

Policy Networks and the Problem of Governance in the Process of Public Policy Making in the Postmodern Democratic Society, particularly in Slovakia¹

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Abstract

Policy Networks, a term used by politic sciences reflects the deepening and complexity of postmodern governance. Term network along with its six types offers a new interpretation of relationships among the state, civil society and market, emphasizing the horizontal instead of hierarchical approach to power, i.e. to the competence of decision-making. To look into today's governance, one has to examine the growing complexity of public activity. This complexity accrues from the instable socially-organizational environment of public activity and from the transformation of electoral policy into policy of problems. The above mentioned is elaborated on in the presented article.

Keywords: Policy Network, Governance, Public Policy, Postmodern Democratic Society

Taylor² determined public as one of the two forms of civil society (the other one should be market economy). Just as civil society is an immanent and defining feature of liberal society - along with representative government, lawful state, guarantees of undisputable rights and certain freedoms, maximizing of free goods and collective governance of citizens over themselves in accordance with rule of law based on equality³ - public is very well an immanent feature of civil society. Existence of the public is pretended even where, in reality, it is completely suppressed.⁴ *Where civil society along with its various free leagues is not created, the pulse of freedom is very slow, Taylor says.* Civil society stands away from any official influence, for it seeks non-political goals. As a part of civil society (along with modern market), the public has a non-political, thence enlightened, discursive, critical, normative and secular character. In the quoted article, Taylor brilliantly explains all of the listed features of the public and market.⁵

¹ Napísanie danej state je súčasťou riešenia grantovej úlohy VEGA (Vedeckej grantovej agentúry Ministerstva školstva SR) 1/3590/06: Genéza a tvorba verejnej politiky v SR.

² Taylor, CH. (1994): *Liberální politika a veřejnost*. In: *Liberální společnost*. Kol. autorov. Praha: Filosofia, nakladatelství Filosofického ústavu AV ČR, pp. 19-39.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 17-18.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 17-54.

Broadening of civil society and deep-rooting of democracy in post-modern, but risk-implying⁶ and liquid⁷ society is connected with the creation of various kinds of networks of protagonists working as initiators and intermediaries at formulating of politically and publicly serious problems of the given society.

A number of policy network researches has been oriented on the conflict between pluralism and neo-corporatism in the process of public policy realization.

The term 'policy network' first came up at problems of theories dealing with the "processes of interest groups intermediation" which were developed by neo-corporatism and pluralism. Pluralism assumes that everyone can make use of state resources in open competitive system while neo-corporatism claims that only strong economic groups can access resources of power. In reality, it is genuinely possible to watch representation of interests on political scene in the closed field integrating public and private protagonists, and on the other side, proliferation of these fields.⁸

Closeness of interest representation in the closed field

Works coming from the USA of the 50s and 60s of the 20th century try to oppose the pluralism that was until then dominant at explaining the state-society relationships and show that American industrial policies resulted from narrow, stable and, most of all, informal relationships among industrial lobby groups, representatives of state departments and Congress members. These policies were described as a result of coalitions of protagonists who swap and change in *subgovernments* or "intermediary governments" between industrial and economic groups and the government, and who are supposed to implicitly close the door to governance for the majority of other interests of industrial branches and create public policies based on informal and elitist interactions. Terms such as "iron triangle" or

⁶ Beck, U. (2004): *Riziková společnost. Na cestě k jiné modernitě*. Praha: SLON.

⁷ Bauman, Z. (2002): *Úvahy o postmoderní době*. 2. vydanie. Praha: SLON; Bauman, Z. (2002): *Tekutá modernita*. Praha: Mladá fronta.

⁸ Massardier, G. (2003): *Politique et action publiques*. Paris: Armand Colin, p. 129; Svensson, P. (1995): *Teorie demokracie*. Brno: CDK, p. 122-131; Jodl, M. (1994): *Teorie elity a problém elity*. Praha: Victoria Publishing, p. 9-39.

