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Shortage of local civil dialogue—an institutional perspective

Abstract: This article is based on a narrow definition of civil dialogue, which includes interactions between the bodies of public administration and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). The models of civil dialogue present in the basic units of local government (communes—Polish: *gmina*) were compared with the precepts of the European model of good governance. The author describes local civil dialogue in Poland (on the basis of existing data) and presents the results of his own research. These results show the approach of non-governmental organisations to social consultation with large municipal self-governments, as well as the reasons why NGOs avoid transparent forms of political communication.

Keywords: civil dialogue, civil society, social policy, welfare pluralism

Introduction

Before describing civil dialogue we first need to define it. In the broadest sense such dialogue includes interactions among citizens, as well as interactions between citizens and public authorities (politicians and other officials). The dialogue may involve particular people or more or less formalised civil groups. It is believed that the free flow of civil dialogue is necessary for the best functioning of a liberal democracy (Misztal 2016). Also, in the literature one may come across a narrow definition of civil dialogue which I have adopted in this article. This narrower definition only includes interactions between public administration and non-governmental organisations (Kendall 2005; Rymsza 2008; Misztal 2011), which play an important role in governance of modern democratic states. In such countries non-governmental organisations have obtained separate legal powers, a part of which covers their interaction with public administration (Załęski 2012; Hoggett 1991).

In this article I analyse local civil dialogue concentrating on the interaction between non-governmental organisations and self-government administration. Thus I added another (formal) limitation to the narrow definition of civil dialogue—I am only interested in civil dialogue in Polish self-governments at the smallest administrative division—the communes. This kind of dialogue does not always fully reflect normative models included in acts and regulations created by the government. This is why analysis of local civil dialogue is an interesting research area, as it refers indirectly to how well local self-government and civil society function.

Importance of Civil Dialogue

Civil dialogue accompanies the cooperation between public administration and non-governmental organisations. It is a part of a broader system of communication between officials and citizens, which, in democratic countries, is subject to legal regulations. It is important for the process of governance that the dialogue of public administration is properly adjusted to the environment. Officials perform tasks upon the instructions of politicians, but officials are also an important link of interaction between the rulers and the ruled (cf. Luhmann 1981). They participate in preparing legal acts (as bodies which give opinions and prepare document drafts), and make administrative decisions on the basis of their knowledge. This process shows how important civil dialogue is in attaining good quality governance. Therefore, legislators create acts which ensure that officials follow minimum standards in their communication with the stakeholders of public policy programmes.

The concern about the quality of civil dialogue is a key element of public administration reforms which were implemented in developed democratic states in response to the crisis of governance in the 1960s and 1970s. At that time many dysfunctions of governance were noticed, as a result of which the 'ungovernability' syndrome was defined. One of the reasons for such a syndrome was the inability to adjust the way public administration functioned to changing conditions of ruling, as a result of which the state lost the ability to process information and take action adequate to the level of complexity of a given situation (Mayntz 1993; Kooiman 1993). It made it difficult for the government to govern in accordance with the changing needs of the governed. Also, governing the state was difficult due to the heritage of the statist social policy and deficits of the bureaucratic model of administration. The crisis of governance was facilitated by the progress of communication technologies, the increase in prosperity, the transition from the model of an industrial society to a post-industrial society, and the change of the citizens' attitude towards life (from materialism to post-materialism—cf. Inglehart 1977), as a result of which they began to have varied expectations of their state.

The concern for civil dialogue carried out by public administration is also a part of the discourse about the shortage of democratic participation of citizens in governance (Dahl 1989; Norris 2011). This kind of discourse became important at the same time as the discourse describing the dysfunctions of public administration appeared. One of its more important aspects included the claim for increasing the responsiveness of the democratic system to the voice of the ruled. Such discourses were accompanied in synchrony with the renaissance of the idea of a civil society, which contributed to the fact that people began to perceive non-governmental organisations as bodies which represented the citizens and were able to act effectively (Szacki 1997; Salamon 2003). Such an approach validated the legal reinforcement of the meaning of NGOs in ruling systems. Later, such reinforcement was criticised by those who proved that non-governmental organisations did not have to reflect the opinions and needs of the citizens (Hudock 1999). It results from the fact that quasi-NGOs are organised by politicians, NGOs depend on government subsidies and NGOs become professionalised, i.e. carry out business activities (Greve, Flinders and Thiel 1999; Wygnański 2008). However, despite proving such phenomena, the rights given to non-governmental organisations were not withdrawn.

