

# **Title: Silent Struggle for Participation: The Role of NGOs in Governance and Public Service Provision through the Work of Civic Dialogue Bodies in the City of Kraków**

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## **Abstract**

This article examines how the relationship between non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and local authorities is discursively constructed in documents regulating the functioning of civic dialogue bodies in the city of Kraków. Drawing on a critical discourse analysis (CDA) framework, the study addresses three core questions: (1) how NGOs and municipal actors are represented and positioned in governance discourse; (2) what discursive mechanisms constrain NGOs' ability to participate in decision-making and access public resources; and (3) how NGO opinions are represented, evaluated, and legitimised in institutional communication. The analysis is based on five official documents produced between 2019 and 2024: Kraków's Multiannual Cooperation Programme, the official consultation report, two sets of minutes from the Public Benefit Activities Council (KRDPP), and a formal KRDPP resolution.

The research was originally designed to include semi-structured interviews with public officials and NGO representatives. However, access limitations and time constraints allowed for the completion of only three interviews. These conditions prompted a shift in methodological focus toward discourse-based investigation. The researcher, as an active member of both the KRDPP and the Youth Policy Dialogue Commission, adopted an insider perspective to better contextualise institutional logic and discursive patterns observed in the analysed documents.

Using a twelve-category CDA matrix (including actor representation, modality, genre, topoi, and legitimacy attribution), the study shows that while NGO participation is formally acknowledged, it is discursively shaped in ways that reinforce institutional asymmetry. NGOs are frequently portrayed as service providers or commentators, with limited space to influence agenda-setting or policy framing. Modal verbs, presuppositions, and strategic genre conventions contribute to the symbolic containment of participation, with institutional legitimacy granted only to positions that align with administrative logic.

By analysing how participation is constructed, limited, and selectively validated through language, the article contributes to broader debates on technocratisation, depoliticisation, and symbolic inclusion in local governance. It also highlights the relevance of discourse analysis in addressing empirical constraints when studying power-laden institutional settings.