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CO-GOVERNANCE OF SOCIAL SERVICES: A CASE STUDY OF CO-OPERATION BETWEEN THE ADMINISTRATION OF MARIJAMPOLĖ MUNICIPALITY AND NGOS

Andrius Stasiukynas
Faculty of Public Governance and Business, Mykolas Romeris University
+370 5 2714 676, Ateities St. 20, Vilnius, Lithuania

Aušra Šukvietienė
Faculty of Public Governance and Business, Mykolas Romeris University
+370 5 2714 676, Ateities St. 20, Vilnius, Lithuania

Justinas Staliūnas
Faculty of Public Governance and Business, Mykolas Romeris University
+370 5 2714 676, Ateities St. 20, Vilnius, Lithuania

Svajonė Rainienė
Sudovian Academy, Mykolas Romeris University
+370 5 2714 676 P. Armino St. 92-4, LT- 68125 Marijampolė, Lithuania

Danguolė Micutienė
Sudovian Academy, Mykolas Romeris University
+370 5 2714 676 P. Armino St. 92-4, LT- 68125 Marijampolė, Lithuania

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Abstract. *Constructive co-operation between municipal administrations and independent public service providers, including non-governmental organisations (NGOs), establishes favourable conditions for the development and dissemination of best practices in the delivery of high-quality social services. This research aimed to assess the development and effectiveness of co-operation between a municipal administration and NGOs in delivering social services, using Marijampolė municipality as a case study. A qualitative empirical approach, comprising interviews and focus group discussions, was employed. The Stakeholder Relationship Management Maturity (SRMM) model was used to evaluate the level of co-operation. The municipality chosen for the present analysis is distinguished by a substantial presence of NGOs actively delivering services. The research findings indicate that, according to the SRMM model, the*

maturity of co-operation between municipal administrations and NGOs in providing social services is primarily at the procedural level, whereas relational aspects are evident within the process standardisation dimension. To foster mature co-operation, it is recommended that participants within the co-operation network establish a shared vision regarding the future of social service provision and the role of NGOs. The findings of the empirical research underscore the necessity for participants in a co-operation network to cultivate competencies essential for sustaining and enhancing co-operation (e.g. communication and conflict resolution) and highlight the importance of establishing a unified culture of co-operation.

Keywords: *NGOs, social services, maturity of co-operation, municipality, co-creation, provision of public services*

Reikšminiai žodžiai: *NVO, socialinės paslaugos, bendradarbiavimo branda, savivaldybė, bendrakūra, viešųjų paslaugų teikimas*

Introduction

The involvement of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in the delivery of social and other public services, as well as their collaboration with public sector institutions, has been an important area of research for several decades. However, with shifts in service provision models and the transition from co-production to co-creation and co-governance, there is an increasing need to advance this research. Specifically, it is important to examine in greater detail the dynamics of cross-sectoral co-operation, the evolving distribution of decision-making authority among stakeholders, and the maturity of participation of organisations within the service provision network.

Historically, social services in Lithuania were delivered primarily by the public sector; however, national legislation now allows municipalities to select the model of social service provision that best aligns with their specific needs, considering factors such as population demographics and the existing service infrastructure. Certain municipalities have opted for a more flexible approach, outsourcing some services to NGOs or other external providers.

The authors of this article posit that constructive co-operation between municipal administrations and independent service providers (NGOs) can foster the development of best practices in delivering high-quality social services. However, under a more liberalised model of service provision, NGOs delivering social services may vary considerably in terms of organisational culture and operational methods, creating challenges for municipal administrations in managing and ensuring the quality of these services for residents.

Marijampolė municipality was selected for this case study for the following reasons:

i. Lithuania has a pressing need to strengthen NGO participation in the delivery of public services. The 2021–2030 National Progress Plan includes a target that by 2030, at

least 30% of municipal public services should be delivered by NGOs. In the selected municipality, the majority of social service providers (29/34) are NGOs.

ii. Demographic challenges are driving the need to expand the availability of social services and develop new services, in light of societal ageing, the need to reduce poverty, and the increasing demand for services among specific groups such as families and people with disabilities (the Programme of the 19th Government of the Republic of Lithuania, 2024). In the selected municipality, 21% of the population is classified as elderly.

iii. Lithuania exhibits regional social inequalities, and the Marijampolė region has the greatest demand for social services and assistance, as 40.2% of its population experiences poverty or social exclusion (Office of the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania, 2025).