In the last decades of the 20th century democratic countries began reforming administrative systems according to the new approach to public governance. Such reforms assumed 'decentring' of ruling in three dimensions: a) decentralisation of territorial public administration; b) the ability to delegate some competences of public administration to non-governmental organisations (especially in the provision of public services); c) deconcentration of decision making processes in the state in the form of multi-level and multi-range governance (Peters 2008). This resulted in changing social policy from the *welfare state* model to the *welfare pluralism* model (Rodger 2000; Grewiński 2009). This way, public administration had the opportunity to give more subsidies to non-profit organisations which provided political services but did not belong to the sector of public finance. It is worth mentioning that the functioning of non-profit sector agents was influenced by laws and regulations which concerned the spending of public budgets, and by executive acts, as a result of which such agents were not fully independent of the state policy (James and Thiel 2010).

The implementation of the *welfare pluralism* model was accompanied by a belief in market forces and in the ability to use the resources controlled by private actors for public purposes. It was assumed that extending the range of entities providing public services and introducing competition for public subsidies would increase citizen/consumer satisfaction with the effects of the state functioning (cf. Osborne, Gaebler 1993; Hausner 2002). Such a view was based on a belief in justice and the effectiveness of mechanisms with open competition (Hayek 1960; Friedman 1976), but it ignored the fact that the market of public subsidies is shaped by politics. Non-governmental organisations play an important role in this process, as they may influence the creation and execution of the law. One of the channels of such influence is a narrowly understood civil dialogue, which consists of interactions between NGOs and public administration officials.

The attempt to correct the above mentioned problem appeared in the concept of good governance. Such an attempt emphasizes that social expectations do not always match the instrumental rationality imposed on officials by legal and economic conditions. The concept of good governance does not negate the need to decentre ruling or the relation of mutual dependence of public administration and the network of its non-public cooperants. Proper coordination of such a network depends on the quality of inter-sector communication (Torfing 2005; Pestoff 2009). According to such an approach, marketisation of public expenditure and decentring of the state should be connected with the improvement of communication between the authorities, the citizens and the NGOs. An important claim is increasing the openness of public administration to civil dialogue—both in the narrow and in the broad sense. It in particular refers to inclusive and transparent interactions that would follow the ideals of democratic participation in communication processes (Jessop 2003). Such interactions should give officials and politicians the opportunity to access a wide range of social expectations, preventing the use of a limited collection of information. Not only is public administration responsible for the provision of public grants and services, but it also gathers and processes information which is later used to make administrative decisions, prepare legal regulations and evaluate political programmes (cf. Luhmann 1981; Mayntz 1993). Thus the effects of civil dialogue carried out by officials may indirectly influence the politicians' decisions related to shaping budgets and how public money is spent (also within the scope of cooperation between public administration and non-governmental organisations).

The principles of dialogue related to the concept of good governance are, in many cases, difficult or even impossible to implement (Jessop 2003). This results from a limited amount of time and money, the need to reach possible recipients in an active manner, and the necessity to normalise the principles of how teams which carry out the dialogue function (compare the course and conclusiveness of discourses with implementing the conclusions in the stream of decisions related to the ruling process). As a result, the administrative system has to accept those teams which, in a defective manner, participate in the meta-management process, i.e. the management of the process of public and social cooperation (ibid.).

In the 1990s the concept of good governance, despite its imperfections, influenced the normative programmes of public administration reforms formulated by the World Bank (WB 1997) and the European Commission (WPG 2001). After 1989, such institutions influenced the reforms of public administration in Poland, which is why the concept of good governance is a point of reference for the analyses presented in this article.

According to the normative concept of good governance, public administration reform needs correction in the following areas: a) transparency of the activity of administrative bodies for citizens and public opinion; b) participation of citizens in administrative works on all ruling levels, with special emphasis on the narrow civil dialogue, i.e. the participation of non-governmental organisations in the programming, implementing and monitoring of public policies; c) assessing public administration in its responsibility for the fulfilment of public policies and clear division of competences between the legislative and executive authorities; d) the effectiveness of ruling, i.e. improving the potential of public administration to take optimum and thrifty actions based on the principle of subsidiarity; e) the coherence of administrative actions within the scope of public policies, both in the horizontal dimension (see multi-level ruling) and in the vertical dimension, in the form of the integration of sector policies (MRR 2008). The concept of good governance assumes that the above mentioned values should be followed both by the public administration and non-governmental organisations. This institutional change cannot only include a change in legal rules. The administrative reforms carried out on the basis of acts which 'decentre' the ruling may be a failure if they come across an obstacle in the form of local cultural standards that influence the course of cooperation among the sectors (Scott 2001: 52).