“intermediary government” have become a common tool of describing the relationships between the state and interest groups.⁹

Politics experts Lowi¹⁰ and Peters¹¹ describe the “iron triangle” as a “subsystem” where “symbiotic relationships” and interests among representatives of interest groups and state departments and Congress have become close, and even similar. The state can find support for realization of its programs in interest groups. In fact, today’s interest groups organize gaining of state services for their own good.¹² These “symbiotic” relationships come to light at the limits of public institutions and interest representations organizations. Everyday life of public policies is discussed within these autonomous social non-organizational fields.¹³

The pluralist scheme of public policies making differs from the neo-corporatist one. There is no single organization with a monopoly on relationship with the state; instead, there are many protagonists slipping through the gaps of institutions and very safely avoiding state paternalism. If the case were opposite, competing at the market of access to governance would be opposite and public authorities would engage in their own interests. Thus is the assumption of the policy network idea.

Extension of representation fields: inter-network competition

Hugh Heclo, claiming pluralism, saw a heuristic advantage in the term “network” and criticized the “iron triangle” network as a too elitist one. Heclo suggested a different view of government-to-lobby-groups relationships within industry. He used the term *issue network* to describe the less closed social fields where the number of protagonists was much higher than the authors-elitists claimed, but less integrated and more episodic to such extent that access of lobby groups to government and American Congress was more obvious than elitists said. For Heclo, it is important to regard the severe extension of interests in competing for access to power, which is not possibly negligible and simply expressible as a triangle through which one might define politics.

⁹ Potůček, M.; Vass, L.; Kotlas, P. (2005): *Veřejná politika jako proces*. In: Potůček, M. a kol. (2005). *Veřejná politika*. Praha: SLON v spolupráci s NISPAcee, p 56; Malíková, L. (2003): *Veřejná politika. Aktéri a procesy*. Bratislava: Univerzita Komenského, učebné texty, p 40.

¹⁰ Lowi, T. (1969). *The End of Liberalism*. Norton.

¹¹ Peters, G. (1986). *American Public Policy*. Mac Millan.

¹² McConnel, G. (1966): *Private power and American Democracy*. Knopf.

¹³ Freeman, J. L. (1955): *The Political Process*. London: Doubleday.

A significant contribution of pluralists to opening the problem of policy networks lied in elaboration of many explicative models of interest groups > government > state relationships. The most important pluralist conclusions on policy networks follow:

1. networks are extensive,
2. networks fragmentize the state into a number of opposing segments that we call networks,
3. recent society exists in a sort of “local rules” or opposing policy networks in which public policies are created..

Criticism of neo-corporatist paradigms reflecting the crisis of the representative ability of politically-administrative regimes and characteristics of the statist model of public policy making (particularly of the Austrian model¹⁴) lead to creation of a newer research branch devoted to the term public policy network or public activity network, thence *policy network*.¹⁵ If the term network is a classic sociological term, it acquires growing importance for the analysis of public activity during the 80s of the 20th century, until it stands for one of the most dynamic disciplines within political science, most of all within *policy analysis*. Recently, it is integrated into wider perception of the term “governance”. In Czech political literature, term *policy network* was virtuously presented by Petr Fiala and Klaus Schubert in their *Moderní analýza politiky*.¹⁶

The term policy networks describes “actionist orientation”¹⁷ of public activity. Particular decisions of public policy come from “local rules” that limit relationships which authorize them. Public policies of this approach stem from social relationships among many autonomous protagonists. Within the paradigm “of construction and preservation of local rules, they ensure regulation of behavior and integration of various divergent, if not conflicting strategies of the given protagonists.” Dynamics of “market relationships” and “systems of alliances” are just those which structure the “field of activity”.¹⁸ In this scheme, the logic of explicating public policies is endogenous. As E. Friedberg explains, „studying partial social systems is only worthwhile if we accept their relative independence.”

¹⁴ Hassenteufel, P. (1990): *Où en es tle paradigme corporatiste?* In: *Politix*, 1990, Nr. 12, p. 75-81; Hassenteufel, P. (1991): *Pratiques représentatives et construction identitaire: une approche des coordination*. In: *Revue française de science politique*, Vol. 41, 1991, Nr. 1, p. 5-27

¹⁵ Le Galès, P. (1998): *Régulation, gouvernance et territoire*. In: Commaille, J., Jobert, B. (eds.). *La métamorphose de la régulation politique*. Paris: LGDJ, p. 203-240.

