

The Emergence of Inter-Agency to Address Social Needs amid Economic Crisis in Greece. An Irresolute Transformation

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Abstract

The economic crisis in Greece has acted as a catalyst for changes, and has promoted the participation of a plethora of organizations, state and non-state actors, in local interventions forming the recognition of a new welfare-mix with local governments which keep the central role. Local collaboration schemes, however, were based on a fragile background and face significant difficulties that hinder, if not cancel, their development and contribution to social protection. The barriers indicate the divisive central policy, the cautiousness of state actors but also the weakness of non-state actors. The paper aims to highlight the necessary conditions for the development of inter-agency schemes and, in turn, to examine the degree in which these conditions are met in a range of cases from the broader region of the capital city, Athens. Through the case study, the barriers regarding the operation and development of inter-agency schemes are shed light on as they are identified in the discourse of a number of key-informants from both the municipalities and local NGOs. It turns out that despite the need to develop broad schemes of collaboration, the conditions are far from ideal, while the future perspective is uncertain.

Keywords: Greece, local social policy, inter-agency collaborations, welfare-mix, NGOs

Introduction

The Greek economic crisis during the last decade has served as a leading cause and a fitted occasion for structural changes in the Greek society. Resistance to these changes has often proven stronger than the need for change, and in several cases, the state itself had been skeptical and ambivalent of supporting its choices. One such example is found in the changes related to social policy. At the local level, favorable conditions for a more active role of the local self-government in social protection were created. This was combined with the expansion of the welfare-mix, mainly with the participation of non-state organizations (Mogollon, et.al. 2021; Clarke & Huliaras, 2017; Simiti, 2017). At the same time, the need to address chronic weaknesses, such as the lack of communication and coordination between spatially located interventions, their connection to national policies and more generally the completion of the range of social protection at the local level, fueled the strengthening of local authorities' role and their partnerships with local agencies (Skamnakis, 2020). Along with institutional changes, the enrichment of the welfare-mix was supported. The social conditions brought upon by the long-term economic crisis rendered immediate interventions as necessary to meet basic living needs such as food and shelter (Bagavos and Kourachanis, 2021).

The changes at the local level, however, reflect broader transformations of social protection (Powel, 2019; Pertoff, 2014). Local interventions are now expanding in both number and intensity (Oosterlynck, et.al. 2019; Johnson, 2014). Local authority is a pivotal institution upon which local interventions are built. This framework facilitates the instigation of new pluralistic schemes in social protection and the need to strengthen inter-agency collaboration.

The aim of the paper is to highlight the ambiguous development of inter-agency collaboration in Greece. Through a case study, the barriers that limit the functionality and the multiplier benefits of the networking between services, organizations that contribute to social protection are highlighted.

With reference to the local level, the paper underlines the conditions that must be met in order for the collaborative schemes to thrive. The contradictions that limit the development of collaborations and make the inter-agency anemic are identified in the Greek context based on an extensive study from the broader area of Athens.

We focus to the enrichment of *welfare-mix* and the corresponding issues that arise for the organization of inter-agency collaboration. The local level is emerging as a privileged field for the development of networks, a fact fueled by current trends in the *downscaling* of social policy (Connoly, et.al., 2020; Kazepov,2010). The barriers that appear in the Greek case define the necessary conditions that should exist for the inter-agency schemes to uphold and to strengthen the social protection net at the local level.

Therefore, the paper contributes to the discussion of welfare pluralism in social protection. With that in mind, in the first part, we focus on the significance of the local level dimension of social policy. Subsequently, the dual importance of the inter-agency analysis is pointed out. On the one hand, the effect of inter-agency collaboration in contemporary social policy is highlighted. On the other, the necessary conditions for inter-agency schemes to thrive and develop are identified. In the second part using a case study from Greece, we demonstrate the emergence of inter-agency collaboration in the country but also, we locate the existing barriers of its enlargement and establishment and finally enrichment of the welfare mix.