This article examines the maturity of co-operation between municipal administrations and NGOs in the delivery of social services, using Marijampolė municipality as a case study. The steps undertaken to achieve this objective were as follows: (i) to review the theoretical foundations regarding the maturity of co-operation between the public sector and NGOs; and (ii) to carry out an empirical qualitative study assessing the maturity of co-operation between Marijampolė municipality and NGOs in the provision of social services.

Literature Review

Ever since the concept of the welfare state first emerged, social services have been recognised as a fundamental component intended to ensure that citizens' basic needs are met (Klenk and Reiter, 2023). Nevertheless, academic literature has traditionally focused primarily on the provision of social benefits and support to disadvantaged populations, rather than on the development of social services, the quality of these services, or improvements in the mechanisms for their delivery. In the contemporary context, as the importance of social services extends beyond crisis situations (e.g. the COVID-19 pandemic and the management of migration flows) and they are increasingly recognised as a form of social investment that generates added value, European Union Member States are placing increasing emphasis on this issue.

From a practical standpoint, while the scope, diversity, and accessibility of social services may differ across countries, scholars generally identify their objectives as follows: providing support to socially vulnerable or disadvantaged individuals; assisting in addressing emerging problems and enhancing the capacities of service recipients; and promoting societal social security by supporting the most vulnerable groups (Klenk and Reiter, 2023; Taber, 2012). Consequently, the scope of social services encompasses a variety of preventive measures, general and specialised services, and programmes targeted at specific groups, ranging from one-time consultations on immediate concerns to ongoing care provided by inpatient service facilities. This classification of social services enables not only the identification of key stakeholders in the provision of specific services but also the assessment of the diverse interests and motivations of various actors, including municipal institutions,

professional staff, and service users, as well as the differing incentives of service providers to engage in the co-operative delivery of social services (Pestoff, 2012).

When examining stakeholder involvement in the provision of social services, it is important to highlight the critical role of co-operation between public sector institutions and NGOs. NGOs are conceptualised not merely as representatives of specific interests or as voluntary organisations but as 'equal partners' in the public management process, actively participating in both service delivery and decision-making as well as in initiatives aimed at reforming this sector (Voorberg et al., 2014; Pestoff, 2012). In other words, they are viewed as partners striving to ensure that decisions and services align with societal needs and are delivered more effectively.

When examining the factors essential for such co-operation, the literature highlights the influence of legal frameworks, public administration traditions, and the culture of participation in different countries. In the case of Lithuania, it is noteworthy that, like other Central and Eastern European nations, the country has experienced three main stages of public administration development, i.e. traditional public administration, new public management (NPM), and new public governance (NPG), during which the role of NGOs has evolved considerably. Nowadays, many countries recognise co-operation between municipalities and NGOs as a fundamental component of public service delivery. According to Reinholde et al. (2020), while NPM initially gained appeal for its emphasis on efficiency, market-oriented reforms, and the inclusion of new service providers – which facilitated the active participation of NGOs in service delivery – it has subsequently faced criticism for being socially irresponsible and for its potential to exacerbate inequality. Consequently, NPG – with its focus on social welfare, justice, and active citizen participation – is often viewed as a means to mitigate the negative effects of NPM by expanding opportunities for NGO and civil society involvement and enhancing their role in public governance.