¹⁶ Fiala, P.; Schubert, K. (2000): *Moderní analýza politiky. Uvedení do teorií a metod policy analysis*. Brno: BARRISTER & PRINCIPAL.

¹⁷ Friedberg, E. (1993): *Le pouvoir et la règle. Dynamique de l'action organisée*. Paris: Seuil, p. 251; Massardier, G. (2003): *Politique et action publiques*. Paris: Armand Colin, p. 127.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 178.

On the other hand, this brings up the must to explain relationships between protagonists and the peculiar system they are a part of. This system contains configuration of protagonists, power structure and rules of the game forming exchanges of protagonists and mutual actions. As a result, the problem is in the access “issuing from actions of protagonists in order to understand how schemes are constructed and transformed in these actions. Without these schemes, actions of protagonists would have no sense or coherence.”¹⁹ Patrick Le Galès puts his idea about policy networks in a similar manner: “Urging their growing independence naturally leads to omitting the problem of public activity or of what is left for the state to do“.²⁰

Policy networks

This way of political reality conceptualization is a part of the fact that traditional tools poorly regard a certain number of transformations that most recently define the relationships between state and society. According to Kenis and Schneider, number and importance of “organized collectives” significantly grow along with differentiation of politics and administration. More and more political protagonists influence public policy making - *overcrowded policy making*²¹; influence and operation of public policy expands, state is decentralized or fragmented, boundaries between the public and the private diminish, forms of “private government” that take part in public policy or take care for “public order” are multiplied, national policy is “trans-nationalized” and finally, mutual dependence and complexity of political and social problems grow. In their principle, these problems concern access to political agenda and creation of expertise in the process of public policy making.²²

The term “network” answers the questions above, for it offers a new interpretation of relationships between the state and civil society, emphasizing the horizontal instead of the hierarchical character of access to power along with the competence to make decisions. This term also emphasizes the hierarchical character of access to the relatively informal exchange

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 251.

²⁰ Le Galès, P.; Thatcher, M. (eds.) (1995): *Les réseaux de politique publique. Débats autour des policy networks*. Paris: L'Harmattan, p. 21.

²¹ Richardson, Jordan 1979. In: Muller, P., Surel, Y. (1998): *L'analyse des politiques publiques*. Paris: Monchrestien, p. 90.

²² Kenis, Schneider, In: Muller, P., Surel, Y. (1998): *L'analyse des politiques publiques*. Paris: Monchrestien, p. 91.

among network protagonists, thus multiplying the peripheral exchanges linked to various positions of protagonists in the political system.

Petr Fiala and Klaus Schubert²³ see policy networks as “*links of pluralist intermediation of interests and inter-governmental decision making processes. Beside that, interest groups, being differently interconnected within policy networks, use these networks among others as an opportunity to seek their own goals, thus producing a policy without an integrating centre*”. These authors thus relativize the importance of state within public policy making in a postmodern society. Therefore, power in policy networks supposes autonomous, complementary and relatively same or equal protagonists, meaning partners.²⁴

Rhodes and Marsh define network as “*a group or a complex of organizations connected by mutual dependence on each other’s resources. These groups differ from other groups and complexes of organizations in the structure of this dependence*”²⁵, and thus emphasize the variety of relationships between heterogeneous social groups and state. Term *policy network* emphasizes the diversity of protagonists participating in the relatively continuous character of groups thus created. The term network introduces certain stability of these relationships and provides various analytical tools for understanding how interactions of public and private protagonists are created.

There are many definitions of the term *policy network*. It is not easy to define it perfectly. Term *policy network* reveals social order built of “local social orders” which fragmentize and relativize the society-state relationship and which speak of the contradictory evolution of public activity.²⁶

In Veřejní politika²⁷ [Public Policy], the textbook of M. Potůček, L. Vass and P. Kotlas, similarly to L. Malíková²⁸, the authors introduce the term iron triangles which describes a situation where network protagonists (in the USA comprising the government, Congress departments and interest groups), act like autonomous and partner subjects and create a stable alliance of three members. This alliance conducts the US public programs in

²³ Fiala, P.; Schubert, K. (2000): *Moderní analýza politiky. Uvedení do teorií a metod policy analysis*. Brno: BARRISTER & PRINCIPAL, pp. 136-137.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 139.

