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POLITICAL NETWORK AS AN ENVIRONMENT FOR INTERACTION BETWEEN THE PUBLIC AND THE AUTHORITIES

Political network as a model of representation of public interests has been analyzed, its characteristics considered. It has been determined that a political network is an environment for interaction between the public and the authorities. The main types and levels of political networks have been singled out. The phenomenon of “trust” has been analyzed as the main element of the effective functioning of political networks. Now political networks are an environment where public interests are not just represented but accepted by the authorities as mandatory recommendations for the approval of effective political decisions supported by the entire society. This approach exactly, which is based on the interaction between the authorities and the public in the course of developing public policy, would ensure a high level of trust, a stable political system and a sustainable development of the state.

Keywords: public policy, model of interests representation, political network, interaction between the public and the authorities, type of political network, level of political network, trust.

A precondition for the democratic development of any state is the effective interaction between the public and the authorities. According to their political regime, the people are the only source of power in a state. A lack of interaction between the public and the authorities holds back the development of the state which, under crisis conditions, triggers destructive processes in a society. In particular, the society does not accept or does not share the ways and methods of achieving the set objectives, the amount of and justification for the resources that are used in the process of making and implementing government and administrative and political decisions. As a result, a stratification of society and the public sphere occurs meaning that applied to the environment of developing and implementing the public policy.

Presently, there are a lot of direct democracy tools that enable the public to influence the development of public policy: citizens’ applications, public consultations, petitions etc. However, these tools are ineffective without an environment of interaction between the public and the authorities.

This situation is exactly what promoted the emergence and development of political networks, an environment wherein the state authorities and the civil society interact. All of this has considerably broadened the public policy domain and the proposals and recommendations of the civil society developed together with representatives of public authorities often are integrated in legislation and have a mandatory nature.

This article aims to analyze the manner of the functioning of political networks as an environment for interaction between the public and the authorities.

Presently, scholars do not have a unified outlook on the model and form of interaction between the public and the authorities. However, most scholars’ opinions converge in that it is the political networks that are the necessary environment for the interaction between the public and the authorities and where all the conditions exist to develop a political agenda.

A political network as a model of interests representation considers interaction between the state and society from the point of view of the middle level, meaning a separate entity where mutual relations exist among multiple independent social actors representing public administration, civil and business structures. It is important for a model of this type to formulate a joint interest and to have a voluntary cooperation among the actors based on trust, mutual dependence and equality. All network participants are considered to bear equal responsibility and obligations, which in theory makes it impossible to apply pressure. It means that, in developing a public policy agenda, proposals from the public and the authorities are equally taken into consideration. Due to the especially created conditions, a political network has cooperation among representatives of the public sector, business entities, and the authorities that has a ready-made decision as its output, the decision being satisfactory to all parties.

According to a definition by T. Borzel¹, a political network means a set of relatively stable relations that unite a multitude of different actors who share resources to achieve common goals. Political networks

¹ Borzel, T. (1998). Organizing Babylon On the Different Conceptions of Policy Networks. *Public Administration*, 1, 121.

have a number of characteristics that make them different from other forms of administrative activity in the area of social needs and interests. First, the political networks theory rebuilds relations between public administration and modern society:

- a political network is numerous organizations and institutions implementing the communication between the civil society and the state;
- there is a mutual interest among the organizations and institutions that participate in the network. This interest is conditioned not just upon dependence on the resources but on the striving to achieve common goals;
- all network participants are equally engaged in the process of developing a political decision using both formal and informal rules.

Second, the political networks theory restores the relations between administration and politics. An approach to public administration from the standpoint of political networks shows interest in the political field. In this manner, political networks form an important addition to the existing arrangements of political power. Aside from that, it expands the available resources for solving social problems and introduces new features to it, those of responsibility, culture of dialog, trust etc.

Third, the effectiveness of network structures in the development of political decisions is not permanent. Political network researchers note a number of factors that help enhance the network effectiveness. These include sufficiency of resources and the overall network stability. However, the integrated nature of the network has a much higher importance as well as its ability to serve as an environment for interaction between the public and the authorities.

Fourth, political networks have their special consensus culture: a network is a contract structure that includes a number of contracts arising from the agreed formal and informal rules of communication.

Therefore, a political network is an environment for interaction of governmental and non-governmental entities (institutes of civil society, business community etc.) to formulate and attain public policy goals. To consider the interaction between the public and the authorities in more detail, one needs to analyze different approaches used by scholars to define the notion of a “political network”.