Conceptual framework

New welfare-mix at the local level

Social protection has always been, in a sense, pluralistic. The composition of the schemes that provide social services reflects shares of responsibility and marks new roles in social reproduction process. The production and distribution of services has always been a procedure with shared activity both by private and public sector organizations (Johnson, 1987; Stewart, 2019). In other words, pluralism has been -a more or less- obvious aspect of social policy, without this affecting the social protection outcomes (Seeleb-Kaiser, 2008:218-19). The parallel, complementary or even competitive relationship of private-state service production space together with the intermediate Third Sector finally form a set of social services which contributes to the confrontation of social problems and ultimately results in the reproduction of social relations. Welfare arises as a result of the composition of the welfare mix that changes, under the pressure of social needs and definitely the choices of the state and its policies, the private sector services as well as the Third sector activity. In European countries the mixture differentiates between different social policy regimes and social policy traditions (Bode, 2006:348-50).

The way welfare production is organized affects the outcome and the relationships between the individual agencies that contribute to social protection. Welfare mix influences the distribution of roles in implementation of social policy and consequently the welfare regime that is constructed (Powel & Barrientos, 2004:85). This observation concerns the relationship that exists between formal interventions, informal mechanisms, and practices of social solidarity, on one hand, and the social needs on the other. At the same time, it emphasizes the dynamic character of the mixture that is being reconstructed under the pressure of economic and social events that differentiate the conditions of social organization and reproduction.

Control over the production of social protection is diffused into a wider and more open set of organizations and institutions and grassroots initiatives. The non-exclusivity of the formal sector is expanding and consolidating. The visibility of the individual elements that contribute to social protection, beyond the state, increases and is reflected as a solid composition rather than as a product of confrontation and conflict (Ascoli & Ranci, 2002; Evers, 1995; Jenson, 2015:4; Powel & Barrientos, 2011:76).

The mixed schemes, as they expand their active presence in the social protection field, feed extensive concerns regarding the nature of the intervention, its resources and orientation, the means it uses, the connection with the official social protection mechanisms, etc. The organization of internal relations as well as the external relations transforms. The latter relate to the impact on the socio-economic environment, i.e. the setting of targets, in particular the way of welfare provision, the identification of beneficiaries, etc. Respectively, regarding the internal environment of social protection institutions, issues such as the planning and organization of communication procedures, interconnection and decision making are crucial.

Consequently, the governance of the organizations parameter, both of their inside and outside environment, and the inter-communication processes, becomes critical for the demarcation of the relations between the partners (Jessop, 1999) as well as for the type and the impact of the social protection interventions (Daly, 2003; Jessop, 2002:35; Newman, 2001:119-20). A wide range of governance schemes is emerging within the European context with a corresponding breadth of areas of implementation (Bifulco, 2011; Johansson & Hvinden, 2016).

These transformations thrive in a *down-scaling* environment of social policy (Kazepov, 2008) where institutions of local authorities provide the necessary institutional requirements for the development of expanded pluralistic schemes. The mix that is formed each time is not limited to public sector institutions, including those of local authorities. However, the latter is the place where such schemes are developed and gradually form a paradigm of intervention where the state does not hold all the roles and, in essence, calls into question its exclusivity in social policy. The extent of welfare-mix pluralism is a decision of the central state and part of the broader transformations of state functions (Jessop, 2004:25). The roles are rearranged in the context of generalized changes regarding the state intervention in the regulation of the social and economic relations. As a result, the social protection mechanisms transform in terms of their means and objectives (Hemerjick, 2012). Under the need or invocation of "reforms" and "modernization" social policies are reviewed while localization and the pluralism of social protection are strengthened (Alexandru & Johanson, 2016).

Multi-form and multi-factor localization cannot ensure the unity of the social policy. On the contrary, it proposes another risk of breaking the spectrum of social protection while it is a threat of the uniformity, the type and quality of services (Andriotti & Mignoni, 2016). However, the presence of local authority is crucial in the process of rescaling protection. This is because it is in a position to provide the prestige and guarantees of the official sector. Conversely, it undertakes the exercise of public control and accountability of mixed schemes by supporting the legitimacy of interventions and their policy (Milio, 2014:391). The contribution of local authorities is not enough to address the issue of the unity of social protection. They are not always in a position to support social planning or to resolve practical issues such as the communication of agencies and more importantly the interconnection of structures that operate at the local level (Maggioni, 2017).