NPG highlights that non-governmental actors, including NGOs, citizens, and informal groups, serve not only as service providers but also as active contributors to the development of social services. Co-operation between public institutions and NGOs is regarded as advantageous, as partnerships and networks can accomplish outcomes that individual organisations alone may not achieve. The effectiveness of such co-operation depends not only on organisational capacities but also on the personal qualities of leaders within NGOs and public institutions, which can either facilitate or impede joint efforts (Zajda et al., 2020). In this context, Brandsen and Honingh (2015) note that the co-production type (see Table 1) is defined by (i) the degree of citizen involvement, encompassing not only the implementation but also the design of professionally delivered services, and (ii) the closeness of the tasks performed by citizens to the organisation's core services. These are the factors determining not only the initiative and capacity of the organisations to engage in service provision but also the role assigned to them by the public sector and the importance of the socially sensitive services entrusted to them.

Table 1. Types of Co-production

	Implementation	**Design and Implementation**
Complementary	Complementary co-production in implementation	Complementary co-production in service design and implementation
Non-complementary	Co-production in the implementation of core services	Co-production in the design and implementation of core services

Source: Brandsen and Honingh (2015, p. 432).

The authors contend that only through sustained and intensive co-operation between sectors can a level of 'community governance' or 'citizen power' be attained, wherein NGOs function as equal partners at all stages of governance, aligning with the ladder of citizen participation proposed by Arnstein in 1969. Nevertheless, in practice, a substantial gap persists between these theoretical participation models and their real-world implementation. Effective empowerment calls for not only public sector initiatives and well-designed policies supporting participation but also an understanding of how the empowerment process itself enhances capacity and influences public sector accountability. However, despite the advantages of co-operation, in practice it is often challenging to reconcile citizen involvement with structural and cultural barriers, institutional inefficiencies, power asymmetries, bureaucratic rigidity, uncertainty over the division of responsibilities, and fears of losing control of decision-making. These factors may lead institutions to avoid engaging interest groups, thereby limiting the potential for successful co-operation (Lester et al., 2015; Bäck et al., 2025).

Another important factor that can impede effective co-operation is that NGOs providing services risk becoming financially dependent on external sectors or funding sources. This dependency may shift focus towards financial considerations, while funding instability and short project cycles further undermine their capacity to participate as equal partners. Furthermore, while NGO involvement in service provision enhances legitimacy and accountability, it can also impose an additional administrative burden on municipalities that lack the capacity to manage participation processes effectively (Denis et al., 2015; Sidor et al., 2021). Therefore, it is evident that in the shift towards less centralised service provision, many countries encounter challenges in engaging diverse service providers and face the risk of service fragmentation. An uneven distribution of providers can result in unequal access to services (Eppel and Allen, 2023), highlighting the need to develop mechanisms that ensure the consistent involvement of stakeholders, including NGOs, in service delivery.

Given that effective co-operation between municipalities and NGOs relies on institutionalised mechanisms, joint decision-making structures, stable resources, and mutual accountability, the provision of social services and related practical aspects should be examined through the lens of stakeholder involvement, with particular emphasis on the maturity of their co-operative relationships.

The maturity of stakeholder co-operation, as a research subject, is employed to examine

various challenges in cross-sectoral collaboration. Its primary value lies in enabling the identification of stages through which organisations or co-operation networks progress, from fragmented or ad hoc co-operation to formalised, managed, and continuously improved co-operation processes (Magdaleno et al., 2011). Maturity models do not diminish the value of one-off co-operation initiatives in addressing specific or crisis situations. However, the literature highlights the importance of clear legal frameworks, transparent funding mechanisms, and organisational capacities that support sustained co-operation rather than ad hoc arrangements (Sidor et al., 2021). These factors are shaped by a country or region's developmental level, the relationships among actors, their characteristics, and the prevailing culture of participation and administrative traditions.

Maturity models offer a measurement framework, or 'ladder', ranging from passive consultation, where stakeholders simply provide information, to active engagement, where there is a two-way exchange of information between stakeholders who collaborate to develop an area of public policy (Gimenez et al., 2017; Bourne, 2008). This framework enables the identification of the current level of co-operation and the planning of transitional actions to achieve greater levels of capacity and improved outcomes.

