

Co-Creation in Environmental Public Governance: The Case of the National Agreement on Forests

Co-creation-based governance is considered to be an element of good governance, and Lithuanian public governance innovations are also linked to this principle. Thus, the aim of the study is to assess the experience of participation of different groups of stakeholders in the National Agreement on Forests, based on the co-creation principle. The main goals of the research are to identify problematic aspects of the application of the co-creation principle, and to provide guidelines for the effective implementation of the co-creation principle in public policy processes. The study explores the practicalities of applying the co-creation principle and presents data of the interviews with representatives of interest groups from different sectors (economic, ecological and social) and politicians involved in the National Agreement on Forests. The study also describes the results of a secondary data analysis, based on the European Social Survey, which has helped to identify possible reasons for the failure of the agreement.

Keywords: co-creation, inclusive governance, social capital, political efficacy, National Agreement on Forests.

Bendrakūra grindžiama valdysena laikytina privalomu gero valdymo elementu, su šiuo principu siejamos Lietuvos viešojo valdymo inovacijos. Todėl šio tyrimo tikslas – įvertinti įvairių suinteresuotų šalių atstovų patirtį, įgyvendinant Nacionalinį susitarimą dėl miškų, priimtą taikant bendrakūros principą. Pagrindiniai tyrimo uždaviniai – identifikuoti praktinio bendrakūros principo taikymo probleminius aspektus ir nustatyti galimas tobulinimo gaires, kurios leistų ateityje efektyviau taikyti šį principą. Straipsnyje nagrinėjami praktiniai bendrakūros principo taikymo aspektai ir aprašomi tyrimo metu paimti interviu iš įvairiuose sektoriuose (ekonominiam, ekologiniam ir visuomeniniam) veikiančių interesų grupių atstovų ir politikų, kurie padėjo įgyvendinti Nacionalinį susitarimą dėl miškų. Aprašomi ir antrinės duomenų analizės, pagrįstos Europos socialinio tyrimo duomenimis, rezultatai, leidę identifikuoti galimas minėto susitarimo žlugimo priežastis.

Raktiniai žodžiai: bendrakūra, įtrauki valdžia, socialinis kapitalas, politinis veiksmingumas, Nacionalinis susitarimas dėl miškų.

Introduction

Today's fast-changing, complex and difficult-to-define world requires new

approaches to governance, including public governance. It is generally agreed that in such a context, usually referred to

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as a VUCA environment¹, only inclusive governance can be considered effective. Inclusive governance relies on two key assumptions, namely the efforts of the government, broadly defined, to involve the public or different types of stakeholders, and their willingness to participate (Šarkutė, 2023). Public sector innovation, as envisaged in Lithuania's vision for the future "Lithuania 2050", is also based on this principle (Valstybės ateities vizija „Lietuva 2050“, 2023).

In public policy practice and research, inclusive, co-creation-based governance is considered as an element of good governance, it is even considered as a prerequisite for good governance. The co-creation principle has gained popularity and is increasingly used in democratic countries to listen to citizens and to involve new people, who are not a part of the system, but from "outside". It should be noted that basically all innovations in the public sector are linked to this approach (Valstybės ateities vizija „Lietuva 2050“, 2023). However, there has been little analysis of the practical aspects of the application of co-creation principle, particularly in public governance, and even more so in specific sectors such as environmental policy.

It is important to note that the model of inclusive governance itself is not new. The rudiments of this model can be traced back to the 19th century, when A. Smith linked the pursuit of personal interests and the pursuit of benefits to the well-being of society as a whole. Later, this topic has been developed by other scholars. The changes that have given rise

to new forms and methods of inclusive governance are associated with the social transformations of the 21st century, which have transformed the relationship between society and stakeholders from a hierarchical one to one based on the equal partnership, or, in other words, a co-creation (Weisbord, Janoff, 2010).

On theoretical level, several trends can be observed when analysing the application of the co-creation principle. Firstly, despite the new forms and techniques of co-creation used in today's context, the question remains why the theoretically defined ideal conditions of action, i.e. inclusion and engagement, do not work in practice (Arnstein, 1969). Secondly, can the co-creation principle be universal or is a specific approach still needed in certain cases?

Application of the co-creation principle to environmental policy making requires a separate discussion, as there are very few case studies, and the phenomenon is not sufficiently analysed by researchers. The relevance of the topic is grounded in the research object of this article: the application of the co-creation principle in environmental policy making is based on the analysis of the National Agreement on Forests. The National Agreement on Forests is the first vision for the future of Lithuania's forests, based on partnership and an open, systematic and constructive dialogue, the development of which was largely based on a co-creation principle (Nacionalinis miškų susitarimas, 2021).

The case we chose to analyse, at least in theory, met both conditions

¹ Abbreviation of words "volatility", "uncertainty", "complexity", "ambiguity".

for inclusive governance, based on co-creation, i.e., there was an effort by the government, in the broadest sense, to involve the public and stakeholders, as well as willingness on their part to actively participate in the process. However, according to publicly available information, the process, which lasted for almost two years, did not produce the desired result, i.e. ensuring balanced participation of all stakeholders and a balanced representation of interests. Moreover, it has led to frustration among the participants in the process that “they were not being heard”.

It is important to note that this is the first time that the co-creation principle has been used in environmental policy making in Lithuania in order to reach agreement at the national level, and therefore the analysis of this case is particularly important as it could help to identify possible preconditions for the successful application of the co-creation in the future. It is also important to assess the practicalities of this application, taking into account the specificities of the sector and identifying when and to what extent a specific approach is necessary and when a universal one is appropriate. **The research problem** is therefore based on the question of how effective is the application of the co-creation principle in public policy making. The following aspects of the problem were analysed how important are rules and methodologies to make the co-creation process effective; are the citizens democratically “mature” enough to be able to set the rules and play by them; is it still necessary to follow certain rules and best practices, to make the co-creation process effective.