Local Civil Dialogue—The Existing Data

In Poland there are legal regulations which standardise cooperation between public administration and non-governmental organisations (Rymsza 2013). Apart from the Polish Constitution, a very important law is the Act on Non-Profit Activity and Voluntary Work passed in 2003 (abbreviated in Polish to UDPP). This act includes, *inter alia*, regulations that standardise local civil dialogue. Some of these regulations are mandatory, others are not. The non-mandatory regulations of UDPP are similar to the tools given to local government politicians that help them properly define the legal framework of local cooperation between sectors, which is later fulfilled by officials. Polish law obliges self-government administration to engage in dialogue with NGOs while respecting the principles of the normative concept of good governance. Moreover, it obliges self-government administration to announce social consultation while preparing certain local laws in a way that makes it pos-

sible for interested parties to comment on the consultation documents. Such consultations are publicly announced and summarised.

Let us analyse the above mentioned regulations based on a case study. According to UDPP, communes in Poland are obliged to prepare acts of local law every year. Such acts are called 'Annual Programmes of Cooperation with Non-Governmental Organisations' (Polish abbreviation: RPW). These acts are important for cooperation between the commune councils and the 3rd sector. In 2015 most communes (86%) prepared and adopted such a document. In the case of communes with a large number of inhabitants, which are—at the same time—towns with the rights of a county, the percentage was 97% (Monitoring 2016).

Since 2010 commune councils in Poland are obliged to consult RPW drafts with non-governmental organisations before such acts are submitted for voting on by the commune council. The consultation must be announced publicly, making it possible for organisations cooperating with a given council to submit their remarks. The results of such consultations must be made available to citizens. According to the analysis of Polish self-governments carried out in 2011 by the Association 'Klon/Jawor', most commune councils that were analysed (68%) did not fulfil the obligation to announce consultations despite passing the RPW by the commune. The percentage was less than half as much among communes which were towns with the rights of a county—26% (Przewłocka et al. 2013). Analysis carried out by the government in 2015 indicated that self-government administration (the data in the report was presented for communes, counties and regions[1] together) often carries out consultation based on simple forms of communication, such as presenting the draft acts on websites (34%) and the ability to access the documents in the council office (32%). The communication channels which make contact with the council easier, such as traditional mail or e-mail, are used less frequently (mail—7%, e-mail—10%). The councils hardly ever used active forms of carrying out consultation, such as consulting conferences (9%), working meetings (7%) and working groups (8%) (Monitoring 2016: 55). This fact is significant if we take into account that there is a threat that public administration may become dependent on cooperation with selected partners, and that officials may fail to access new sources of information (MPiPS 2011).

In order to counterbalance the above mentioned possibility, let us look at local civil dialogue in Poland from the perspective of data related to the 3rd sector. In 2012, a minority of non-governmental organisations (35%) declared that they participated in social consultation or submitted their remarks to documents prepared by the commune councils (Przewłocka et al. 2013). Such a result is not surprising, as many Polish communes do not fulfil their obligation to announce public consultations. What is more interesting is the fact that as many as 85% of non-governmental organisations make contact with the commune council in which they are registered.[2] In case of half of them, those contacts are frequent and regular. It is worth emphasizing that 46% of NGOs declare that they maintain informal interactions with the councils, using, *inter alia*, their private connections (ibid.). The above information reveals the backstage of the local civil dialogue—such dialogue is often carried out outside social consultation, during normal contact between officials and their visitors.

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[1] Poland is divided into sixteen regions, which are called voivodeships.

[2] The above result is a mean for all the communes. In villages the percentage was slightly higher (95%), and in towns of more than 200,000 inhabitants it was a little lower (71%).