Another benefit of these models is their capacity to identify and mitigate potential obstacles to stakeholder co-operation. As noted above, successful co-operation can be hindered by factors such as unequal power among partners (e.g. dependence on funding, limited decision-making authority, or the excessive influence of a dominant stakeholder), the absence of consistent inclusion mechanisms, and/or low co-operative capacity. Consequently, theoretical models provide matrices and indicators to assess and improve the capacity for co-operation among partners.

One model designed for such assessment is the SRMM framework, which assists in targeting an appropriate level of process and practice based on an organisation's level of 'readiness' (Bourne, 2008). The framework provides a tool for evaluating standardised procedures (legal regulations, protocols, etc.) established for stakeholder involvement, as well as the central support offered to stakeholders. It also offers methodological guidance on effective co-operation, promotes organisation-wide stakeholder engagement across all stages of activity planning and implementation, encourages partnerships that extend beyond individual projects, and provides common standards for typical stakeholder communities, including their roles in risk management and organisational 'health reviews' (see Table 2).

Table 2. SRMM Methodology

SRMM stages	Standardised processes	Central support	Organisation-wide use	Beyond projects	Typical 'stakeholder communities'	Risk handling and organisational 'health reviews'
Ad hoc: some use of processes	Some	No	No	No	No	No
Procedural: focus on processes and tools	Yes	Some	No	Some	No	No

SRMM stages	Standardised processes	Central support	Organisation-wide use	Beyond projects	Typical 'stakeholder communities'	Risk handling and organisational 'health reviews'
Relational: focus on stakeholders and mutual benefits	Yes	Yes	Some	Some	Some	No
Integrated: methodology repeatable and integrated	Yes	Yes	Yes	Some	Some	Some
Predictive: health checks and other predictive assessments	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Source: Bourne (2008)

Based on these criteria, SRMM defines stages of co-operation, ranging from one-off, ad hoc initiatives to address specific issues, in which network members recognise the need to manage stakeholders using simple tools, to continuous, ongoing co-operation. At this advanced stage, co-operation is not only predictable but also characterised by a management focus on collecting experience (historical) data and regularly using this information to 'check the status' of projects (e.g. whether a project is proceeding 'normally') and to predict possible risks in the future.

Research Method

A qualitative empirical study was conducted to assess the maturity of co-operation between municipal administrations and NGOs in the provision of social services, focusing on the case of Marijampolė municipality. Marijampolė municipality was selected because it is situated in a region that has the greatest demand for social services and support in Lithuania, where as many as 40% of the population experience poverty or social exclusion (Office of the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania, 2025). Marijampolė municipality ranks among the ten largest municipalities in Lithuania by population and is distinguished by its well-developed social services infrastructure and the active involvement of NGOs in service provision. Social services, primarily aimed at enhancing personal independence, seek to promote the social inclusion of vulnerable groups and to prevent social challenges or risks. Marijampolė municipality, like many others in Lithuania, faces various social challenges, such as an ageing population, an increasing number of families and children at social risk, and a growing number of children with disabilities (Marijampolės savivaldybė, 2021). An analysis of the municipality's demographic indicators showed that the population has remained generally stable, with a slight increasing trend. However, nearly one-fifth of the municipality's population has used social services, and people aged more than 65 years make up approximately 21% of the population.

Demographic changes are driving the expansion of the municipality's social services infrastructure, the broadening of service provision, and increased municipal budget allocations for social services. Municipal budget expenditure on social services increased from €46.09 to €68.47 per resident between 2021 and 2024 (Marijampolės savivaldybė, 2022, 2023, 2024). Measures to address the social challenges identified in the municipality's strategic planning documents include developing community-based social services, increasing the involvement of the non-governmental sector in service provision, and boosting funding for social services. Accordingly, the Marijampolė municipal administration faces the challenging task of ensuring the delivery of high-quality social services to residents through co-operation with a diverse range of NGOs.

Empirical research method

Given the complexity of the topic and the aim of capturing the characteristics of the research subject in detail, a qualitative research method was employed. This approach enables a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the phenomenon under investigation (Tidikis, 2003). According to Bailey (1995), the primary distinction between quantitative and qualitative methods lies in their scope and depth: quantitative research targets a larger sample to demonstrate the prevalence of a social phenomenon, whereas qualitative research seeks to explore the same phenomenon through the 'eyes and minds' of informants, uncovering its relationships with other factors and the depth of the issue.

