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The Role of Intersectoral Partnerships in the Development of Youth Public Policies: A Collaborative Approach

- summary-

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Research Context

Society is in a state of constant change, and the state's ability to adapt quickly to the rapidly emerging needs of citizens is essential for ensuring well-being and creating a sustainable society. Unfortunately, citizens' needs are often greater than the state's capacity to meet them, leading to an inability to provide high-quality goods and services for the community.

This paper aims to analyze the situation of young people in Romania through the lens of existing measures, public policies aimed at this segment, and how the public sector can improve its cooperation with other actors to develop the youth sector. The model targeted for cooperation among multiple actors is collaborative governance. This model involves equal involvement from the public, non-governmental, and private sectors in the development of youth initiatives and in sharing responsibility for their outcomes.

The research contributes theoretically by identifying a model of collaborative governance that could have a positive impact in the Romanian context. At the same time, it provides practical contributions by identifying and analyzing elements of collaborative governance in Romania and highlighting areas for improvement.

Necessity of the Research

This research responds to the weak collaboration capacity between state and non-state actors in developing public policies for youth in Romania, increasing their chances of socio-economic integration. Collaborative governance, the proposed instrument, offers a long-term solution to the identified problems by creating public policies based on the real needs of youth and involving actors other than the state, such as civil society through non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the private sector. The general objective of the research is to identify and conceptualize the communication and collaboration process between the public, private, and non-governmental sectors in developing youth public policies in Romania. To operationalize this general objective, the following specific objectives were set:

- OS.1. Identify and detail the existing forms of collaboration between the three actors in Romania.
- OS.2. Identify the main factors that influence both positively and negatively effective collaboration between the three actors.

- OS.3. Identify the perceptions and attitudes of representatives from the public, private, and non-governmental sectors that may positively or negatively influence intersectoral collaboration.
- OS.4. Develop a set of recommendations for optimizing the collaboration process between the three actors. The research hypothesis is that if the three sectors (public, private, and non-governmental) collaborate in developing youth public policies, their quality will increase. The goal is to understand collaboration as a systemic activity, not just a punctual one.

Novelty of the Research

The novelty of the research lies in the systematic approach to collaborative governance as a solution for the development of youth public policies in Romania, an area where intersectoral collaboration is weakly regulated from a legislative perspective. The research introduces innovations in several areas:

- Identification and conceptualization of the collaborative governance process adapted to the Romanian context and the needs of Romanian youth.
- Multidimensional approach to elements that influence intersectoral collaboration.
- Exploration of the perceptions and attitudes of the involved actors.
- Proposal of a set of recommendations based on the analysis of the real problems of young people.

Research Methodology

To carry out the scientific approach, I used both qualitative research tools (interviews) and quantitative ones (questionnaires), with strictly qualitative interpretation (the research results cannot be extrapolated to the entire youth sector or to other sectors of activity). This research includes both a theoretical and an applied part, through the realization of a case study. In the theoretical part, I analyzed the phenomenon of collaborative governance in relation to New Public Management and New Public Administration, presenting both the European and national frameworks for youth sector intervention, as well as the situation of young people in Romania. In the case study, I conducted field research to investigate whether elements defining collaborative governance are present in the current decision-making process of generating

youth public policies, and whether this type of collaboration is suitable for the Romanian context, and under what circumstances.

For this research, I used a non-probabilistic convenience sampling method. The main reasons for choosing this type of sampling were limited financial and time resources, as well as easy access to certain groups. Additionally, the research is exploratory in nature, and non-probabilistic sampling can aid in identifying certain directions and hypotheses that can be tested later using more rigorous methods.

Theoretical Framework

The research is based on concepts such as neo-institutionalism, New Public Management (NPM), New Public Administration (NPA), and collaborative governance. In the dynamic context of modern governance, the public policy-making process has evolved through the interactions between the three actors: the state, the private sector, and civil society through non-governmental organizations. This interaction demonstrates a shift towards involving non-state actors and changing how public institutions engage with external stakeholders for the common good.

Neo-institutionalism offers a theoretical framework to understand this evolution and how these relationships are shaped by formal and informal rules, institutional norms, and constraints governing the actions and interactions of the three actors. Authors such as Newman, Barnes, Sullivan & Knops (2004), Hartley, Sørensen & Torfing (2013), Christensen & Lægreid (2011), Osborne (2006), Ferlie, Hartley, and Martin (2003) suggest that the empirical phenomenon of collaborative governance can be seen as part of a paradigm shift between or coexisting with new public management and new public governance discourses in contemporary society.

