Strategic Planning, Stakeholders and Networks at Municipal Level in Portugal

Local public administration is faced with demands from different actors. In order to promote local development, strategic planning is fundamental in projecting the future, guiding organizations, involving a multiplicity of stakeholders, structuring municipal action and fostering networking. Thus, analysing local strategic planning, the participation of stakeholders in this planning and their organization into networks becomes relevant. To meet this academic and practical demand, the general aim of this research is to understand the reality of strategic planning in Portuguese municipalities, the involvement of stakeholders in this planning, and whether stakeholder involvement enhances networking. The work will be divided into three chapters. The first will deal with strategic planning in local public administration, with the aim of characterizing municipal strategic plans and relating them to the characteristics of the municipality. To this end, a documentary survey will be carried out of the 308 Portuguese municipalities and a categorized content analysis of the municipal strategic plans. The second chapter will focus on municipal stakeholders with the aim of analysing the perception and involvement of stakeholders in strategic planning. Six to eight semi-structured interviews and focus groups will be conducted with key stakeholders from two chosen municipalities, analysed through their categorized content. The third chapter will focus on networks and governance in local public administration and seeks to understand the structuring elements of networking, resulting from municipal strategic plans and stakeholder involvement. Data will be collected in conjunction with the second chapter, but with specific questions, and a municipal network will be mapped. The data collected will be analysed using UCINET software and Social Network Analysis. It is hoped that this research will contribute to the identification of good municipal strategic planning practices, the understanding of the participation of relevant stakeholders and the promotion of their association in networks.

Keywords: strategic planning, local government, stakeholder theory, local networks.

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