The research object is the application of the co-creation principle in environmental policy making.

The aim of the research is to assess the experience of participation of different stakeholder groups in the National Agreement on Forests, based on the co-creation principle. **The main objectives of the research** are to identify problematic aspects of the application of the co-creation principle, and to provide guidelines for the effective implementation of the co-creation principle in the public policy process.

The following **research methods** were used to achieve the objective: literature review, semi-structured interviews and secondary data analysis.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted in April and May 2024. Representatives from interest groups acting in different sectors (economic, ecological and social) as well as politicians were interviewed. Secondary data analysis was used to identify possible causes for the failure of the National Agreement process. The data source is the European Social Survey 10th round data from the core modules from “Media and Social Trust” and “Politics”.

Theoretical background of inclusive governance and co-creation

Nowadays, inclusive governance, which is essentially based on co-creation, is seen as a prerequisite of good governance. The concept of inclusive governance is often used when it is necessary to create equal opportunities of participation for different societal groups, such as children with special educational needs, people

with disabilities etc. Different actors of Lithuanian public sector actors are applying this model of governance: Open Parliament, increasing digital inclusion in libraries, etc.

In a narrow sense, inclusive governance can be understood as an opportunity or a prerequisite for public participation in the public policy decision making process, but the phenomenon is much more complex and requires a much broader interpretation. However, the concept of inclusive governance is relatively new and there is still no consensus on how it should be defined. The importance of the concept of inclusive governance is demonstrated by the fact that different scholars have analysed this phenomenon quite extensively, which makes it possible to unveil the essence and the concept of inclusive governance and to define the scope of its use.

A discussion of the concept of inclusive governance should start with the notion of citizen participation, as neither inclusive governance nor co-creation are new phenomena. Origins of these two concepts, which are different in form and manner from their understanding in today's context, can be traced back during the evolution of management theories. There are both direct and indirect similarities. As the information discussed below shows, despite the changes in the citizen's and society's relationship with the state and government (in the broadest sense of the term) – from obedience to into a client-business relationship and into legitimate empowerment (Domarkas, Juknevičienė, 2007) – the problem of how the voice of society and citizens is “heard” and “visible” for the government is still an issue of concern.

We should start the analysis of the evolution of management theories from the 19th century, starting with A. Smith's “The Wealth of Nations” and the description of the creation of the welfare of the whole society in pursuing personal interests. Then we should continue analysing the hierarchical relationship between the citizen and the state, which were crucial in M. Weber's theory of bureaucracy, W. Wilson's statements on the normative relationship between public policy and public administration, the French administrative theory of H. Fayol (2005), and so on. Bearing this in mind it could be stated that we will not find any direct references to the idea of inclusive management or governance. However, the theory of public choice, which emerged in the 20th century, argues that all collective decisions (including those of government) are guided by narrow self-interest. It suggests that at that time it was already possible to notice the rudiments of inclusive governance, which is essentially based on the desire to represent one's own interests through the governmental and bureaucratic apparatus. Among other things, it was found that the individual is still central to the analysis of collective choice, i.e., public choice rejects the creation of organic decision making units such as nation, community or society, since decisions are made only by individuals, not groups. Similarly, public and private decision making processes differ not because the motivations of the actors are different, but because the incentives and constraints that lead to the pursuit of self-interest in these two environments are very different (Shughart II, n. d.).

In the subsequent period, together with Niskanen's bureau-shaping model, which fundamentally changed the relationship between the state and the citizen to a business-customer one, and the identified benefits of employee engagement as shown by human resource theory, the citizen and society became "visible" in public policy decision making process. That is, at least in theory, the preconditions for engagement in public policy decision making processes have emerged. However, the fundamental preconditions that gave citizens legitimate opportunities to participate in decision making emerged at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries. This was driven by the social transformations of this period, which forced governments, broadly speaking, to be much more systematically concerned with the quality of their relationship with citizens, beyond maintaining and increasing public trust (Dickinson, 2016).

This process is evolving further. In fact, most contemporary public governance innovations are based on citizen participation practices, i.e., involving citizens, their communities, businesses, academic sector and other stakeholders (Valstybės ateities vizija „Lietuva 2050“, 2023). However, scholars (Vaidelytė, Žilinskas, Rauleckas, 2016) point out that both academic and practical discussions on citizen participation in public governance tend to use interrelated, but not identical, concepts of citizen engagement, citizen inclusion and citizen participation.

When analysing inclusive governance, it is noted that the concepts of citizen engagement and participation are often used interchangeably but are not

identical. The main objectives of both citizen participation and citizen engagement are the promotion of cooperation between citizens and government, as well as the improvement of public services and policy programmes. However, while the two concepts may seem similar, it is important to note that they have different perceptions of the role of citizens themselves. The main difference between participation and engagement is that citizen engagement requires an active and meaningful dialogue between citizens and public decision-makers, whereas citizen participation can only emerge from citizens (Lodewijckx, 2020). It can be summarized, that citizen engagement is composed of citizen inclusion and citizen participation (Šarkutė, 2023).

