

The scientific aim of the project is to investigate the roles played by III sector organizations in social policy in Poland after 1989. The intended aim will be achieved by means of a careful investigation of two detailed public policies, such as education and social assistance. The project examines the importance of III sector organizations in the dual dimensions of public policy in terms of their formulation and implementation. The project will therefore contribute to the continuing discussion on the role of the III sector in the welfare mix. The theoretical framework of the project is based on the concept of co-production (Pestoff & Brandsen 2008, Pestoff 2009, 2012). The achievement of the major goal of this project is governed by the intention to accomplish three detailed aims, namely: 1) an investigation into the contribution of III sector organizations, with respect both to the formulation and implementation of education and social assistance policies. 2) A comparison between the contribution of the third sector to education and social assistance policies. As a result, it will be possible to offer an elaboration of the role of the III sector's contribution to the system of social policy in Poland as a whole. 3) An investigation of a model of inter-sectorial (the III sector – public administration) relations at the country and local level in Poland.

The main reason for implementing the proposed project is the need for a new quality in the analyses of III sector – public administration relations in Poland as well as studies on the roles played by the III sector in social policy. What differentiates this project from previous Polish research is the departure from the cooperation perspective grounded in the Act of law of April 24th 2003 on Public Benefit and Volunteer Work and the embedding of the project in the concept of co-production. The assumption is that researches grounded in this Act has some limitations. First, the dominant term employed in these researches to describe relations between III sector organizations and public administration is 'cooperation'. As a result, it is widely used as a source of terminology describing inter-sectorial relations in the majority of the Polish research including the Klon/Jawor Association, the Institute of Public Affairs, the Institute of Labor and Social Affairs, the Institute of Political Studies the PAS or even the Central Statistical Office of Poland (so called research on SOF-1 form). Unfortunately, not every inter-sectorial relation should be considered as cooperation. Second, the Polish research rooted in the Act of law of April 24th 2003 on Public Benefit focuses on the role of the III sector in the public service delivery, but not on management. Moreover, they usually disregard the participation of the III sector in decision-making and the planning of public services. Only Olech (2012) considers the way in which citizens may have an influence on local law. However, this study is not focused on III sector organizations and it utilizes a concept of participation. From the analytical point of view, the concept of co-production is not a synonym of participation, even if the first is taken from the same theoretical background as the second. Co-production, by introducing terms like co-governance, co-management and co-production, allows the investigation of the roles played by the III sector both in the formulation and implementation phases of public policies. As a result, III sector organizations are accorded full recognition for their contribution to the creation (co-production) and management of the multilevel and multi-sectorial structures of public service providers. Moreover, the use of co-governance considering participation of III sector organizations in decision-making and planning public services, enables the investigation of their roles in the democratization of the welfare state. As a result, the project will break with the dominant Polish conceptualization according to which the III sector is allowed to play a merely supplementary or complementary role to the public administration and/or for-profit enterprises, but its role in democratization of the welfare state is very limited or does not exist at all. Moreover, for the first time, the use of co-production in the proposed project enables to extend the analyses of inter-sectorial relations by an investigation of the activities of Polish III sector organizations at the three levels like country level, local level and the level of EU institutions. Finally, as opposed to research rooted in the Act of law of April 24th 2003 on Public Benefit, the proposed project draws from the well-developed theoretical background established by the social sciences of co-production. (e.g. politic, economic and sociologic theories explaining the emergence of the III sector, polycentricity and theories considering participatory reforms). As a result, this project uses more advanced analytical tools than those employed in Polish studies based on the Act of law of April 24th 2003 on Public Benefit because co-production is strongly correlated to the normative-institutional dimension. This means that co-production not only describes relations between the III sector and public administration, it also situates those relations within a wider socio-political and economic order.

The research in the project is grounding a relatively new in Poland concept of co-production. Moreover, it is breaking basic shortcomings in a current western research on co-production, pointed out by Pestoff (2012), which are also visible in a few current Polish research on co-production. It is due to the fact that the research in the proposed project is using both qualitative and quantitative methods, it is conducted in more than one public policy (Ciepielewska-Kowalik analyzed only one public policy in 2013 and 2015 in printing) and it is propelling beyond only theoretical analyses conducted with reference to Western European countries but not Poland (Kaźmierczak 2012, 2014 and Sześciło 2015 disregarded Poland in their analyses).