The concepts of public policy “community” and “networks” first appeared in scientific literature in the 1970s. Historically, the concept of “community” in public policy was formulated before the concept of “network” by D. Walker who elaborated on the selection of problems for political agenda. He showed using, in particular, the US Senate as an example, that the agenda is formulated by a certain community establishing a network of cooperation between civil society institutions and the authorities. According to D. Walker, a public policy community is formed out of innumerable voluntary public and governmental organizations who unite professional civil servants, politicians and experts. These groups specialize in the field of public policy and play a core role in the process of identifying problems that must be solved both by representatives of civil society and politically responsible officials¹.

A special view on the nature of political networks is entertained by the western researchers D. Touk and D. Marsh. They believe that the actor who controls important resources has a key position in a political network:

- economic (physical and financial resources, consumption benefits, conditions for obtaining cash revenue);
- information (knowledge);
- administrative and political (appointment to office, political decision-making, approving legislative and other normative acts etc.);
- personal qualities of a social actor that help maximize the benefits to another actor².

Scholars believe that the availability of the relevant resources and their balance determine the power of the actor and their place in the network hierarchy. Joining a network, the participant gains access to its resources, the “network capital”. The peculiarity of network capital is in the synergy effect resulting from a consolidation of the images and good will as well as the information, cognitive, expert, financial and resource potentials of the network participants. The phenomenon of equality of the network participants is also explained in the context of the rational choice concept. This phenomenon is defined not just by formal and legal independence and autonomy of their existence but also by comparing their equivalent resources (from the point of view of getting benefits), even though they may not be equal.

¹ Ситник, С.В. (2011). Мережева структура публічної політики. *Державне управління: удосконалення та розвиток*, 5.

² Marsh, O., Rhodes, R. (1992). *Policy Networks in British Government*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 311.

In the information society, a balance of equivalence of resources of both governmental and non-governmental players is struck. Business entities are turning themselves into leading centers for collecting and storing economic information and of highly sophisticated management. Public organizations and universities are becoming centers for the development of political and social technologies and originators of knowledge on social and applied problems of strategic vision of social development. Overall, the private sector achieves a high level of communication and gains international contracts that bring it certain advantages in relation to political and administrative resources. They cancel or significantly reduce the effects of the iron law of hierarchy according to which power of one person over another person depends not on their merits and capabilities but on their positions in a hierarchical pyramid.

Thus, the special feature of the public policy networks is in that they represent the model of administering public affairs that ties the state to the civil society. The structure itself is represented by a set of governmental and non-governmental organizations and private persons having common interests and is made up with a view to achieving consents in the process of sharing the resources that the actors have. In spite of a possible irregular distribution of information resources, the participants knowingly assume the obligation to interact, recognize the resource dependence and exercise the culture of consensus. Accordingly, all the actors have equal rights in formulating a joint decision.

For example, almost all researchers of public policy networks uphold the idea of R. Rhodes that the main precondition for the existence of a network is observing the “rules of the game,” such as pragmatism, priority of national interests, and decision making as a result of a forum discussion etc. Proceeding from this premise, an effective application of the “network” concept depends on taking into consideration the additional factors including, in particular, a multi positional nature of the actors. Usually, public policy actors participate in a whole array of networks. For example, an actor represented by a high official, a large state-owned enterprise or a trade union leader participates in many different networks by default. In this case, the said person in one case acts as an arbitrator and in another case, as an “intermediary.” Actors like this are the real public policy entrepreneurs. They may come from the civil society and from the institutions of the political and administrative system. The mere possibility of representatives both from the civil society and the power holders to participate in different topical networks and play different roles is one of the main features of political networks along with equality and a high level of trust¹.

Therefore, a political network is an environment for interaction between the authorities and the public that involves the population in the process of political decision-making, formulates the public policy agenda and promotes the solution of socially important issues. Depending on the type of the problem that a political network aims to solve, they may differ by a number of characteristics:

- number and type of network participants;
- nature of institutionalization;
- policy area in which the networks are formed;
- distribution of resources among network participants;
- peculiarities of the interests that unite the network participants;
- degree of power concentration etc.

One of the first scholars to divide political networks into types was the American scientist H. Heclo². He singled out two types of networks: the iron triangle and issue network. The main criteria that he used to distinguish between these types of networks were:

- the status of a network participant;
- the network boundary;
- control of actors inside the network;
- type of actor (representative of the public, business entities or the authorities).