Research Results

Following the research conducted within the case study, I examined the possibility of effectively applying the collaborative governance model proposed by Ansell and Gosh. However, before presenting conclusions regarding the model's efficiency in the Romanian context, I would like to clarify several concepts introduced in the theoretical framework chapter. It is observed that the current governance in Romania is undergoing an informal transition from a performance-oriented administration to one open to collaboration with stakeholders in generating public policies, specifically in the area of youth policies. The collaborative governance model proposed by Ansell and Gosh emphasizes four key

components: initial conditions, leadership, institutional design, and the collaborative process. At the same time, it presents a series of vulnerabilities, which were confirmed by the results obtained in the case study. These include:

Excessive idealism and lack of practical applicability in unequal contexts – The proposed model is theoretical, with the authors considering an ideal scenario in which all involved actors are on equal footing, with a balance in their interests, the resources they allocate, and their power to influence decision-making. In reality, this balance does not occur.

Underestimation of the political and economic context – The authors assume that political and economic challenges can be resolved solely through communication and openness to dialogue. However, in reality, these factors determine the manner of collaboration between actors.

Complexity of the decision-making process – Communication is an essential element in the proposed model, but it does not account for the resource consumption required for this constant effort, resources that not all actors possess.

Undervaluation of the legislative and institutional framework – Although the model mentions institutional design, it does not sufficiently emphasize the importance of a clear and coherent legislative framework to support collaboration. In many contexts, the lack of an adequate legislative framework can hinder collaboration, even when goodwill exists among the parties.

Difficulty in measuring the success of collaboration – The model does not offer clear criteria for evaluating the success of collaboration. In the absence of measurable results or well-defined performance indicators, collaboration can become an end in itself, without producing tangible results for the final beneficiaries (in this case, the youth).

In conclusion, the model proposed by Ansell and Gosh requires improvements to generate results in terms of effective collaborative governance. Based on the aforementioned critiques, I propose several recommendations for adapting the model to the Romanian context:

- Establishment of neutral structures to facilitate collaboration between the public, private, and non-governmental sectors. These structures could include monitoring organizations or independent collaborative governance councils.
- Strengthening continuous and transparent dialogue through the real and constant involvement of all actors, not just at specific moments. Creating virtual and local forums can support the inclusion of all interested parties.

- Simplification of bureaucracy and the adoption of transparent and standardized procedures that allow for smoother and less costly collaboration in terms of time and resources.
- Engaging all parties in co-creating solutions to youth issues, ensuring that each actor has a clear, well-defined role and the appropriate resources to contribute.

Main Future Research Directions

Exploring the Efficiency of Different Types of Intersectoral Partnerships – Conducting a comparative analysis of various types of intersectoral partnerships, such as public-private, public-civil society, civil society-private, and most importantly, partnerships that bring together all three sectors. This would involve measuring their impact on youth public policies. Exploring this dimension could contribute to identifying the most effective collaboration model, based on the different objectives and needs of youth policies. Additionally, this research direction is essential since the evaluation component in Romania in this area is still in its early stages, as mentioned in the first chapter.

Including the Academic Sector as a Fourth Entity – Alongside the exploration of the aforementioned types of partnerships, a potential future direction could involve integrating the academic sector. This analysis would be important due to the resources available in academia for researching collaborative governance in the specialized literature. Research centers could provide relevant data regarding different types of intersectoral partnerships and the contexts in which they yield the best results.

Long-Term Impact Evaluation of Partnerships on Youth Public Policies – Conducting a long-term impact evaluation of these partnerships on youth policies and young people as final beneficiaries could contribute to developing more sustainable and efficient public policies. In this evaluation, various parameters could be monitored for improvement, such as participation in decision-making processes, involvement in volunteer activities, and trust in public institutions. This future research direction is crucial as the evaluation component in Romania remains underdeveloped in this field.

Participatory Evaluation – To better understand the impact of intersectoral partnerships on youth public policies, a participatory evaluation could be used, involving key stakeholders in the evaluation process.

Identifying Success Factors and Challenges in Implementing Intersectoral Partnerships – Identifying the factors that determine the success or failure of intersectoral collaboration is necessary to create a successful model for stakeholders to follow. The

challenges of such collaboration span the entire process, from initiation to implementation and assuming responsibility for the results. Therefore, analyzing the factors that can influence or disrupt the process during implementation will ensure a conducive environment for developing youth policies that meet young people's needs. Additionally, the results from this research direction could be extrapolated to the implementation of public policies for other sectors and different types of beneficiaries.

Perceptions and Attitudes of Key Actors Towards Intersectoral Partnerships – Conducting qualitative studies to measure the perceptions and attitudes of key actors (private sector, public sector, civil society through NGOs, stakeholders, etc.) regarding these partnerships would contribute to a better understanding of the factors that positively or negatively influence such collaboration. Determining the ideal context for entities to collaborate would lead to increased efficiency.

Comparative Analysis of Intersectoral Partnerships in Different Countries or Regions – Comparing intersectoral partnerships across various countries or regions could provide insights into their governance systems and cultures, and how these influence the collaboration process in developing youth public policies. Such analysis could also generate one or more collaboration prototypes that certain countries could adopt depending on their governance model or future goals.

Study of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Intersectoral Partnerships for Youth – Analyzing how intersectoral partnerships contribute to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, as committed by the Romanian Government through the 2030 Agenda, focusing on the youth component. This analysis could highlight the coherence of national interventions with European directives.