

Local Stakeholder Networks Models: Comparing Institutional and Civic Drivers of Collaboration in Small Cities

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The successful development of cities is usually associated with the collaboration between different stakeholders. However, collaboration networks in urban contexts are complex, and their real impact on local development is dependent on network structure, leadership configurations, types of relationships or purpose of collaboration. The current study examines the role of stakeholder networks on local development in urban contexts and the characteristics of these networks by mapping the stakeholders' networks in two small cities from Romania. The two case studies, Beclean and Darabani, are similar through their demographic size, shaped by a shared post-socialist trajectory, but are significantly different in terms of accessibility, evolution and development levels. The research is based on semi-structured interviews with stakeholders from different fields of activity from each of the two cities, followed by Social Network Analysis and statistical analysis. The results highlight contrasting governance configurations. While both resulting networks are rather centralized, their leadership structures, purposes of collaboration and effects on local development differ significantly. In Beclean, the collaboration network was mainly centred around the local administration, which proved to have an essential role in attracting funding opportunities and developing essential local projects, while also bridging public and private actors along this process. The second case, Darabani, stands out through the presence of a local NGO which acted as a central stakeholder within the network, mobilizing community actors around the creation and development of an emblematic cultural event that generated notable social impacts and, to some extent, economic benefits. This study contributes to the understanding of emerging forms of urban governance in small cities by identifying the multi-layered characteristics of collaboration structures and the roles played by different categories of actors. The results of the study provide relevant insights for designing territorial policies that can contribute to promoting effective models of local governance in small cities.

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