According to H. Heclo, an issue network is a subsystem within which a relatively large number of individual and team actors interact while the boundaries of such network are vague and the number of participants is not defined. In such a network, it is virtually impossible to identify an actor or actors who actually control the content of the policy or its program. A network of this type is in many respects similar to an expert club for discussing pressing political issues.

¹ Rhodes, R.A.W. (2006). Policy Network Analysis. M. Moran, M. Rein and R. E. Goodin. *The Oxford Handbook of Public Policy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 237.

² Heclo, H. (2016). Issue Networks and Executive Establishment. *The Oxford Handbook of Classics in Public Policy and Administration*.

Unlike an issue network, iron triangle is a type of network wherein a limited number of actors interact. Due to the constant number of members, boundaries of such a network are quite clear. Iron triangle includes team actors coming from government and administrative environments, the public and the private sector. In the opinion of H. Heckle, such network is seen oftener than the former one and can influence the political decision-making.

The typology of political networks suggested by R. Rhodes became the most common. The scholar singled out five types of political networks using three criteria:

- degree of internal integration;
- number of network participants;
- and distribution of resources among them¹.

According to R. Rhodes, the network types are:

1. Political communities. This type of political networks is characterized by stable relations, limited membership, vertical interdependence based on mutual responsibility for the provision of services and an isolation from both the other networks and public organizations (including the Parliament). Such networks are highly integrated and have a high level of vertical interdependence but also a limited vertical coordination. It is emphasized that such networks focus on the main functional interests, for example, education of fire safety. It is often the case that they are the networks of a local (regional) level.

2. Professional networks. They are characterized by the overwhelming membership by one class of participants in the making of political decisions, professional groups. These networks represent the interests of a special professional group, have a high level of vertical interdependence and also are isolated from other networks. Professional networks may be represented on a national scale, for example, the National Health Service in the United Kingdom. Examples of such network types are labor unions, different specialized services and associations.

3. Interdepartmental networks are characterized by a broad coverage of public interests which makes it necessary to expand their horizontal structure and make do without a strict vertical interdependence. In the opinion of R. Rhodes, networks of this type are formed based on the representation from local authorities. However interdepartmental networks may exist at different levels of public authorities and therefore have an “internetwork” nature.

4. Manufacturer networks focus on economic interests of the public and private sectors. They have a volatile membership, a dependence of the power center on industry organizations and, conversely, a limited interdependence among economic interests.

5. Task networks are characterized by a large number of participants with a limited degree of interdependence. Stability is respected here and the structure has an atomistic nature.

The networks may be divided into three levels according to the tasks which solution their creators had in mind: local (regional), national and international. Local networks aim to develop a regional policy and involve both the local community, business environment and the authorities in their activities. National and international networks solve issues of a global character. For example, national-level political networks formulate a public policy agenda and influence legislative decisions in a state. International-level political networks mostly exist in the European Union as associations aiming to solve the issues of coexistence in the European Community.

It is worth noting that the trust phenomenon plays an important role in the formation and functioning of political networks. If a high level of trust is not achieved among the public, business communities and the authorities within the network, resources are scattered, the decision approval process and network cooperation become more complicated. For instance, P. Bourdieu, F. Fukuyama and P. Stompki believe that the level of trust among the political network participants is the main component of a political network. Trust may emerge only on the basis of common values, a balanced perception of interests of all the network participants and a realization of the possibility to balance them. The phenomenon of trust emerges as a result of implementing cognitive models of social reality that should coincide with the principal components, for example, views on the national interests, local group needs and resulting objectives, priority tasks, common interests, benchmarks and criteria of effectiveness of interaction as viewed from the perspective of mutual costs and benefits.

¹ Rhodes, R.A.W. (2006). Policy Network Analysis. M. Moran, M. Rein and R. E. Goodin. *The Oxford Handbook of Public Policy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 237.

Therefore, depending on the type and level of political networks, one may analyze their impact on public policy agenda. Political networks are an environment, in which interaction occurs among representatives from the public, business entities and the authorities to discuss socially important issues that later have broad repercussions, are analyzed and included in public policy agendas. Following the results of such interaction, experts write their reports and recommendations are developed, and specific legislative and administrative decisions are approved. Now political networks are an environment where public interests are not just represented but accepted by the authorities as mandatory recommendations for the approval of effective political decisions supported by the entire society. This approach exactly, which is based on interaction between the authorities and the public in the course of developing public policy, would ensure a high level of trust, a stable political system and a sustainable development of the state.

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