The Author's Own Research

The data related to local civil dialogue inspired me to create my own research programme (Piróg 2016). I focused on large communes, i.e. towns of more than 200,000 inhabitants. As I have already mentioned, most of these communes conduct social consultation every year. Also, I have already quoted the data according to which a lot of non-governmental organisations fail to participate in the consultation processes.

The aim of my research project was to discuss the communication models of NGOs with town councils, including the passiveness of NGOs in social consultations. I carried out the research in 2014, in two regional capital cities which announce their consultations regularly. In these towns there were many non-governmental organisations, which gave me the opportunity to diagnose a wide range of communication models. One of those towns was in the group of the biggest and richest regional capital cities in Poland, and the other was among the smallest and poorest.[3] The research included analysis of official documents and interviews with 29 leaders of NGOs. In the documents I found the information on the amount of subsidies received by the organisations from the town, as well as on the participation of these organisations in consultation processes. While interviewing the leaders, I reached the organisations which were characterised by at least one of these three features: a) participation in the RPW consultations; b) using public subsidies given by the town; c) participation in social movements that were important and recognisable in the media, and that aim at changing public policies carried out by the town. The interviews did not only refer to models of communication of a given NGO with the town council, they also included questions concerning personal connections between the analysed organisation and the town council (sometimes such connections were visible in the official documents). I identified the personal connections with the performance of political functions in a given town by NGO board members (such functions included town councillors, members of commissions functioning at the town councils, advisors and attorneys of the president of the town).

Dialogue of the Satisfied

The main typology axis of communication models was the division of organisations into those which were either satisfied or dissatisfied in their communication with the town authorities. Organisations satisfied with the local civil dialogue were hardly ever involved in social consultations, choosing less transparent forms of communication with the officials and trying to influence the politicians directly. I distinguished two types of entities in the group of such NGOs:

1. Organisations that do not feel the need to reinforce their cooperation with the town authorities. Within this sub-type I defined two kinds of organisation:
   - Organisations which provided simple, standardised services ordered by the town, almost completely (85–100%) financed from public resources. The provision of such services did not cause any serious economic or organisational problems, it

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[3] The names of the towns were not given due to the protection of the respondents' identity.

was carried out according to legal regulations and supervised at a higher level than local state institutions. For the analysed organisations, providing services for the town council was a secondary activity. They did not feel the need to engage in dialogue with the officials concerning the aims, assumptions and ways of fulfilling their task. They were not interested in influencing politicians.

- Organisations which declared a lack of any need to cooperate with the town council—in either financial or other terms (including the need for dialogue). Such entities did not obtain or hardly ever obtained subsidies from the town, and the subsidies which they did obtain were insignificant in the structure of their budgets. Their activity was based on other sources of income.

2. Organisations that intensively cooperate with the town authorities. Such organisations provided public services according to the request of the town council, and their members performed, *inter alia*, the functions of councillors, directors of important municipal institutions, or advisors to town presidents. They hardly ever participated in social consultation, but on the rare occasions when they did so, they declared full satisfaction with such consultations. They did not communicate with the commune authorities through the media. These organisations influenced local policy via direct communication with officials and councillors. They were given large self-government subsidies which constituted more than half (sometimes up to 90%) of their total income. I divided the organisations of this sub-type into two groups:

- Organisations that are economically strong, which were partners of the town council. They used the subsidies given by the town and obtained public or private funds from other sources. These resources allowed them to provide public services addressed to the town inhabitants.
- Organisations that were economically weak, which were in a clientelist relation with the town authorities.

All organisations related to the town council were characterised by two things: declaring satisfaction with the way the town communicated with NGOs and a high dependence on liking the local authority elites (vide financial dependence). Leaders of economically weaker non-governmental organisations mentioned problems in their cooperation with the town council, despite that fact they declared full satisfaction with the way local civil dialogue was carried out. In conflict situations these organisations avoided public channels of political communication and social consultation, which may be explained by the complicated nature of the patron-client relation. It is worth mentioning that the degree of dependence on the patron was not the same in the organisations. Stronger NGOs were important partners of the town council in fulfilling the objectives of the local social policy. This resulted in their ability to gather social resources uncontrolled by the town authorities. This feature strengthened their position in relation to officials and councillors.