In order to understand the difference between citizen engagement and participation in a broader context, it is useful to analyse the origins of these concepts. In essence, citizen engagement is a top-down initiative driven by the government, whereas participation is a bottom-up initiative driven by citizens themselves. Top-down initiatives initiated by the government are strictly regulated and has certain rules, whereas bottom-up initiatives by citizens can usually operate without specific rules. The government initiative is thus formal, while the citizen initiative is more informal. For a formal government initiative, it is necessary to identify: 1) what is important to citizens; 2) how to convince them to engage in the process; 3) provide the necessary information (Lodewijckx, 2020). The main challenges for a bottom-up citizens' initiative are: 1) to have sufficient support from citizens; 2) to influence the widest possible public policy areas (Lodewijckx, 2020). Thus, it

can be concluded that inclusive governance essentially requires two conditions: 1) government efforts to involve citizens; 2) the involvement of the public, communities and businesses.

In general, according to J. Herberg (2022), co-creation can be perceived as the practical expression of a collaborative trend in public policy institutions, which is necessary when dealing with complex problems. Co-creation can also refer to a desirable ethos for collaboration. J. Torfing, E. Sørensen and A. Røiseland (2016) provided one of the most comprehensive definitions of co-creation: it is „a process through which two or more public and private actors attempt to solve a shared problem, challenge, or task through a constructive exchange of different kinds of knowledge, resources, competences, and ideas that enhance the production of public value in terms of visions, plans, policies, strategies, regulatory frameworks, or services, either through a continuous improvement of outputs or outcomes or through innovative step-changes that transform the understanding of the problem or task at hand and lead to new ways of solving it”.

In a conventional understanding, as stated by J. Herberg (2022), co-creation usually refers to the collaboration of heterogeneous actors from civil society, academia, policy and industry. Co-creation thus can be seen as a tool for mobilizing societal resources and enhancing unorthodox problem-solving, and building broad-based ownership for public solutions (Ansell, Sørensen, Torfing, 2024). Co-creation practices usually mobilize the experiences, resources, and ideas of public as well as private actors to solve different public policy

problems (Torfing, Sørensen, Røiseland, 2016). Co-creation can improve governance by providing valuable information or expertise in public policy decision making or by lessening the burden on public budgets (Røiseland, 2022).

Co-creation, which is collaborative innovation in public policy making, is significantly influenced by the level of social capital (Al-Omoush et al., 2022). A theory of social capital was suggested by R. Putnam (1993; 2000) which demonstrates the importance of social connections to performance of political systems. Social is defined as the amount of participatory potential, civic orientation, and trust in others (Putnam, 1993). Social capital refers to the culture of trust and cooperation that makes collective action possible and effective by lowering transaction costs and easing the dilemmas of collective action (Putnam, 2000). D. Halpern (2010) describes social capital as “the hidden wealth of nations”. Social capital is a collaborative mechanism and is related with “*capabilities and resources obtained through social relations, collective working and external ties rooted in organizations’ social networks and used to achieve shared objectives*” (Al-Omoush et al., 2022). It means that high level of social capital can induce effective application of co-creation principle. The extent of social capital in a society could indicate the level of social trust (Šarkutė, 2023).

Social capital, and at the same time effective co-creation, is also related with political efficacy. Political efficacy is understood as the citizens’ own understanding of the power they have in the state. Political efficacy consists of two dimensions: 1) subjective competence, or internal

effectiveness, which means the individual's confidence in his abilities to understand politics and act in the political process; 2) the responsiveness of the system, or external effectiveness, which means individual's belief in the opportunities and possibilities provided by the political system to engage in political processes (Balch, 1974).

According to C. Ansell and J. Torfing (2021), by *"changing how government engages with citizens and stakeholders, co-creation provides an attractive and feasible approach to governance that goes beyond the triptych of public bureaucracy, private markets and self-organized communities"*. J. Torfing, E. Sørensen and A. Røiseland (2019) identified four main drivers of co-creation: 1) politicians are eager to strengthen their political leadership, which requires a close dialogue with citizens and private stakeholders; 2) public managers need to mobilize the knowledge, resources, and ideas of external actors; 3) citizens seek community and purpose by having a more active and direct influence on public policy decisions; 4) private organizations need to control their environment by engaging in strategic alliances and partnerships. The barriers, which can hinder the effective application of co-creation principle, are the following: 1) questions of national security that presuppose secrecy; 2) crisis situations that call need quick and determinate action; 3) political and ideological conflicts that prevent collaboration and mutual learning (Torfing, Sørensen, Røiseland, 2019).

As the practical application of the inclusive governance model and co-creation principle – the case of the National Agreement on Forests, which is

discussed in this paper – shows that the fulfilment of the theoretical assumptions of co-creation does not guarantee a successful process, ensuring balanced participation and interest representation. This confirms that the inclusive process, despite its evolution, societal progress and advances in governance, is fundamentally plagued by the fundamental problem identified as early as the 20th century. This problem means that public participation is more formal – citizens can be heard but has no power to ensure that their interests are taken into account (Arnstein, 1969).

Research methodology

In order to identify the particularities of the practical application of the co-creation principle in environmental policy, both qualitative and quantitative approach were combined. The Ministry of Environment of Lithuania, which was responsible for the outcome of the National Agreement on Forest, chose a co-creation principle for the process. Participants of the National Agreement on Forest were interviewed, their public statements were also analysed. Interview data helped to reveal the views of different actors involved in the co-creation process, to identify the problematic aspects that hinder the effective application of the co-creation principle and to find out possible improvements to the practical application of co-creation principle in public policy making.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted in accordance with ethical principles of social research. At least two

representatives from different groups of stakeholders, i.e., representatives from economic, ecological and social sectors and politicians, were interviewed or their opinion was extracted from publicly available data thus ensuring that no group will be given priority. Confidentiality of all respondents was also guaranteed. Public interviews and other public statements of the participants of National Agreement on Forests were also included in the research. Together with interview data, we analysed opinions of the participants of National Agreement on Forests, which were publicly announced and related to the research object. Semi-structured interviews were carried out in April and May 2024. The respondents were selected according to the following criteria: belonging to certain group of stakeholders which participated in the National Agreement on Forests. In total, 6 respondents took part in the interviews. Publicly available opinions of 2 other actors of the process were also included in the analysis.