²⁵ Rhodes, Marsh, In: Le Galès, P.; Thatcher, M. (eds.) (1995): *Les réseaux de politique publique. Débats autour des policy networks*. Paris: L'Harmattan, p. 43.

²⁶ Massardier, G. (2003): *Politique et action publiques*. Paris: Armand Colin., pp. 128-129.

²⁷ Potůček, M.; Vass, L.; Kotlas, P. (2005): *Veřejná politika jako proces*. In: Potůček, M. a kol. (2005). *Veřejná politika*. Praha: SLON v spolupráci s NISPAcee, p. 56.

²⁸ Malíková, L. (2003): *Veřejná politika. Aktéri a procesy*. Bratislava: Univerzita Komenského, učebné texty, p. 40.

the direction complying with the compatible goals of all three network protagonists – either private network protagonists or public network protagonists, representing public interests.

Parallel networks meet and collide and thus, public policy is dynamically created. "Collective interest has become, just how its name indicates, a set of interests".²⁹

Really fundamental importance of the term network lies in pointing at various relationships between social groups and state. Rhodes and Marsh name five, more or less open, network types:

- issue network³⁰ regroups its protagonists around the centre of one problem or demand, for instance around protection of a proposed law concerning environment. There can be a big number of people involved in the network, their identity is variable (some can leave or back off, some can enter the network) and mutual dependence of these people is limited by the discussed topic,

- "producers network" is created by a special economic interest which induces relatively limited relationships of mutual independence,

- inter-governmental network stands for horizontal groups of local or territorial authorities,

- professional (or branch) network reflects the existence of organized professions in vertical composition, where a specific expertise strongly unites the network and makes it very different from other network types,

- policy community network is a stable, both horizontal and vertical configuration, in which chosen and independent members share a significant amount of common resources and thus contribute to creation of common outputs (Rhodes and Marsh, In: Le Galès, Thatcher, 1995, p. 44),

- epistemic network³¹ unites specialists of a given field (scientific, expert, consultative) who share common ideas and beliefs about cause-consequence relationships – about episteme, i.e., about scientific and technical knowledge characterizing a certain social group and the one that regulates such group. P.M. Haas adds that this term (epistemic community) marks a particular group of individuals sharing the same general point of view (episteme) who do so because of diffusion of beliefs among lobbyists and "policy decision makers" within the network.

²⁹ Heclo, H.; Wildawski, A. (1974): *The private Government of Public Money, community and Policy inside British Politics*. London: MacMillan, p. 365.

³⁰ Heclo, H. (1978): *Issue Networks and the Executive Establishment*. In: King, A. (ed.): *The new American Political System*. Washington D.C., American Enterprise Institute.

³¹ Haas, 1986, 1992, 3, note 4, 18, Jordan, Richardson, 1983, 1982Massardier, G. (2003): *Politique et action publiques*. Paris: Armand Colin, p. 135-136.

Limits of such typology come to light right away. It is so broad that any form of human organization connected more or less by political decisions can be considered as a network. Differential character of such classification thus creates a danger of consequential weakening. Moreover, as Rhodes and Marsh themselves underline, transfer from one category of network to another is not obvious. It is therefore possible to agree with the authors who suggest that the analysis of networks should be concentrated within two typological extremes. These authors suggest that networks are situated somewhere between policy community and thematic network, which repeatedly welds the canonical opposition between pluralism and neo-corporatism.³²

Policy network types presented by M. Potůček, L. Vass and P. Kotlas in their textbook of Public Policy (*Veřejná politika*) are very similar to the typology given above (issue network, group sub-governments, policy community).³³

Despite its limits, the term network has heuristic importance concerning general reflection on state. Most of all, the term policy network enables putting emphasis on diffusion of boundaries of state and civil society. It also points out the validity of institutional approach in public area where public activity is carried out in more and more gradual or liquid social environment. Configurations of public policy protagonists are no more exclusively concentrated in public organizations (ministries, government) or private companies. They appear in the third sector as well (non-governmental organizations, civil associations), and they are more and more equal.