Content and prerequisites of inter-agency collaboration at the local level

The organization and coordination of the pluralistic network of social protection at the local level is emerging as a *sine qua non* perspective led by transformations in the current context. The development of some form of cooperation emerges as a priority, in order for the welfare-mix to yield better results and to strengthen the level of social protection. Under the three defining elements, namely *new welfare-mix*, *governance of social policy*, *social policy downscaling*, which respectively aim at strengthening social protection -planning and coordination- saving resources, the inter-agency collaboration enforcement ultimately emerges. The development of inter-agency schemes does not follow a strict and unidimensional archetype. They form distinct types of networks which fall into the categories of inter-agency (Atkinson et al., 2005; Frost, 2005:14).

However, the study of inter-agency is not limited to matters of relationship management, communication and division of tasks. Local networks especially at the local level, collaborations, and more specifically the way in which they are developed and intervene imply and reveal the orientation, the content as well as the planning and the resources of the social policy. The common understanding regarding the role of intervention, the means used to provide services, together with the common principles in the settlement of relations between them are the starting point of inter-agency (Stoker, 1998).

More analytically, the study of cooperative schemes is linked to social policy in at least four ways. First, it expresses a way of distributing power between the partners. In other words, it captures an equilibrium that concerns the internal relations but also the results of the intervention of the collaborating organizations. The component of these forces also determines the targeting of the interventions that result from the cooperation in the process of social reproduction (Leach, 1980; Benson, 1975). Second, it signals changes in the role of the state in social protection (McQuaid, 2000; McQuaid, Lindsay, & Greig, 2005). The importance of the formal sector in the various schemes affects the scope of the action and definitely, the aims of the interventions organized in this context. Third, it highlights the values of social policy, that is, it delimits the targeting but also the ways by which joint action is taken to address social problems. The common space of values is strengthened and forms the dominant paradigm of social protection (Lindsay, McQuaid, & Dutton, 2008).

Fourth, it clearly states the hierarchy of problems by demonstrating priorities and choices for the content of social needs (Longo & Notarnicola, 2018). In other words, it affects the nature of the intervention in the community, its target and orientation. The set of four parameters contributes more or less to the identity of social policy.

Inter-agency comes to take advantage of the capabilities of the individual organizations and to address their weaknesses. It is promoted as a practice of upgrading social protection interventions (Davidson, Bunting & Webb, 2012). The promotion of all kinds of partnerships was based on the triangle of cooperation, innovation, and adaptability. The development of joint interventions, through various types of collaboration, utilizes staff and resources while protecting against duplication in the actions of individual organizations (Hemphill et al., 2006; Kozek & Kubisa, 2014; Shaw, 2007). Additionally, flexibility in the implementation of innovative practices and approaches in social services are facilitated within the inter-agency context (EU, 2013; Nelson & Zadek, 2000). Finally, the response to local needs and specificities completes the triangle of the basic argument for partnerships of organizations and agencies as they contribute with their individual fields of expertise and implement integrated interventions (Brandsen, 2014; Sunley et al., 2006).

The various forms of inter-agency are an important part of the discussion concerning the organization and support of social policy at the local level when suggesting potential answers to identified weaknesses of social protection mechanisms. To ensure this, an ecosystem of three conditions is formed:

The *first* concerns the institutionalization of the inter-agency. The development of cooperation schemes is promoted in the context of decisions for the organization of social protection, as government takes them centrally. In other words, it is necessary for each type of inter-agency schemes to be supported by strategic choices for social protection in order to take on specific roles in social policy. To put it differently, the development of inter-agency schemes is part of governmental policies as they are centrally adopted (Miller & Ahmad, 2000). The state, without bearing the sole responsibility of organized interventions, chooses to shape the necessary institutional environment for the development of the inter-agency (Riedel, Kraus, & Mayer, 2016).

Subsequently, the *second* condition refers to the internal environment, especially the rules that govern the operation of inter-agency schemes. Once their institutional status is established, the respective processes of organization and coordination of the internal environment of the schemes should be recognized, with an emphasis on the relations between the partners. Leadership and role sharing as well as collaboration and complementarity are emphasized as being crucial to the success of interventions (Lindsay, McQuaid, & Dutton, 2008). For example, the distinction of roles between partners and contractors, the controls on each partner's contribution to the scheme etc., are issues that can determine the degree of partnership success (Qvist, 2016).