Secondary data analysis was aimed at identifying possible causes of failed process of the National Agreement on Forests. Data source is European Social Survey (ESS) data of the 10th round from the core modules “Media and Social Trust” and “Politics”. ESS is an academically driven cross-national survey, which has been conducted across Europe every two years since its establishment in 2001. The survey measures the attitudes, beliefs and behaviour patterns of diverse populations in more than thirty nations². ESS is a multi-country survey based

on face-to-face interviews, which are conducted with newly selected, cross-sectional samples. Interviews were carried out with 37,611 respondents aged 15 and over in 22 European countries (European Social Survey European Research Infrastructure (ESS ERIC), 2023). Number of respondents in Lithuania is 1,659. The field work period is September 2020 – September 2022. In Lithuania, the survey was fielded in July 2021 – December 2021 – the same year when National Agreement on Forests started.

Research results

Further results of interview data and secondary data analysis are presented and discussed.

Interview results

In order to assess the practical application of the co-creation principle, this our research aimed at analysing how it has been implemented in the process of the National Agreement on Forests. Ministry of Environment was responsible for the effectiveness of this process. The principle of so-creation was used for the first time in environmental policy making. It should be noted that it is the co-creation approach that is expected to be used to create systemic change and improve public governance in Lithuania in the future (Valstybės ateities vizija „Lietuva 2050“, 2023). That is why it is very important to

² For more information see here: <https://www.europeansocialsurvey.org/about-ess>

assess the practical aspects of the application of co-creation principle.

Further analysis is based on the data from the interviews with representatives of different groups of stakeholders involved in the development of the National Agreement on Forests. In order to organise the process, the participants were grouped according to their interests: 1) political interest; 2) economic interest; 3) ecological interest; 4) social interest. The other groups (coordination, sectoral or agreement) were designed to organise the process and are therefore outside the scope of this study.

First respondents were asked how they felt about the *involvement of interest groups in public policy decision making*. It should be noted that all respondents were positive about the involvement of different interest groups in the public policy decision making process. Among the respondents, there were those who answered that *“it is a natural attribute of good governance of the forests”* or it was treated *“as an alternative to the protests of the ‘unheard’ and ‘invisible’ actors of the system”*. According to the publicly available opinion of one of the representatives of stakeholders, *“for fundamental change to take place, it is often said that you need to ‘get out of the box’. Maybe even ideas that may seem radical at the moment, but in time may be taken for granted. The system cannot make changes from within, because the existing players are usually not able to offer something qualitatively newer”* (Paškevičiūtė, 2021). According to the publicly available opinion of another representative of stakeholders, a great deal of work has been done, despite the fact that the objectives have not been fully achieved: *“For the first time, in*

a complex way, transcending the narrow interests of individual departments or services, a wide range of interests and aspects that influence each other, sometimes even contradicting each other, have been discussed” (Lapinskas, 2023). Summarising the respondents’ answers to this question, it can be said that, in general, the co-creation principle is seen as appropriate for making changes in environmental policy making. Among other things, this implies that two essential preconditions for systemic change and citizen inclusion and engagement have been met, i.e., the government is prepared to involve actors of the political system, and that the latter are willing to actively participate in the process of reaching agreement.

Respondents, when asked whether they felt *sufficiently involved in the decision making process*, essentially highlighted practical aspects of the application of co-creation principle and its challenges, which have not been known or adequately identified until now. In analysing the respondents’ answers, there was a tendency for all of them to identify *impartial facilitation* as a mandatory element for a successful process. That is, facilitators should be those who ensure that different views are evenly heard in the debate, that the structure of the process is maintained, and that time is managed. It means that facilitators must be impartial, neither formally nor informally favouring any interest group. In the case of National Agreement on Forests, according to the respondents’ answers, this is what prevented successful engagement in this process. Not being sufficiently “heard” or not being “heard” at all, not ensuring that different views were “evenly heard”

was one of the important pitfalls of the process.

Another important aspect mentioned by few respondents, was related with *methodological requirements how to apply the co-creation principle*. Respondents stated that it is crucial to *strictly adhere to established requirements*. Respondents felt that the use of co-creation principle *cannot be an end in itself*, i.e. it is not good to act in this way: *“find out and choose who you are going to consult and what you are going to consult about”*. The dialogue should be *integrated by the organisers in charge of the process into a clearly structured platform with a well-developed rationale*, through which the secretariat and moderators of the process continuously refine, systematise, summarise the positions and proposals of the participants of the dialogue and promptly make these positions and proposals public, thus ensuring transparency and fluency of the process. This is the key to a successful process, as knowing the rules in advance and adhering to them throughout the process would help to achieve proper results, ensuring the equal participation of all stakeholders in the process. To summarise the respondents’ answers, it can be concluded that the essential conditions for effectively organizing the co-creation as a process, i.e. for putting this principle into practice, are: 1) impartiality of the facilitators, thus ensuring that the views of the different groups of stakeholders are equally heard; and 2) compliance with the methodological requirements of the process, thus ensuring transparency and fluency.