Dialogue of the Dissatisfied

The second type of organisation includes NGOs whose leaders declared dissatisfaction with the local civil dialogue carried out by the town council. Such organisations hardly ever par-

ticipated in social consultations, emphasising their superficiality and ineffectiveness. These
NGOs used forms of dialogue that did not require communication with the town council
in the public space. Some NGOs also tried other forms of political lobbying: influencing
the commune councillors, cooperation with the media and social movements, and lobby-
ing on higher than local levels of governance. The following sub-types of NGOs may be
distinguished here:

1. Organisations associated with a strong social movement. The position of such organisa-
   tions in communication with the town council resulted from their strong social mandate
   and support of political elites. In my research two such entities occurred:

   - An organisation related to a municipal movement that aimed at changing the trans-
     port policy of the town authorities. The organisation did not use the subsidies of-
     fered by the town. It became an important political player due to the fact that it
     organised large street protests and managed to force the authorities to announce
     a local referendum. Its arguments were absorbed by the local political elites. This
     way, the organisation became a significant partner of the town council, and some
     of its members were given administrative job positions. That organisation practised
     direct communication with the officials. It hardly ever participated in social con-
     sultations (depreciating their meaning) and it preferred a less transparent dialogue.
     Due to its position, it was able to influence the decisions of politicians and officials.
     As for the conflicts that appeared in its everyday cooperation with the town council,
     it did not want to escalate them or make them public, as this way the organisation
     would risk losing its influence. Passiveness in the consultations was related to the
     organisation's strength resulting from the support of political elites and previous
     successes in organising social protests.

   - A municipal scouting organisation, part of the all-Poland scouting movement, had
     significant influence, not only among politicians and town officials, but also among
     the elites of higher ranks of national power. The organisation used local government
     subsidies to organise the free time of local youth in a cheaper and more effective
     manner. Such subsidies constituted a small part of its annual budget (less than 10%).
     Scouting movements are apolitical, so the above mentioned organisation neither
     engaged in open conflicts with the town council nor expressed their claims during
     social consultations carried out in the public space. Instead, the organisation ac-
     tivated an informal network of scouting fans who existed among politicians and
     officials. In a difficult situation, the organisation influenced town policy through
     lobbying in the town council and looking for political support among people who
     perform key functions in the bodies of government authorities. The position of the
     scouting organisation in relation with town officials was connected with the unique
     resources in the form of a large number of well-trained and disciplined scouts who,
     as volunteers, helped with the organisation of local public events.

2. Organisations that enforce lawfulness. Such organisations did not obtain any subsidies
   from the town council. They functioned due to the work of volunteers and used other
   sources of financing. They performed the functions of local watch-dog organisations,
   acting on the basis of rights given to citizens. They looked for mistakes made by the
   town council and reproved officials for each case of law breaking. If it was not effec-

tive, the organisations would sue the officials, and courts usually confirmed that the organisations were right. Organisations of this type were usually aware of their position guaranteed by legal acts and their autonomy. They perceived social consultation as a tool of civil dialogue that had minor relevance in interactions with local administration, and preferred direct communication with officials. In case of any problems, they were not afraid of making the conflict public, they encouraged the media to speak about the problem and they started legal proceedings.

3. Organisations from the sector of culture, competing for the subsidies of the town council. Such organisations produced cultural events. Town subsidies constituted a small part of their annual budgets (10–20%), but they were important from a strategic point of view. Other grant-givers asked them to obtain money from many different sources. In this situation the lack of financial support from the town council made it difficult or even impossible to produce a particular event. Such organisations competed with one another for prestige, the spectators' attention and public (local and higher than local) patronage. They were distrustful of other organisations of this type and they doubted whether it was possible to build a coalition with them. They avoided involvement in public social consultations announced by the town council, preferring dialogue based on individual contact with officials. They believed that caring about the quality of their cultural events would help them fight their competitors and obtain the permanent favour of the town council. Weaker organisations of this type did not make public any claims related to possible changes in the town's policy. Stronger entities based their self-confidence on their reputation and ability to obtain money from different sources. In difficult situations they used such forms of political communication as street theatre or activity in the media.