Finally, the *third* condition is the common understanding of the individual organizations to target the interventions. Either it is imposed centrally, by an authority such as the state setting means and targets (Scott & Merton, 2021), or it is more broadly based on serving common values regarding social protection (May, 1994; Pasotti, 2020). The common principles of operation and the collective perception and interpretation of social problems include issues such as the planning and accessibility of services, the process of distribution of benefits and the identification of beneficiaries.

Overall, it is clear that all three categories of conditions form strategic goals and choices of social protection systems and are part of their character. The choices at the central state level, however, also require the reaction of local organizations, either from the part of local authority or local Third Sector organizations to form inter-agency schemes and to jointly contribute to the weaving of the social protection grid.

Field research framework

The composition of the Greek context

Social protection interventions at the local level are organized around the local authorities that assume an organizational and managerial role while providing the necessary institutional environment for control and accountability, both in the local community and at the central state. The recent period of long-run economic crisis has been the occasion for the acceleration of transformations in the social protection system and especially in the local authority contributing to the exercise of social policy in Greece (Feronas, 2017).

These transformations took place in an already weak social protection system and this lag coincides with analogously anemic local authorities' institutions, feeding a *double deficit* in social protection. More specifically, the social protection mechanisms in Greece are lagging behind, ranking them among the weakest systems in Europe (Ferrera, 1996; Petmesidou & Guillen, 2015). The examination of the Greek system's performance in tackling poverty indicates a significant lag even in relation to countries with common characteristics as those of European south (Papanastasiou & Papatheodorou, 2019). The "polarized operation", a typical characteristic of the system, seems to have receded in the years of crisis not as a product of strengthening its services but mainly because of the cuts and favorable customer-type arrangements that had been developed during the last few decades (Petmesidou, 2001:78). The weakness of the social protection system was intensified during the decade of crisis due to austerity policies and the consequent reduction of resources.

Additionally, the Greek state remains centralized. Despite the significant reforms that have taken place in recent years, the central state remains reluctant to delegate power and proceed with decentralization (Hlepas, 2020). This, however, does not imply maintaining its traditional role by providing guarantees for the functioning of social protection mechanisms, albeit a residual one. The *three waves of modernization* have strengthened local authorities' institutions and changed the local authorities map but failed to effectively respond to the *double deficit* of social policy at the local level (Skamnakis & Pantazopoulos, 2014).

Although the local dimension of social protection in the Greek case is organized around local authorities' institutions, the distinct services fail to acquire unity and to establish integrated mechanisms. The communication between them is a structural weakness, which has not been effectively treated, to date, sufficiently, despite its identification (Kontiadis & Apistoulas, 2006). During 2016, the first steps to address the problem were taken with the establishment of the "Community Centers" (*Kentra Koinotitas*). The aim of the new institution was the coordination of the scattered services and the parallel collection of information in a citizens' service center. In order to make this possible, the Community Centers welcome, evaluate and direct potential users (Law 4368/16). Although the first evidence of their operation is not encouraging in addressing the issue of interconnection and cooperation of local social protection services.

The context of the analysis is shaped by the changes imposed by the crisis and long-term austerity policies. On the one hand, social conditions are dramatically deteriorating. Given the permanency of employment in the public sector, unemployment increased dramatically from 11% in January 2010 to 26.7% in 2013 before its gradual decline (ELSTAT, 2020).

Over the last decade, social protection mechanisms have been developed at the local level attempting to combine state intervention with NGOs' contribution as well as emergency assistance from agencies and organizations without formal formation, or even conjunctural actions at the neighborhood level (Arampatzi, 2018; Adam & Teloni, 2015; Afouxenidis, 2015). A new for the Greek context mix of organizations was therefore developed, which enriched pluralism in social policy with a remarkable presence, at least compared to the past. Regional and local authorities had a central role to this change, which provided the institutional background on which welfare pluralism was rebuilt in the country (Pantazopoulos, 2020). Mixed collaboration schemes have developed a variety of social services (Kourachanis et al., 2018) and still do so (Skamnakis, 2020). Under these new circumstances, the development of a wide network of collaborations and joint interventions based on the local authorities has emerged. The local level is considered as the field of reference for new interventions because of collaborations between the regional and local authorities, organizations of local or broader scope and emergency measures at the neighborhood level.