Respondents also assessed how they perceived the government to view the co-creation process: *as an efficient process*

or rather as more obstructive or formal. The results of the interviews show that a positive opinion predominates. This can be illustrated by the following statements: *“bringing all stakeholders to the same table after a long time”*; *“it is an alternative to protests”*; *“it has helped to identify and mitigate many conflicts”*; *“people from the outside are needed for a fundamental transformation and the co-creation method itself is empowering to get them involved”*. According to the publicly available opinion of one of the participants of the National Agreement on Forests, *“the old methods of bringing together traditional interest groups and listening to those who shouts the loudest or who has more connections, and it means are more powerful – no longer work. Well, maybe you can squeeze out some small change, but not a fundamental one. And for change to happen, political will is also needed”* (Paškevičiūtė, 2021). However, it should be noted that half of the respondents, despite an overall positive assessment, pointed the negative aspects of both the organisation of the process and of Lithuanian public governance in general. This can be illustrated with these statements: the country’s governance is essentially command and control based, where *“the opinion of different interest groups means little”*; decisions are taken *a priori*; *“the format was inappropriate for achieving quality content and compromise”*. Summarising the respondents’ answers and statements, it can be said that, in general, the co-creation principle is viewed more positively than negatively. However, there were important elements missing to reach an agreement, which was the main objective of the National Agreement on Forests. The participants

of this process had comments on the organisation of the process itself (impartiality of the facilitation and compliance with methodological requirements, integration into the process), they also agreed about the “imitation” of the democratic process, as interest groups are usually “unheard”, and decisions are already taken in advance.

Respondents were also asked *what was missing in order to reach an agreement* and *what could have been done better so that the co-creation principle could be applied more effectively* in achieving policy change. Before analysing the respondents’ answers to this question, it is important to note that during the preparation of the National Agreement on Forests, discussions and agreements took place in nine thematic groups. In six of these thematic groups (“Development of forest-related science and training systems”, “Relation between private property and public interest”, “Openness of the forest sector, more detailed public information and inclusion in decision making”, “Formation of stable and more climate change-resistant forests, greater carbon accumulation and increase of forest cover”, “Unlocking and enhancing the socio-cultural value of forests”, “Attractive jobs in forest-related sectors, social security and protection of workers”) agreements were formulated and reached. The vision for forests and the underlying objective of the process have also been formulated. Agreement failed on three clusters of topics (“Reconciling and balancing the multiple benefits of forests in the long term”, “Improving the protection of biodiversity in forests”, and “Enhancing the economic benefits of forests”), where two conflicting

issues – protection of forests and the use of timber resources – were directly at stake. According to the publicly available opinion of one of the participants of the National Agreement on Forests, there was not enough room for wisdom, diplomacy and compromise, so a decision was taken to continue to coordinate these issues under the leadership of the Ministry of Environment (Lapinskas, 2023).

More than half of the respondents felt that while co-design as a method is generally good, it is not suitable in this particular case, i.e., the National Agreement on Forests. Respondents mainly based their answers on the experience of foreign countries, such as Austria and others. The co-creation principle is suitable in cases where “*a very specific solution to a very specific problem is being sought*”, but it is not suitable for organising what is referred to abroad as the National Forest Programme (note: in Lithuania it is the National Agreement on Forests). A quarter of the respondents pointed out that the National Agreement on Forests is essentially too big and important a project to be decided by a small number of people selected according to “*certain criteria*”, and “*the need for expertise*” in deciding on issues that are important to the country and to a large part of society. It is important to note that vast majority of the respondents pointed out that co-creation as a method should be applied in a highly structured way, i.e. “*without lumping together a large number of issues*”, as was the case of the National Agreement on Forests: management of forests, forest workers’ guarantees, public needs, etc. were all addressed together. The process should be decomposed to different elements, as it is not possible

to put together a large number of issues and set the general rules of the game. It may be possible to achieve a result on a single issue, but certainly not all at once.

To summarise the answers of the respondents, the co-creation principle is seen as a positive one, but in this particular case, the National Agreement on Forests, is not the right choice according to the opinion of half the respondents. The respondents argued that *“many different problematic issues are being lumped together”*, *“lack of expertise was noticed”*, and it was also pointed out that once again Lithuania is trying to *“reinvent the wheel”*, i.e., the experience of foreign countries was ignored, which would be of great value in this process. Thus, in order to achieve a better result, it would be worth considering: 1) a different format for the agreement; 2) if the co-creation principle is retained, it is necessary to decompose the process, i.e., to structure it according to the individual issues; 3) to assess the best practices of foreign countries, adapting them to the Lithuanian case.

Results of secondary data analysis

In this part, results of secondary data analysis, based on the European Social Survey (ESS), are presented. This data helped us to identify possible causes for the failure of the National Agreement on Forests. Amount of social capital and level of political efficacy – both external and internal – was analysed as possible indicators of the success of the co-creation. As mentioned in theoretical part of this chapter, level of social capital can induce effective application of co-creation

principle. The level of social trust usually indicates the amount of social capital in a certain society. In ESS, three dimensions measure social trust, i.e., respondents were asked to assess three statements (on a score of 0 to 10): 1) most people can be trusted (10), or that you can't be too careful (0) in dealing with people; 2) most people would try to take advantage of you (0) if they got the chance, or would they try to be fair (10); 3) most of the time people try to be helpful (10) or that they are mostly looking out for themselves (0).