4. Organisations financially dependent on the town. These organisations based their activity on town subsidies which constituted more than half (even up to 90%) of their annual income. They avoided open conflicts with officials, so they did not express their claims during public social consultations. They were not satisfied with the quality of communication with the town council as they had no good contacts with the highest town officials. Two kinds of entities occurred in this group:

   • An organisation that obtained a town subsidy despite the unwillingness of the president of the town. While starting its business activity, the organisation faced the competition of another organisation which had been carrying out a similar kind of activity in the town and of which the president of the town was fond. Competing with that organisation resulted in success, i.e. a town council subsidy was obtained for the activity similar to the activity of the other organisation. Such success was possible due to the fact that the leaders of the organisation in question were supported by lower-rank town officials and by town councillors (also from the president's environment), and they knew the law, as well as other rules of their local politics. Despite the success, the organisation kept avoiding public forms of communication with the town council, as it might have been harmful to its interests.

   • Organisations which lost the financial support of the town. Such NGOs joined the local associations of non-governmental organisations, which lobbied for improvement in the quality of cooperation between the town and 3rd sector organisations.

They made their claims public only as a last resort, when their activity in a given town was seriously threatened. Some of them, after losing their source of income from the town council, did not continue their activity in a given town. Others gradually took up the role of non-governmental organisations which, later in this article, I shall call 'the promoters of good governance.'

5. Strong, independent partner. In my research I came across an organisation whose functioning did not depend on town subsidies (it obtained a lot of money from other public sources). It was a foundation acting on the national level. It provided financial resources necessary to satisfy the needs of disabled inhabitants of the town, and its employees offered substantial support to town officials. The organisation did not feel the need to participate in public social consultations and it did not have any problems concerning cooperation with local officials and politicians. The town council sometimes asked the organisation to give its opinion on key issues. The organisation hardly ever took part in social consultations—it only did so at the request of local authorities. Despite being satisfied concerning communication with the town council, the foundation in question noticed a shortage of local civil dialogue which affected other non-governmental organisations. Sometimes the foundation discussed this issue during public consultation meetings, but such occasions were rare and of a secondary nature.

6. 'Promoters of good governance.' The group of NGOs dissatisfied with the civil dialogue carried out by the town council included organisations which promoted a change in communication models, referring to values close to the ideals of the good governance concept. Such organisations believed that the town council should be equally open to communication with all interested organisations. 'Promoters of good governance' often participated in public social consultation and tried to lobby officials and politicians for the improvement of such consultation and for organising it more frequently. Organisations of this type aimed at the systemic change of the town council's practices related to creating dialogue with citizens and NGOs. While doing so, the organisations faced passivity or open resistance—not only from officials, but also from other NGOs which did not share their opinion. Another important conclusion is the fact that the 'promoters of good governance' showed a utilitarian approach to civil dialogue carried out by the town council. On one hand, they emphasized the role of announcing public social consultations, but on the other hand—in order to advance their own claims—they tried to communicate with officials through forms of dialogue characterised by low transparency as well as lack of openness and inclusiveness. In this group of organisations we may distinguish two very different kind of NGOs:

    •   'Professional promoters.' Such organisations had a strong position in their relationship with the town council. They did not obtain subsidies from the town, and they had no personal connections with the local authorities. They mainly used public grants given by the bodies of central government authorities and by the European Union, as well as the support of other NGOs, private sponsors and volunteers. Due to such resources, these organisations sometimes offered town officials and politicians the opportunity to carry out social consultations, and they educated non-governmental organisations and local government elites in the advantages of following certain models of public and social cooperation. Moreover, 'professional promot-

ers' created and supervised the local associations of NGOs, i.e. the coalitions of entities clearly aimed at changing the town's policy towards non-governmental organisations. Also, such promoters knew a lot about different practices of governance occurring in territorial self-governments in Poland and abroad. They were members of all-Polish networks and coalitions of NGOs, exchanging information on good governance practices and the effectiveness of cooperation with self-governments. Some of these coalitions carried out lobbying-advisory activity in parliament and government during the preparation of some legal changes.

- 'Unprofessional promoters.' Such organisations were characterised by a weak position in their relationship with the town council, which is why they decided to participate in the local coalition of non-governmental organisations. Often it was their last chance to survive, as they did so after losing the town's subsidies. Such coalitions were initiated and supervised by 'professional promoters.' They reminded the coalitions of customers who wished to reinforce their position in cooperation with the patron. At the same time, such coalitions were platforms for networking, education and exchanging knowledge. The coalitions created common official opinions concerning town policy. Additionally, 'professional promoters' encouraged organisations involved in the coalitions to fill vacancies and working groups appointed by the town council in order to carry out civil dialogue.