The qualitative research methodology employed is based on the developmental phenomenography approach pioneered by Marton (1986). Phenomenography facilitates an understanding of how informants experience, perceive, conceptualise, and interpret phenomena or the world around them. In recent years, developmental phenomenography has become increasingly prevalent in research addressing public policy issues. As noted by Žydžiūnaitė and Sabaliauskas (2017), developmental phenomenography aids in deepening understanding and uncovering the conditions that enable a more accurate perception of reality.

Interviews are recognised as one of the most effective methods in qualitative research (Tidikis, 2003). The present research employed semi-structured interviews, in which the researcher prepares a set of questions and topics to guide the discussion with the informant. There is no fixed order or exact wording of questions; the researcher has the flexibility to pose additional questions, seek clarification, explore respondents' statements in greater depth, inquire about the meaning of their responses, guide the conversation as desired, and develop a personalised approach to conducting the interview. This type of interview facilitates a free-flowing exchange between the researcher and the respondent, allowing key issues and topics to be explored collaboratively.

This research also employed the focus group discussion method,[1] which is particularly well-suited to identifying, describing, and analysing problems and generating new ideas. Additionally, by sharing their own perspectives and listening to the views of others, participants can contribute to, comment on, or respond to the opinions and insights of fellow group members. Focus group discussions provide a more nuanced understanding of the issue under consideration by capturing diverse perspectives and revealing new aspects of the problem, thereby generating insights that are often difficult to obtain through other data collection methods (Patton, 2001). Similar observations have been made by other methodologists, who note that interactions among participants facilitate a deeper understanding of the problem and support the generation and justification of new ideas (Gaižauskaitė and Valavičienė, 2016).

The interview guide and focus group discussion questionnaires were developed based on the SRMM model (Bourne, 2008), with adjustments made to reflect the context of co-operation between the Marijampolė municipal administration and NGOs in the provision of social services.

Informants in the empirical research

According to Patton (2001), in qualitative research, a researcher should prioritise collecting rich, informative data over focusing on the size of the sample. Relevant literature offers various recommendations for appropriate sample sizes in qualitative research. According to Nielsen (2003, cited in Bitinas et al. 2008, 104), 'a theory explaining 85% of the problems of the research subject can be developed with a sample of fewer than five participants.' Neal (2005, cited in Bitinas et al. 2008, 104) suggests increasing this number to 15. Other authors emphasise that sample size is less important than the informativeness of the data, recommending that new participants be added until the additional data no longer substantially enhances understanding (cited in Bitinas et al. 2008). In planning the stages of the qualitative research, a targeted non-probability sampling method was employed as follows:

- Respondents for the semi-structured interviews were selected based on their work experience, professional competencies, and their connections or relationships with the research subject. Experts for the semi-structured interviews included individuals responsible for decision-making and the strategic direction of co-operation between the municipality and NGOs in the provision of social services, such as the mayor, the deputy mayor responsible for social services, and the head of the social services department. The experts were randomly assigned the codes E1, E2, and E3.
- Informants for the focus group discussions included representatives of NGOs providing social services (two focus groups comprising 13 and 15 participants) and municipal

[1] Note. V. Žydžiūnaitė and S. Sabaliauskas (2017) refer to this approach as the focused group discussion method.

employees responsible for administering social services (one focus group with seven participants). The informants were randomly assigned the codes I1, I2, I3, etc.

The interviews and focus group discussions were conducted between 16 June and 3 July 2025.

Research ethics

This research was guided by ethical principles of research (Bitinas et al., 2008). All participants were informed about the purpose of the research, the use of the obtained domains, and adherence to the principles of research ethics.