Data from ESS round 10 show, that all dimensions of social trust are assessed similarly by the Lithuanian population (see Figure 1). The highest proportion of respondents gave the highest scores to the statement that most people try to be fair – the average score of this dimension is 5.61. The lowest proportion of the most positive evaluations was assigned to the statement, that most people can be trusted – the average score of this dimension is 5.05. Quite similar score is when evaluating the statement, that most of the time people try to be helpful – the average score is 5.02. In order to see this data in comparative perspective, the case of Lithuania can be compared with representative population samples of other countries. Finland (7.03), Iceland (7.01) and Norway (6.98) has the highest average score when assessing the statement that most people try to be fair, while North Macedonia (4.21) and Bulgaria (4.11) has the lowest score. Iceland (6.49), Finland (6.3) and Norway (6.29) has the highest average score when assessing the statement that most of the time people try to be helpful, while Montenegro (4.0) and North

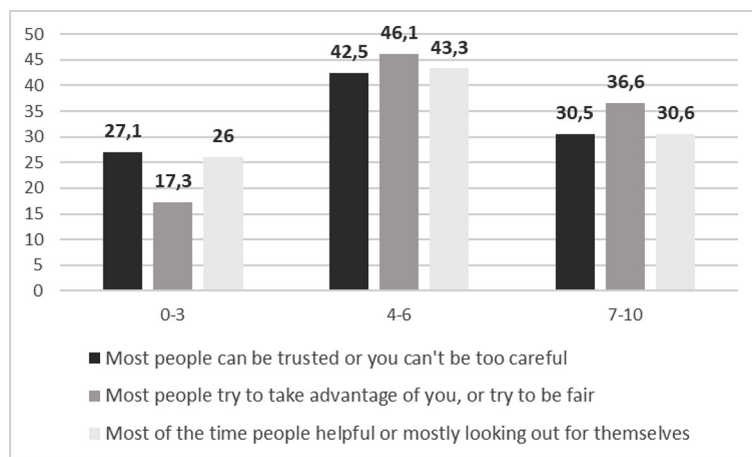


Fig. 1. Lithuanian respondents' assessment of the dimensions of social trust: ESS Round 10 data (%)

Source: ESS Round 10-2020. Weighted data: post-stratification weight including design weight (variable "pspwght").

Macedonia (3.36) has the lowest score. Finland (6.87), Norway (6.69) and Iceland (6.48) has the highest average score when assessing the statement that most people can be trusted, while Northern Macedonia (3.59) and Bulgaria (3.57) has the lowest score. It can be concluded that social trust, which also indicates the extent of social capital, is not very high in Lithuania, as it is barely above the average score of the countries, which participated in the ESS round 10, and is barely more than 5 points out of 10.

As presented in Figures 2 and 3, external political efficacy was scored more positively than internal political efficacy in Lithuania. 35.3 percent of Lithuanian respondents completely disagreed with a statement that political system allows people to have influence on politics, and 26.3 percent completely disagreed that political system allows people to have a say on what government does (Figure 2). Internal political efficacy was assessed even more negatively, with as many as

42.9 percent of respondents saying they were not at all confident in their own ability to participate in politics, and 39 percent stated that they were not at all confident in being able to take an active role in a political group (Figure 3).

Although Lithuanians are more positive about their ability to participate in and influence politics than about their ability to act in this process, both external and internal political efficacy are still low in Lithuania. Internal political efficacy was evaluated as follows: the average score of the confidence in respondents' own ability to participate in politics is 1.87, and ability to take active role in political group is 1.94. External political efficacy was evaluated as follows: the average score when evaluating the statement that political system allows people to have a say on what government does is 2.26, and the average score when evaluating the statement that political system allows people to have influence on politics 2.02.

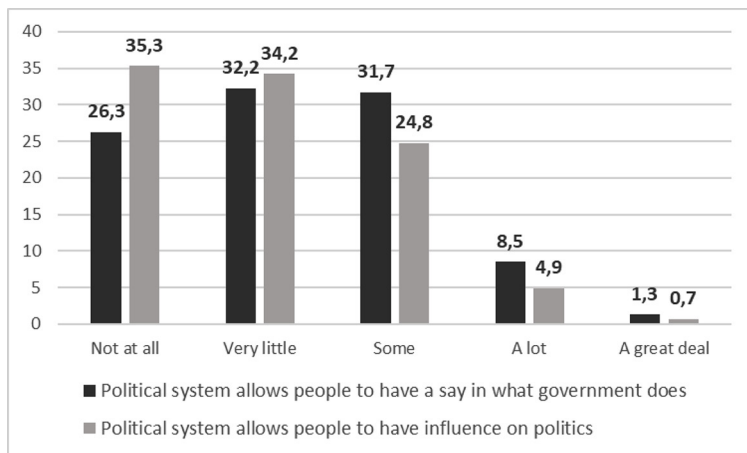


Fig. 2. Lithuanian respondents' assessment of the external political efficacy: ESS Round 10 data (%)

Source: ESS Round 10-2020. Weighted data: post-stratification weight including design weight (variable "pspwght").

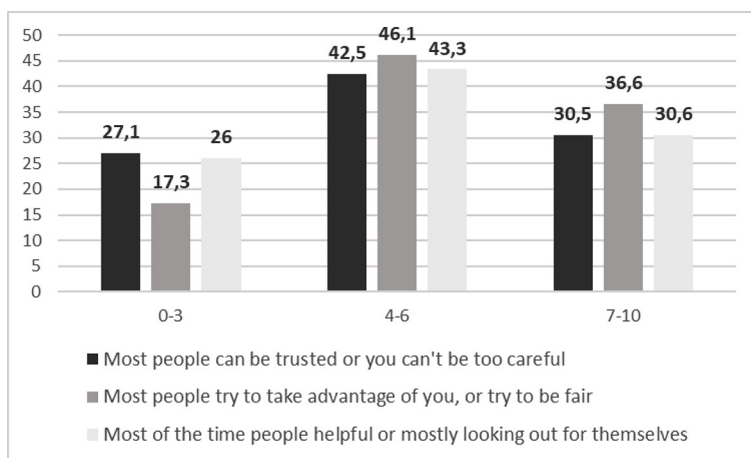


Fig. 3. Lithuanian respondents' assessment of the internal political efficacy: ESS Round 10 data (%)

Source: ESS Round 10-2020. Weighted data: post-stratification weight including design weight (variable "pspwght").