Dialogue of the Connected Ones

The results of the presented research explain the condition of local civil dialogue from a perspective of connections between NGOs and public administration. Most types of non-governmental organisations diagnosed in my analysis were characterised by unwillingness or the lack of need to participate in local social consultations. Such organisations were not partners of the town council, but 'clients' who paid attention to the quality of relations with a stronger 'patron' (cf. Emerson 1962; Coleman 1986). This was not the only reason for their passiveness. Other NGOs, who were passive regarding consultation, included those who had a strong position in their relationship with officials. First of all, they had their own resources and programmes of action that were attractive from the perspective of the town council. In such cases, the officials, upon their own initiative, listened to the arguments of those organisations, taking into account their advice while planning their actions. Second, such NGOs had their own influence among politicians and town councillors. Due to such connections they did not have to argue with officials, but they could lobby for legal changes that could influence the work of the town council.

Clientelist behaviour may be explained through reference to institutional connections between the 3rd sector and public administration. In democratic welfare states the activity of many non-governmental organisations does not go beyond the fulfilment of the requests of public administration; they resemble a self-financing civil service (Załęski 2012; Brinkerhoff 2002). This is related both to making NGOs dependent on public subsidies and to the fact that the functioning of NGOs depends on legal regulations and administrative decisions that impose certain rules of action on them. In democratic welfare states, the increase in

the number of NGOs at the end of the 20th century did not match the increase in the number of citizens declaring their membership in NGOs (Putnam 2000).[4] This phenomenon is of special importance in Poland and other post-communist countries in which citizens are not very interested in participating in the structures of the 3rd sector (Czapiński 2015). Consequently, this weakens the influence of the 3rd sector on the democratic system of governance.

The results of my research match the negative evaluation of models of cooperation between public administration and non-governmental organisations in Poland. Such cooperation is characterised by a strong position of the administration which results from legal acts and from the low self-organisation of society in 3rd sector structures (Wygnański 2008; Gliński 2015). It reinforces the phenomenon of 'scattered statism' which permeates the political networks (Mayntz and Scharpf 1995; Staniszkis 2003) and is expressed in the specific culture of public-social cooperation called the 'contact culture' which does not include partnership and dialogue (Rymsza and Zimmer 2004). The legal norms related to the local civil dialogue are not reflected in the actual actions of public administration. In this context, the administration is accused of fulfilling legal guidelines in a superficial, covert and manipulative manner (Stępień 2009; Schimanek 2007). This accusation also refers to how social consultations were conducted (MPiPS 2011).

Finally, I would like to emphasize that neither the European concept of good governance, nor the laws changing the behaviour of public administration in Poland, forbade officials from getting involved in forms of civil dialogue that are characterised by a low level of transparency. Such forms make it possible to carry out dialogue which is based on bilateral relations that exist between officials and non-governmental organisations, and which is sometimes carried out 'behind closed doors.' The results of the research presented in this article prove that diagnosing the models of civil dialogue and explaining them should go beyond assessing its imperfect form seen from the perspective of the normative concept of good ruling. It would be more useful to realistically notice the fact that in democratic welfare states NGOs and public administration create a public-social network of cooperation. Within this network, non-governmental organisations have varied economic potential and a different intensity of political influence. This, in turn, affects the way NGOs communicate with officials, and is one of the reasons which explain the passive attitude of non-governmental organisations in social consultation announced by the public administration.[5]

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[4] It is worth mentioning that Putnam focused on American society and didn't distinguish between different kinds of NGOs. Research conducted later in the UK revealed that Putnam's conclusions were imperfect and did not apply to British service organisations, which had arisen and developed in the last three decades of the 20th century. Putnam's conclusions pertain to other types of organisations in the UK, like youth organisations, traditional women's organisations and the church (Hall 2002). Nowadays, professional service organisations are replacing public administration in producing social services and competing for public donations. They generate employment and civic activity, but their existence corresponds with privatisation programmes led by government.

[5] The phenomenon also occurs in the Communications between NGOs with the administration of the European Union. Contrary to the slogans repeated by E.U. officials, informal groups and bilateral contacts play an important role in such communication. These forms of creating dialogue with E.U. officials are believed to be effective, although only NGOs rooted in the best-organised political networks may use them (Fazi and Smith 2006).

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