With the use principally of Community Funds, the new services aim at meeting the basic living needs of households. Based on control procedures of subsistence means, material support is provided to the weakest households. The new social protection services are oriented towards the conduct of a minimum level of social assistance. The conditions of material deprivation are addressed by the immediate provision of assistance that gradually forms a range of social benefits that boast the provision of survival as a priority, degrading the prospect of more dynamic interventions. In other words, social policy moves away from the reform of social and economic relations and is limited to purely supportive intervention to ensure survival.

The *safety net* character of the new interventions that dominate the local social policy and the pluralistic form of the new schemes of organization and provision of social services characterize the social policy at the local level. The local character emerges as a central choice, certifying that the new dimension of social protection is part of a broader strategic plan for social protection mechanisms. The orientation of action as well as the welfare mix appears to be depending on these options at the central level. However, as empirical research demonstrates, their predominant feature is the ambiguous and weak support that results in an anemic presence of inter-agency schemes at the local level.

Field research

The empirical research took place at the end of 2018 in four municipalities of Attica. Located at the western arc of metropolitan area of Athens, where low-income households are concentrated (Maloutas & Spyrellis, 2019; Pantazis & Psycharis, 2016). The long-term recession have affected these areas intensifying the pre-existing high unemployment rates leading to increased demand for social services. The research aimed to highlight the organizational and operational characteristics of the start-up social protection schemes in order to shed light on the barriers that emerged during their first phase of operation. The floor was given to key-informants (15 in total) of the various organizations involved in inter-agency schemes.

Empirical research focuses on highlighting the key weaknesses and obstacles that undermine the expansion of all kinds of collaborations at the local level. In particular, the response to the triptych of conditions highlighted the irresolute and contradictory way in which the central state and government responds to the development needs of inter-agency schemes.

Addressing the immediate effects of the long-term recession combined with fiscal adjustment policies has accelerated the development of inter-agency collaborations at the local level. In the broader Attica area, about half of the collaboration schemes were established between 2012-2015 supported by national and ESF funds and from 2017 exclusively from national resources. Some of these services were bequeathed to municipalities with limited scope in both services as well as benefits. Especially in West Attica region, where the cases mentioned below are coming from, four such schemes were organized covering the needs of the residents from respective municipalities (General Secretariat of Public Investments, 2015; Ministry of Finance, 2018). The services provided aimed at addressing immediate livelihood needs while beneficiaries are subject to uniform selectivity *means based* criteria set and controlled by the state.

The upheld of inter-agency schemes is the outcome of a series of concurrent conditions. These ultimately determine the degree of their success. The research highlights and illuminates individual aspects of the basic conditions as they emerge during the implementation of collaborations and emphasizes the complexity of the project, since as shown below -in an early stage of development in the Greek case- the barriers and the difficulties are numerous. The case study confirmed changes in the organization and exercise of social policy at the local level, highlighting the weaknesses that prevent the expansion of inter-agency working and the enrichment of the welfare mix. It highlighted, in other words, the barriers and the resistance to the consolidation of pluralistic social service schemes. Having demonstrated the weaknesses of fulfilling the basic prerequisites for the development of inter-agency collaborations, we do conclude the emerging dilemma of inter-agencies, which, although in existence at present, one cannot deny their uncertain prospect.

The institutional environment

The operation of numerous services based on inter-agency cooperation predominantly confirms the choice made by the government in favor of the use of such schemes in the field of social protection. The choice of partnership strategy is not new. It has been sporadically identified in the Greek public administration but does not seem to have been adopted as its central policy until the years of crisis. However, the state as in most cases, determines the regulatory and partly the financial framework setting out finally the welfare-mix (McMullin & Skeltcher, 2018; Johansson et.al. 2015).

As mentioned earlier, the lack of an interconnecting mechanism and more importantly of cooperation has undermined the scattered social services for a long time. In a centralized system, like the Greek one, the collaborations with the Third sector are more cautious and it is obvious that top-down management does not leave space for cooperation at the local level. Despite the structural obstacles that the framework - and to some extent the tradition - presents, the form of collaborations has found a field of development.

... in recent years government agencies treat us as partners and as time goes by the more appreciable are our services, though they have reservations due to many scandals ... (although)there is an institutional framework which ensures the Organizations' solvency (informant 1).