The low level of both the internal and external political efficacy is even more evident when comparing different countries. The highest average score of evaluation of the confidence in respondents' own ability to participate in politics is in Switzerland (2.76) and Iceland (2.75), and ability to take active role in political group is in Norway (2.66) and

Iceland (2.54). The lowest average score of evaluation of the confidence in respondents' own ability to participate in politics is in Slovakia (1.57) and Czech Republic (1.65), and ability to take active role in political group is in Bulgaria (1.63) and Portugal (1.78).

The highest average score when evaluating the statement that political

system allows people to have a say on what government does is in Switzerland (3.17) and Norway (2.95), and when evaluating the statement that political system allows people to have influence on politics is also in Switzerland (2.97) and Norway (2.96). The lowest average score when evaluating the statement that political system allows people to have a say on what government does is in Croatia (1.64) and Italy (1.7), and when evaluating the statement that political system allows people to have influence on politics is also in Bulgaria (1.66) and Italy (1.68). It should be noted that almost all dimensions of political efficacy, with the exception of one dimension of external political efficacy, are ranked lower in Lithuania than the average of all the countries which participated in the ESS.

The data of ESS Round 10 presented above shows that in Lithuania the level of social capital is rather low and people's confidence in their ability to act in the political process is critically low. This shows that there are serious hindrances to the successful application of the co-creation principle. It naturally happens that the amount of social capital is proportional to the quality of political debate in communities and to the overall civic performance. While high social capital is the basis for an effectively functioning democracy, there has been a recent trend of declining social capital in modern societies. As far as the level of both the social capital and political efficacy is low it reduces the likelihood of the success of the co-creation. On the other hand, such situation encourages the application of co-creation principle in public governance, because one of the main benefits, according to J. Torfing,

Sørensen and Roiseland (2019), would be that it *"may strengthen social cohesion and build more resilient communities by empowering local actors, enhancing mutual trust, and building additional social capital that enable public and private actors to use their relations to other people to accomplish new things"*.

Conclusions

The application of the co-creation principle in public governance is a prerequisite for good governance, but "playing by your own rules", where the participants in the co-creation process decide the rules themselves, also requires a certain degree of rule-following and democratic maturity. Otherwise, it could be assumed, as our research has shown, it is likely that the desired consensus will not be reached. This paper analyses results of the research findings on the problematic aspects of the practical application of the co-creation principle in the case of the National Agreement on Forests. This was the first attempt in Lithuanian environmental policy to reach an agreement at the national level without an *a priori* decision. Our analysis has revealed that the theoretical assumptions behind the use of co-creation do not always coincide with the practical ones.

The research data shows that the necessary conditions for co-creation, defined at the theoretical level, i.e., the efforts of the government to include different stakeholders and their willingness to participate, are not sufficient for a constructive dialogue. The essential preconditions defined at the theoretical level need to be complemented by two

other conditions: 1) impartial facilitation and 2) decomposing the process, i.e. not dealing with a large number of different issues simultaneously. All the respondents we have interviewed shared the same views on this issue. The use of the co-creation principle to reach the agreement in public policy making was generally viewed positively, with the emphasis on the advantages of not having *a priori* decision and the involvement of all stakeholders in the process. However, at a practical level, the application of this principle requires careful preparation, as respondents pointed out the main weaknesses of the process: the non-compliance or insufficient compliance with methodological requirements, the insufficient structuring of the process, and the lack of objectivity in the recording and evaluation of opinions. It means that there was no sufficient control of the process to ensure a balanced involvement of all the participants and the representation of their interests.

As already mentioned, the application of the co-creation principle in public governance is itself positively perceived, suggesting that it has the potential to continue in the future. This requires an assessment of the key problematic aspects identified which would make the process more effective in the future. In our research, we interviewed representatives of all stakeholder groups, ensuring a comprehensive information. The key problematic aspects identified mainly relate to the need for impartiality in the facilitation of the process and to the need to decompose the processes, as the case of the National Agreement on Forests showed. This process involved more than 400 participants and dealt with a

large number of different issues, without ensuring a balanced focus and participation of the stakeholders. Summarising the results of the study, the following problematic aspects of the practical application of co-creation principle can be identified: 1) the need for impartial facilitation, ensuring the equal participation of all stakeholders; 2) the need to decompose the processes, without dealing with a large number of different issues at the same time, i.e., from deforestation to forest workers' rights (separate processes are needed for each issue); 3) compliance with the methodological requirements of the co-creation is a prerequisite for a successful process, i.e., the chosen rules must be respected during the whole process, without changing them due to changes in circumstances. In addition, a number of other aspects were noted: artificial attribution to particular interest group; lack of expertise; lack of leadership; "reinventing the wheel" without drawing on the experience of foreign countries that have managed to reach similar agreements.

Secondary data analysis, based on the European Social Survey round 10, helped us to identify possible causes for the failure of the National Agreement on Forests. Results of ESS data analysis shows that in Lithuania the level of social trust is rather low and people's confidence in their ability to act in the political process is critically low. Thus, it can be assumed that the Lithuanian public governance environment is not conducive to successful co-creation. Social trust is a source of social capital, as it encourages and facilitates cooperation between citizens and thus also cooperation with the government in managing public affairs.