From this point of view, effective use of the concept of network lies in considering various supplementary factors accruing from multiple positions of protagonists. A protagonist, e.g. a top officer, a company or a unions representative, could participate in many different networks, being an arbitrator or an intermediary.³⁴ As logics of interests meet and interests conflict with cognitive logics that characterize the given subsystem, these protagonists are able to cross the acceptable boundaries between various areas or various groups and in that manner, to express the demands of protagonists in an alternative trustworthy for public policy, and thus finally to control efficient application of public policy. These public policy protagonists can come from civil society, political-administrative apparatus or from private sphere, too. Such mutual relationships among various networks can

³² Hassenteufel, P. (1997). *Les médecines face à l'Etat*. Paris, Presses de Sciences Po.

³³ Potůček, M. a kol. (2005): *Veřejná politika*. Praha: SLON v spolupráci s NISPAcee, p. 56-57.

³⁴ See the term policy broker at Sabatier, In: Večeřa, M. (1993): *Sociální stát. Východiska a přístupy*. Praha: SLON, p. 79.

be replaced by a situation where a number of logics that can be activated one after another coexists in a single network.

As Fiala and Schubert say, constitutive elements of policy networks consist of protagonists, functions, structures, rules of procedure, power and strategies of protagonists.³⁵ In order to understand the character of the policy making process thoroughly, we need to know the structure of protagonists' interests and interactions among them. Different types of societies create different networks of protagonists that function as initiators and intermediaries at political agenda formation.

Fragmentization of society and state and confrontations among public activity networks

Within the term network, social order of postmodern democratic society displays its character by two features.

1. Understanding of political order today is only possible via understanding of state-society separation, which is more common among autonomous social areas including private and public protagonists mobilized on the basis of a particular problem. Suggested understanding of political and social order is therefore a contradiction to "local social orders" that carry many different divergent interests. Each of these interests represents "its reason for activity" and a specific procedure within public policy used to run a certain branch or to carry out a project of economic development. "In reality, the map of making political decisions includes a series of vertical segments where every segment forms an ensemble of organized groups that are generally closed for other groups or for public as a whole."³⁶

The state is as much fragmentized as networks are mobilized for any concrete problem in a concrete sector or as networks are mobilized by a concrete policy. A single service related to a single area will be divided among a number of networks according to the origins of the representatives. In accordance with the given problem, specific networks can start working and thence produce specific partitioning in a concrete service. There are no superior and inferior networks in postmodern society and there is no hierarchy ordering networks together with public organisms. Some networks are strong enough to influence the state, while other

³⁵ Fiala, P.; Schubert, K. (2000): *Moderní analýza politiky. Uvedení do teorií a metod policy analysis*. Brno: BARRISTER & PRINCIPAL, p. 138-140.

³⁶ Jordan, Richardson, 1979, p. 74, quoted by Rhodes and Marsha, 1995, p. 41.

ones stand for informal segments of civil society. On the other hand, the problems a representative deals with can make him or her belong to a number of networks.

Contrary to the pluralist model, theories of neo-institutionalists describe state as being active among interest groups and fully participating (in a fragmented or segmental way) in competition among internal interests within these networks of public and private protagonists.

Public activity networks prove the contradictory evolution of public activity. Dichotomy between horizontal and vertical circulation of resources, between local interests and central government, between pluralism and elitism or corporatism, but also between internal coordination in networks and global issues of governance is created.

Problems of postmodern governance (instead of a conclusion)

The most recent literature on public policy making and on evolution of forms of public activity focusing on *policy networks* analyses the term *governance*. This term is relatively old and it long stayed synonymous to the term government in the English language. In English and French literature, “government” is primarily used to denominate public policy. Many authors used the concept of governance to interpret the changes we can see today in the public policy making process.