The NGOs' discourse highlights the two opposing forces that are expressed simultaneously by the state, which, after all, decisively regulates the relationship. On the one hand, there is the established choice of cooperation. On the other hand, a sense of cautiousness limits the prospect of developing extensive cooperation and long-term state relations with the Third Sector. This reluctance may be well-founded and is partly justified by the weaknesses in organization and transparency level of the Third Sector.

Institutional provisions are not enough to develop strong inter-agency schemes. The intentions, as expressed by the state in the official documents, as mentioned earlier, do not ensure the development of this path in the field of social protection either. In the cases studied, one more barrier emerged, that concerns the institutional environment. The dominant position of the municipalities in the interventions makes their perspective uncertain. The choices of the politicians determine (and redefine with any potential changes) the form of the scheme, the partners and their perspective.

The municipality cannot proceed in any cooperation without political consensus. Some institutions might obtain such a consensus, but others might not. It depends on the local elected representatives' political views... for example in some cases there may be a ban on cooperation with Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) (informant2).

The above excerpt highlights the dominant role that municipality holds. Collaborations developed at the local level require its cooperation, which mainly focuses on the institutional coverage of the collaborations and the general expression of the formal sector. Central and local choices are likely to conflict with and weaken the prospect of developing cooperatives at the local level.

Regarding the basic condition for the development of inter-agency schemes, we contend that it is indeed met. However, empirical investigation reveals significant obstacles that render institutional provisions inadequate. Inherent weaknesses of the Third Sector (Enjolras,2021) as well as views and attitudes towards its role prevent the development of broad schemes. A potential consequence is that they are limited to a subset of organizations and services, mainly to the Public Sector.

The weakness of the sufficient fulfillment of the first condition is found in a series of individual obstacles where the municipalities, as dominant institutional entities, determine the breadth and the dynamics of the schemes, rendering the context an unbalanced parameter.

The internal environment

Regarding the second condition, the organization of relations between partners is obviously crucial to the success of the cooperation schemes. The distribution of power, resources and procedures that are followed, as mentioned above, determine the successful outcome of any kind of cooperation and partnership (Hustinx and DeWaele, 2015). In the Greek case, the sovereignty of the municipality in the organization of the schemes poses a series of limitations and difficulties.

In addition to what is presented above, the organization of the schemes develops around the will and the purposes of the administration of the municipalities.

Firstly, I give priority to the will, not only the staff's but also of the locally elected representatives' and the administrators' and to the prevailing hierarchical order and secondly to the common vision and the sharing of the same goals(informant3).

The framework as defined by the dominant partner obviously does not serve the equal participation of the partners. This form reflects the already existing top-down development of inter-agency schemes (Polyzoidis,2015). However, it works restrictively in the prospect of broadening with the participation of new partners. In practice, the scheme is formed based on the options and under the control of the local municipality that maintains a type of operation with a polarized internal structure. The resource control is subject to the same principle and confirms the hierarchical structure of the corporate scheme.

Nevertheless, the hierarchical pattern is supported by one further parameter. The inability of the Third Sector organizations themselves to ensure their viability and to consolidate their intervention using their own means. Third sector organizations appear and participate as financially and organizationally weak while their viability is presented as dependent from the state. The support and, in essence, the dependence on public sector resources is set to create conditions of power backwardness and ultimately weakness within the inter-agency schemes.

... I would say that there should be a reliable report on needs and problems, evaluation and certification of civil society organizations and financial support for fixed organizational costs (operation and executive training ... they would lead to a demanding professionalism ... the same is-(holds) for municipal services where people do not understand (managerial) problems... (informant4).

In the above verbatim quotation, in addition to the weakness of dealing with the operating costs, another aspect of the internal operation of the schemes arises. This dependence also results in the functioning of the organizations of the Third sector. It undermines the possibility of creating satisfactory jobs by degrading productivity and, as he mentions, the "professionalism" of executives. This, in turn, limits the possibilities of intervention of the corporate scheme.

In the same excerpt, another crucial issue for the internal operation of the schemes is raised. The special training of those who staff these cooperatives, regardless of the institution in which they work with. Building effective communication and consultation mechanisms is obviously crucial but has not been achieved yet.