High level of political efficacy also contributes significantly to a smooth process of public governance.

In order to make the co-creation more effective in public governance in the future, the following recommendations can be made:

It is worth considering the possibility of using mediators, i.e., judges, assistant judges, or other persons with specialised knowledge and qualifications, to take on the role of facilitators.

The recommendation for future research would be to analyse similar processes in different public policy sectors. It is worth analysing why an agreement on 4% of GDP for national defence and a partial agreement on education have been reached at national level, but not on

medicine. It can be assumed that in the first two cases an agreement was reached because funding was foreseen in the national budget, whereas in the absence of such funding – in the case of the medical sector – no agreement was reached.

Following the assumption made in the previous recommendation it can be stated that it is necessary to provide public funding to reach an agreement at national level that also reflects national priorities.

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BENDRAKŪRA VIEŠOJOJE APLINKOS VALDYSENOJE: NACIONALINIO SUSITARIMO DĖL MIŠKŲ ATVEJIS

S a n t r a u k a

Bendrakūra grindžiama valdysena laikytina privatu gero valdymo elementu, su šiuo principu siejamos Lietuvos viešojo valdymo inovacijos. Savaimė bendrakūra nėra nauja viešojo valdymo forma – jos užuomazgos siekia XIX a. Tačiau tokios bendrakūros, kaip ji suprantama šių dienų kontekste, atsiradimas siejamas su XX a. socialinėmis transformacijomis, kurios valdžios plačiąja prasme ir visuomenės tarpusavio santykių iš hierarchinio pavertė lygiavertę. Teoriniu lygmeniu bendrakūra turėtų būti suprantama kaip valdžios pastangos įtraukti piliečius arba atskiras suinteresuotas šalis ir pastarųjų noras įsitraukti. Vis dėlto praktiniu lygmeniu šių dviejų sąlygų įgyvendinimas negarantuoja, kad bendrakūra leis pasiekti norimų rezultatų.

Šiame straipsnyje nagrinėjami praktiniai bendrakūros principo taikymo aspektai. Tyrimo objektas – bendrakūros principo taikymas viešajai aplinkos valdysenai. Analizuoti pasirinktas Nacionalinis susitarimas dėl miškų. Išsikeltas tikslas – įvertinti įvairių suinteresuotų šalių atstovų patirtį, įgytą įgyvendinant Nacionalinį susitarimą dėl miškų, priimtą taikant bendrakūros principą. Pagrindiniai tyrimo uždaviniai – identifikuoti praktinio bendrakūros principo taikymo probleminius aspektus ir nustatyti galimas tobulinimo gaires, kurios leistų ateityje efektyviau taikyti šį principą. Taikyti šie tyrimo metodai: mokslinės literatūros analizė, pusiau struktūruoti interviu ir antrinė duomenų analizė. Interviu paimti iš įvairiuose sektoriuose (ekonominiame, ekologiniame ir visuomeniniame) veikiančių interesų grupių atstovų ir politikų, kurie padėjo įgyvendinti Nacionalinį susitarimą dėl miškų. Antrinei analizei naudoti Europos socialinio tyrimo (ESS) 10-osios bangos duomenys.

Gauti tyrimo rezultatai rodo, kad bendrakūros principo taikymas viešajam valdymui iš esmės

vertinamas teigiamai, tačiau jo taikymo praktika skiriasi nuo teoriniu lygmeniu išskiriamų esminių priedaidų. Šios priedaidos yra valdžios pastangos įtraukti visuomenę ir suinteresuotas šalis ir jų noras dalyvauti bendrakūros procese. Tačiau šių sėkmingos bendrakūros priedaidų įvykdymas negarantuoja, kad pavyks pasiekti norimą rezultatą. Atsižvelgiant į tyrimo rezultatus, kurie leido identifikuoti esmines praktinio bendrakūros taikymo problemas, reikėtų įtraukti dvi papildomas sėkmingos bendrakūros sąlygas: 1) proceso fasilitacijos nešališkumą; 2) būtinybę skaidyti procesus, nesiekiant vienu metu spręsti daug įvairių klausimų. Pažymėtina, kad visų tyrimo dalyvių nuomonės šiuo klausimu sutapo.

ESS duomenų analizė padėjo nustatyti galimas Nacionalinio susitarimo dėl miškų žlugimo priežastis. Šio tyrimo duomenų analizės rezultatai rodo, kad Lietuvoje socialinio pasitikėjimo lygis yra gana žemas, o žmonių pasitikėjimas savo gebėjimais veikti politiniame procese – kritiškai žemas. Taigi, galima daryti priedaidą, kad Lietuvos viešojo valdymo aplinka nepalanki sėkmingai bendrakūrai. Socialinis pasitikėjimas yra socialinio kapitalo šaltinis, nes skatina ir palengvina piliečių bendradarbiavimą, o kartu ir jų bendradarbiavimą su valdžia tvarkant viešuosius reikalus. Aukštas politinio veiksmingumo lygis taip pat reikšmingai prisideda prie sklandaus viešojo valdymo proceso.

Šio tyrimo duomenys bei pasiūlymai gali padėti užtikrinti efektyvesnį bendrakūros principo, kuris formuojant viešąją aplinkos politiką Lietuvoje pasitelktas pirmą kartą, pritaikymą ir sukurti konstruktyvesnį suinteresuotų šalių dialogą, siekiant į(sitraukimo į viešąjį valdymą. Straipsnyje pateikiamos išvalgos gali būti naudingos ir kitiems viešojo valdymo sektoriams.