Results

The findings of the empirical research enabled the identification of specific characteristics of co-operation between municipal administrations and NGOs in the provision of social services. The interviewees noted that transferring the responsibility to NGOs to provide social services to municipal residents was justified for several reasons:

i. It reduces the administrative burden on the municipal administration ('...no need for buildings and related infrastructure, employee recruitment, etc.' [E1]).

ii. Service quality remains high, and costs remain at the same level due to the creation of a competitive environment, with most service provision operating on market principles (E1 and E2).

iii. It fosters a favourable environment for exchanging best practices and improving the quality of services (E2).

However, some interviewees noted that it is more challenging to monitor external service providers (NGOs) (E2 and E3), it is difficult to assess the ratio of resources used to outcomes achieved (E2), and, in some cases, NGOs may exploit the system to increase unjustified demand for services and secure additional funding (E3). Therefore, effective co-operation, partnership, and trust are crucial (E2 and E3). During the interviews, it was observed that although NGOs play a dominant role in providing social services, there remains no clearly defined vision or strategy (E1 and E2) to guide and support further co-operation between the municipal administration and NGOs.

During the focus group discussions, including those with NGO representatives and municipal administration staff, informants indicated that co-operation is evolving, with the municipal administration setting the direction of this collaboration (I5, I8, I17, and I23); municipal administration employees are assigned to the NGOs they supervise, providing information and guidance (I7, I8, and I25); and the municipal administration intermittently organises meetings to disseminate information on specific topics, such as legislative changes (I2 and I24). However, NGO representatives suggested that these meetings should

be held regularly, at least twice per year and on predetermined dates, with a pre-agreed agenda that includes input from NGOs (I8 and I10), to enable common issues related to the provision of social services to be discussed (I8 and I11). Participants in the municipal administration focus group discussion noted that NGO representatives could be more proactive, take greater initiative in convening meetings, and contribute to agenda-setting for such joint sessions (I2 and I4). NGO representatives in the focus group discussions also observed that communication and information exchange among the organisations themselves were not seamless. At the time of the research, no formal network to facilitate co-operation among service-providing NGOs existed, nor was there leadership to establish one (I7, I12, and I26), although a few long-established organisations have maintained active co-operation with each other for many years (I27 and I29). Service-providing organisations employ a variety of working methods and manage documentation in different ways (I5, I14, and I16); therefore, when feedback is received, it would be highly beneficial to consult municipal administration representatives to establish a uniform practice and a consistent approach to service provision (I17, I19, and I27). Participants in the NGO focus group discussions indicated that it would be useful to develop a shared vision (I9, I15, and I24) of '…how the NGO and social services sector might develop over the next five years' (I10).

Notably, the perspectives of NGO focus group discussion participants on co-operation with the municipal administration varied. Two groups of organisations can be distinguished: the first consists of larger organisations that deliver social services on a broad scale to large population groups (e.g. older people), often functioning as branches of national organisations and operating more in line with business principles; and the second consists of smaller organisations serving smaller population groups (e.g. individuals with physical or mental disabilities, or those who are deaf or hard of hearing), which were often established 10 or more years ago to unite people directly affected by the issue, such as family members. The second group, comprising smaller organisations, expressed greater expectations regarding three main issues: (i) more consultations with the municipal administration and increased support in managing internal service administration tasks (e.g. documentation and administrative correspondence related to feedback received) (I22 and I25); (ii) the creation of conditions to enable professional development of NGO staff (I23); and (iii) greater attention paid to addressing emerging challenges in relation to managing the provision of NGO services (I24 and I26).

During the interviews and focus group discussions, indicators reflecting the level of maturity of co-operation between the municipal administration and NGOs in the provision of social services were identified, based on Bourne's (2008) SRMM model. The findings of the empirical research indicated that the municipal administration has established procedures governing stakeholder participation in service provision and decision-making, including involvement in service delivery and in individual decisions through municipal councils (I2, I4, I5, and I6). However, stakeholder engagement is inconsistent, and only a few individuals demonstrate a clear understanding of the significance of the SRMM. As a result, the organisation's internal focus is generally directed more towards evaluating and

standardising ongoing activities or individual projects (I5) rather than on fostering stakeholder engagement and maintaining co-operative networks.

