu.

**Kluczowe wnioski.** Sieci działające w formule partnerstwa między organizacjami sektora publicznego i społecznego są (a) stosunkowo młodym zjawiskiem organizacyjnym oraz (b) z natury rzeczy elastyczne, zdolne do szybkich zmian i osiągania wartości dodanej. Powstają na skutek dążenia do zapewnienia wysokiej sprawności i odpowiedniej koordynacji działań pomiędzy różnorodnymi przedsięwzięciami w ramach złożonych struktur organizacyjnych i społecznych działających w określonej przestrzeni geograficzno-administracyjnej. Struktury te zapewniają lepsze warunki do efektywnego rozwiązywania problemów społecznych.

**Słowa kluczowe:** partnerstwo publiczno-społeczne, zarządzanie publiczne, sieci