Patrick Le Galès put together the problems of policy networks with the problem of governance in postmodern society, claiming transformation of interaction among public policy protagonists. In reality, Le Galès finds ideas of management or administration in the concept of governance, **but without the prime of being approved by a sovereign state** (highlighted by the author). To put up the problem of governance means to repeatedly examine the mutual relationships among civil society, state and market and between the repeating compositions among these various spheres of unclear boundaries.³⁷

Jean Leca, inspired by the works of Renáta Mayntzová, establishes that exercising governmental functions has been more and more complicated, since the task, based on aggregation of socially contradictory demands in plural society, has become overwhelming. This problem creates a dilemma between the representativeness of leaders and efficiency of public policy. It all goes as if government’s activity were contradicting the necessity to regard

³⁷ Le Galès, P. (1998): *Régulation, gouvernance et territoire*. In: Commaille, J., Jobert, B. (eds.). *La métamorphose de la régulation politique*. Paris: LGDJ, p. 203-240

interests of voters with demands more and more contradictory, hard to decipher and of higher numbers.³⁸

Patrick Le Galès defined governance as a process of coordinating activity of protagonists, social groups and institutions, that all intend to reach their own goals discussed and collectively defined in the fragmental and uncertain environment where pluralist interests are expressed. At the same time, he defined the threefold problem recently concerning public activity.³⁹

1. **Technical density and complexity of public activity grows.** Public selections need to consider data coming from more and more heterogeneous scientific, technical, economical, social or political world. Integration of political protagonists into these various worlds of cognitive meaning is growingly problematic.

2. **Socially-organizational environment of public activity is ever more unstable, liquid, doubtful.** Every decision promotes protagonists on various statuses and their integration eliminates boundaries between the public and the private. In the context where elements of decentralization and factors of decision concentration can be combined, public policy gains the form of *multi-level governance*, which weakens an isolated protagonists' ability to act.

3. The increasingly complicated articulation of public policy making processes emphasizes **electoral policy**, i.e. ways of political elites selection, forms of public discussion, conditions of competition for empowered posts and representation of citizens on one hand, and processes highlighting the **policy of problems**, i.e. formulation of public problems and their solutions, representation of interest groups, i.e. processes of public policy realization on the other hand.⁴⁰ We can state that relationship between electoral competition demands on representativeness of political protagonists and necessity of public policy making by plurality of protagonists is more and more unclear.

In these conditions, governance seems more like a **process of governance**, in which coherence of public activity (creation of public problems, predictable solutions and forms of their realization) **is not included in the activity of political-administrative elite** which is relatively homogenous and centralized, losing its monopoly on constructing cognitive and normative matrices of public policy. Instead, the process of governance is realized **by**

³⁸ Leca, K. (1996): *La „gouvernance“ de la France sous la Cinquième République. Une perspective de sociologie comparative.* In : Arcy, F., Roubain, L. (eds.). *De la V^e République à l'Europe.* Paris: Presses de Sciences Po, p. 329-365

³⁹ Le Galès: *Régulation, gouvernance et territoire.*

⁴⁰ For this difference, see Leca 1996, p. 345.

coordinating multi-levels and multi-protagonists with unpredictable result of their activity depending on the ability of public and private protagonists to define the area of common meanings, mobilize expertise of various origin and place forms of responsibility and legitimacy of decisions into the world of **electoral policy along with the world of policy of problems** (highlighted above by the author)⁴¹.

Translation: Branislav Král'.

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⁴¹ Marks, Scharpf, Streeck, Schmitter, 1996, In: Muller, Surel, 1998, p. 96.

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Abstrakt

Prehlbovanie demokratizácie a zložitosti postmoderného vládnutia odráža v politickej vede pojem politické siete (policy networks). Pojem sieť a jej šesť typov ponúka novú interpretáciu

vzťahov medzi štátom, občianskou spoločnosťou a trhom, zdôrazňujúc horizontálny, nie hierarchický charakter prístupu k moci, teda ku kompetentnosti rozhodovať. Položiť dnes otázku o vládnutí, znamená skúmať narastanie zložitosti verejnej činnosti. Táto zložitosť a komplexnosť vyplýva z nestáleho sociálno-organizačného prostredia verejnej činnosti a z premeny volebnej politiky na politiku problémov. O zmienenom pojednáva predkladaná stať.