Assessing the centralised support dimension of the SRMM, the empirical research indicates that the municipal administration department co-ordinating this co-operative network lacks the knowledge and methodological guidance necessary to strengthen partnerships and social capital. Existing legislation and other documents offer clear directives only on the provision of services themselves (I5 and I6); they do not address, for example, communication, conflict resolution, and the management of potential co-operation risks (I3 and I5).

The research also revealed that the effectiveness of the existing co-operative network and its SRMM level largely depends on the initiative of individual actors within the system. Co-operation within the network, in areas not subject to strict regulation, relies primarily on personal, informal relationships (I5, I7, and I10). Consequently, there is an ongoing risk that stakeholder involvement may decrease if the NGO leaders who currently assume this responsibility informally within the co-operation network change jobs, positions, or roles.

Our findings indicated that the municipal administration has established procedures regulating stakeholder participation in service provision and decision-making (I4, I11, and I26). While elements of stakeholder inclusion exist in the service planning process, this practice is neither permanent nor formally approved. Thus, the management of stakeholder engagement is inconsistent, and only a few individuals demonstrate a clear understanding of the importance of SRMM. As a result, the organisation's internal focus is generally directed more toward evaluating and standardising ongoing activities or individual projects rather than on fostering stakeholder engagement and maintaining co-operative networks.

Therefore, based on the empirical findings, it can be concluded that the maturity of co-operation between municipal administrations and NGOs in the provision of social services, according to Bourne's (2008) framework, is primarily characterised by procedural features, while relational aspects are evident within the process standardisation category. Efforts should focus on achieving higher levels of maturity, more integrated and identity-based, within the co-operation network, where participants are committed to continuous improvement and the reinforcement of co-operative relationships, and they can rely on robust internal support. Drawing on prior co-operation experience, future trends should be anticipated and leveraged to further strengthen co-operation and improve service quality.

Conclusions

1. The empirical research confirmed the hypothesis that NGOs providing social services are highly diverse, with a variety of organisational cultures and working methods, which creates challenges for the Marijampolė municipal administration in managing and ensuring the quality of these services for residents. Accordingly,

fostering mature co-operation between the Marijampolė municipal administration and service providers (NGOs) would facilitate the development of a unified vision and the establishment of best practices in delivering high-quality social services.

2. When evaluating the maturity of co-operation between the municipality and NGOs, using the SRMM model (Bourne, 2008), it can be concluded that procedural characteristics dominate across most categories, with higher-level, relational characteristics appearing only within the process standardisation category. The joint activities of the municipal administration for co-ordinating co-operation are generally directed more towards evaluating and standardising ongoing activities or individual projects rather than fostering stakeholder engagement and maintaining co-operative networks. The legal framework for co-operation provides clear guidance on the provision of services but does not address communication, conflict resolution, or the management of potential co-operation risks.
3. To foster mature co-operation, it is recommended that the Marijampolė municipal administration establish a vision regarding the future of social service provision and the role of NGOs. This would enable the identification of directions for developing and strengthening the co-operation network. The findings of the empirical research underscore the necessity for participants in a co-operation network to cultivate competencies essential for sustaining and enhancing co-operation (e.g. communication and conflict resolution) and highlight the importance of establishing a unified culture of co-operation.
4. The empirical research enabled the identification of two types of NGOs involved in social service provision: (i) those serving a larger number of beneficiaries (e.g. older people and children), which possess greater financial and human resources and have more capacity to develop staff skills; and (ii) those providing services to a smaller group of beneficiaries (e.g. children with disabilities), which have more limited resources and fewer opportunities for employee professional development. Accordingly, this factor should be considered when establishing and designing co-operation networks.

Data Availability Statement

The data used to support the findings of this research are available from the corresponding authors upon request.