Shared training would be useful in learning how executives work together, getting to know better the institutional framework ... understanding how we can intervene holistically in favor of vulnerable groups ... planning the perfect intervention isn't the goal... supporting the beneficiary is our goal (in cooperation) ... and collaborating to provide services to the beneficiary I believe this is due to lack of education ... (informant 1)

The excerpt summarizes the lack of a common communication code and the absence of common practices on the part of the partners. It also concerns the external presence of the schemes towards the community and the impact of the intervention. Internal relationships are communicated and reflected in the external environment, thus determining the scope and quality of services. The internal dimension of each scheme affects its perspective and complements all the components of their upheld at the local level. The shortcomings presented further undermine their perspective, posing additional obstacles to their dissemination and consolidation in the social protection grid.

Shared values

The intervention strategy, the targeting regarding the field and the means, requires close alignment between positions and perceptions on the part of the organizations that constitute the inter-agency scheme. The third condition concerns the common values that the cooperating organizations serve. The breadth of their common space contributes to the development of common goals and practices. The targeting of interventions is defined by the common values that fuel a correspondingly common hierarchy of priorities of intervention as well as regarding the means used to address needs. In other words, this is the foundation for building cooperation and the development of joint action (Collins and Hickman, 1991).

From the Public sector's point of view, collaborations are imposed as top-down processes in the context of central administrative choices and in the context of broader governmental policies. Consequently, common values are centrally defined without the possibility of derogations, let alone disagreement on the principles of the cooperating organizations.

Nevertheless, from the Third Sector's perspective, the top-down operation does not differ significantly.

... EU projects at first determine the space, secondly the importance of the local government and especially the responsibilities and resources-not least-the same social reality and problems by the local government's responsibilities and providing resources, third -but not least- social reality indeed and problem. (informant 4).

The available resources also determine the target of the intervention and decisively shape the landscape of inter-agency collaborations. The top-down reality that does not allow the autonomous development of cooperation schemes is further confirmed. The hetero-definition of the goals and of the values that characterize the collaborations undermines their duration.

The limited capabilities of the organizations of the Third sector in combination with the completion of the interventions also have a negative effect on the viability of the cooperation schemes. The completion of the financing implies the collapse of the bond since it is created primarily on the basis of mutual interest and secondarily on the basis of common principles.

Conclusion

The three conditions are partially met since the obstacles to the development of inter-agency collaborations are substantial. As presented above, aspects of their development and operation as well as elements of the wider environment that hosts them limit their perspective. The general picture that emerges from the field research data leads to a number of observations. The divisive policy for the operation of broad forms of cooperation is confirmed. With the local level posing as a privileged space for the development of such type of collaborations, the local authorities provide the institutional environment that all kinds of schemes are developed and controlled. The decisions made by the local administration determine the schemes and more broadly shape the wider landscape of collaborations in the field of social protection. The Third Sector does not manage to function outside the framework set by local and partly central policies, bound by the need to ensure the viability of the constituent NGOs. However, the seamless cooperation is not guaranteed either by them or on the part of the organizations belonging to the public sector, let alone the possibility of joint action. The skills required for the implementation of joint interventions and the development of cooperation have not been acquired. Therefore, the dangers lurking in the lack of communication and the weak mechanisms of cooperation undermine, in turn, the perspective of inter-agency schemes. Obstacles include the instability of the common value space on which inter-agency schemes are constructed. At this point, too, top-down growth prevails through the resources allocated, based on central choices at state or even EU level. This also undermines the perspective and duration of the schemes.

With reference to the barriers that arise concerning/regarding the three basic conditions, the actual difficulties of developing inter-agency schemes are highlighted. These, as they coincide, should be treated cumulatively. Thereby, their presence makes it difficult to complete the schemes and strengthen the social protection network at the local level. It is not possible to formulate broader strategic goals as the schemes remain precarious and weak in terms of their composition. The dominant position of the municipalities, although it responds to significant - mainly functional- weaknesses, cancels the parity of the partners and gives the schemes a hierarchical structure undermining the importance of NGOs. Additionally, the complementarity of the parties that make up the scheme is relatively precarious due to the weakness of all partners to guarantee their smooth operation. Finally, the ambiguity regarding the common value background calls into questions the objectives and means of intervention. Conclusively, inter-agency schemes are constituent element of the social protection mechanisms reality at the local level. However, they confront significant obstacles that complicate their effectiveness in the field of social protection and ultimately fail to diversify social policy at the local level.

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