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Andrius Stasiukynas, Aušra Šukvietienė, Justinas Staliūnas, Svajonė Rainienė, Danguolė Micutienė

SAVIVALDYBĖS ADMINISTRACIJOS IR NEVYRIAUSYBINIŲ ORGANIZACIJŲ BENDRADARBIAVIMO BRANDOS VYSTYMAS TEIKIANT SOCIALINES PASLAUGAS: MARIJAMPOLĖS SAVIVALDYBĖS ATVEJO ANALIZĖ

Santrauka. *Savivaldybės administracijos ir nepavaldžių viešųjų paslaugų teikėjų NVO konstruktyvus bendradarbiavimas sudaro sąlygas formuoti geriausias patirtis teikiant kokybiškas paslaugas gyventojams. Atliktu tyrimu buvo siekiama ištirti savivaldybės administracijos ir nevyriausybinių organizacijų bendradarbiavimo brandos teikiant socialines paslaugas vystymą atliekant Marijampolės savivaldybės atvejo analizę. Atliktas kokybinis empirinis tyrimas (interviu ir fokus grupės), bendradarbiavimo brandai matuoti taikytas „Stakeholder Relationship Management Maturity" (SRMM) (Bourne, 2008) modelis. Analizei pasirinktas savivaldybės atvejis pasižymi dideliu skaičiumi teikiančių paslaugas NVO. Remiantis tyrimo rezultatais, galima teigti, kad savivaldybės administracijos ir NVO bendradarbiavimo teikiant socialines paslaugas branda, pagal SRMM, pasižymi procedūriniu (angl. Procedural) lygmeniu, procesų standartizavimo kategorijoje stebimi santykių (angl. Relational) požymiai. Siekiant vystyti bendradarbiavimo brandą, tikslinga yra bendradarbiavimo tinklo dalyviams formuoti bendrą veiklos ateities viziją dėl socialinių paslaugų teikimo ir NVO vaidmens. Empirinio tyrimo rezultatai pagrindė bendradarbiavimo tinklo dalyvių kompetencijų susijusių su bendradarbiavimo palaikymu ir vystymu (pvz. komunikacijos, konfliktų sprendimo ir t.t.) poreikį, bendradarbiavimo vieningos kultūros formavimo svarbą.*

Andrius Stasiukynas, Professor, Institute of Public Administration, Faculty of Public Governance and Business, Mykolas Romeris University, Vilnius, Lithuania
E-mail: stasiukynas@mruni.eu

Aušra Šukvietienė, Associate Professor, Institute of Public Administration, Faculty of Public Governance and Business, Mykolas Romeris University in Vilnius, Lithuania
E-mail: ausra.sukvietiene@mruni.eu

Justinas Staliūnas, Junior Assistant, Institute of Public Administration, Faculty of Public Governance and Business, Mykolas Romeris University, Vilnius, Lithuania
E-mail: justaliunas@mruni.eu

Svajonė Rainienė, Lecturer, PhD Candidate, Sudovian Academy, Mykolas Romeris University, Marijampolė, Lithuania
E-mail: sva.rain@mruni.eu

Danguolė Micutienė, Advisor to the Dean, Sudovian Academy, Mykolas Romeris University, Marijampolė, Lithuania
E-mail: dan.micu@mruni.eu

Andrius Stasiukynas, profesorius, Viešojo administravimo institutas, Viešojo valdymo ir verslo fakultetas, Mykolo Romerio universitetas, Vilnius, Lietuva.
El. paštas: stasiukynas@mruni.eu

Aušra Šukvietienė, docentė, Viešojo administravimo institutas, Viešojo valdymo ir verslo fakultetas, Mykolo Romerio universitetas, Vilnius, Lietuva.
El. paštas: ausra.sukvietiene@mruni.eu

Justinas Staliūnas, jaunesnysis asistentas, Viešojo administravimo institutas, Viešojo valdymo ir verslo fakultetas, Mykolo Romerio universitetas, Vilnius, Lietuva.
El. paštas: justaliunas@mruni.eu

Svajonė Rainienė, lektorė, doktorantė, Sūduvos akademija, Mykolo Romerio universitetas, Marijampolė, Lietuva.
El. paštas: sva.rain@mruni.eu

Danguolė Micutienė, Sūduvos akademijos dekanės patarėja, Mykolo Romerio universitetas, Marijampolė, Lietuva.
El. paštas: dan.micu@mruni.eu

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