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COMMUNICATION MANAGEMENT IN PUBLIC SECTORS: THE CASE OF THE POLISH ENERGY SECTOR

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Abstract: Public sectors differ from private so corporate PR strategies and instruments can't be simply copied by public institutions. Because of that it was crucial to create a new theoretical background fit for specific frames of the sector that would enable to take under consideration economic aspects of public activities.

Keywords: public sector, government communications, public relations, economic efficiency, Polish energy sector

INTRODUCTION

Economic theories for a long time has favored perfect competition over other models of solving problems related to management in micro and macro scale. According to the concept free market can automatically achieve an economic equilibrium, price is a result of supply and demand game, no barriers to entry exists and each market participant has complete information about conditions of transactions, what enables to make rational decisions in mathematical way [Begg, Fisher, Dornbusch 1995, p.228-267]. By definition, government is not needed to make things work right in perfect economy and the existence and size of public sectors should be minimized to administrative activities in narrow sense, i.a. regulatory functions and common security.

Nowadays, with dominant neoclassical approach to economic science, perfect competitions still rules. If we agree to its concept the cost of access to information about the market is zero. Each seller offers exactly the same product and the market balance itself, so gaining a new customer is a random issue. Consumers will buy exactly as much as sellers offered [Ostrowski, 2000]. Although perfection is something scientists often dream of, reality is far more imperfect than the theory claim. As a results there was born a critical approach to classical economics by some called "heterodox economics". We can see first moves in this direction already at the 1920s and 1930s [Ostrowski after Sraffa 1926; Robinson 1933; Chamberlin 1933; Kalecki 1935; Keynes 1936].

What we live in now, some researchers like to call an information society and a global village. The most important factor distorting foundation of the perfect competition theory is lack of information about the market. Information itself is a part of every production process, product or service. Nobody will be surprised to hear its quality, completeness and speed of spreading across market participants is a base of competitive advantage for economic entities [Goliński 2005, p.11-15]. Information about products and services actually creates consumer's tastes and directly influence demand. Appropriate communication management is of key importance for rationalizing economic choices.

In the paper the author analyzed models of communications management in public sector in order to prove there is a link between these kinds of activities and optimizing economic processes. What is presented in this part is mostly theoretical approach to the problem. In the second part of this paper what was previously verified in theory, was applied to Polish energy sector to where according to European law should be introduced perfect competition. Structural changes going on this market made energy sector neither fully public nor private and communication management

is still treated as a new invention, so it is a perfect object for research purposes and analyses of actions involved with communicating by public administration.

THE DISTINCTIVENESS OF A PUBLIC SECTOR

In the literature of the subject the term public sector has different definitions. It is quite difficult to explain it in a homogeneous way. It is often associated with the public finance sector entities which are listed in a country's law [Woźniak 2003, p.467]. Many researchers claim this way of defining public sector from methodical point of view is inadequate, because it doesn't allow to make a clear distinction between private and public sectors [Kosek-Wojnar, 2006]. Taking this under consideration Owsiak [2005] proposed a two-dimensional approach. He distinguished the public sector in the broad meaning of the term, which includes property and income of the state regardless of their organizational and legal form and in the narrow meaning of the term, which refers only to the public entities and cash on their accounts.

As for this paper public sector should be defined by using subjective and objective criteria. Also social context is of key importance for the analysis [Szewczuk, 2008]. Public sector is the part of economy that serve the public and can consist of governmental entities of different levels. Their main source of income are taxes and other similar funds belonging to central and local government. There can be public or private institutions as long as they provide public goods funded with money from public budget.

From economic perspective the biggest disadvantage of public sector is its inefficiency that is a result of domination of supply side on the market. This sector operates for the public good, so the economic criteria of its functioning is to minimize costs generated when satisfying social needs. Efficacy of the production process is of less importance. The hierarchy of needs depends on favored economic theories and policy adopted by a government. In public sector resignation of microeconomic criteria of maximizing profits on the supply side and utility on the demand side is justified by the public interest.

In private sectors producers have to follow their customers' needs and desires. Thanks to PR or marketing tools to some extent they can influence testes and increase the demand for their products. In public sector to change customers' behavior is to implement the policy [Buurma 2001, s.1289]. The demand for specific activities is determined according to the principles of fairness and social justice with satisfying the most common, average and urgent needs of their "consumers". A change in implemented policy or adoption of a

new one is based on voting, public consultations or negotiations (eventually is done due to the subjective opinion of the government's officials). Functioning of the entire public sector should be under a democratic control. At least it is what can be find in theory [Walsh 1994, p 67]. Because of a low level of social activism in Poland, the evaluation of public activities is done usually during parliamentary elections and in time of the political campaigns.

According to Mordecai Lee, functions of public institutions in country's economy can be identified as [Heath 2007, s.879]:

- the implementation of public policy,
- assisting the news media in the coverage of government,
- reporting to the citizens on agency activities,
- increasing the internal cohesion of the agency and its sensitivity to its public,
- the mobilization of support for the agency itself

To perform such tasks public institutions must act not only as a regulatory body but also as a participant of the market game. Efficiency of a policy is strongly dependent on cooperation between entities involved in its implementation and these benefitting of it. There can't be any cooperation without exchange of information. As a result three main functions of government communication can be found [The George Washington University's Elliott School for International Affairs Lindner Commons Room, 2009]:

- informing,
- advocating/persuading for policies and reforms,
- engaging citizens.

They can be identified after an analysis of public administration's tasks, so it is only natural they are similar to McClellan paradigm known also as the communications pyramid of public diplomacy (fig. 1).

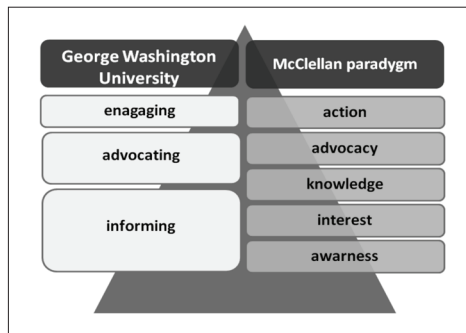


Figure 1.
 Functions of government communication and public diplomacy.
 Source: author's work.

The main goal of government communications is to engage citizens and other stakeholders into processes regarding implementation of a policy. Their efficacy depends on circumstances of a given governmental activity – what kind of a policy is implemented and how much stakeholders are involved in the process. Unfortunately, despite the relatively large freedom of action and decision-making power, political factors can be a limitation of great importance if an initiative is too innovative or conceptually not close to the mainstream concepts. It also applies to communication management instruments [Liu, Horsley 2007].

As we can observe in practice the more complete information and the faster its exchange occurs the better the effects of a companies' business efforts. Similar results are visible in public sectors. Citizens well informed about objectives and instruments of a policy being implementing can behave according to public administration expectations. Thanks to it their opinions are based on reliable knowledge instead of negative emotions. They also know their rights and responsibilities, what should decrease costs of implementation by increasing efficacy of actions taken by the administration (i.e. faster access to beneficiaries of a social program) and lowering costs of fighting against public resistance when a negative attitude towards a policy turns into a crisis situation (i.e. there is no need to pay for press articles or cover expenses of intensified meetings with stakeholders).

MODELS OF COMMUNICATIONS MANAGEMENT IN PUBLIC SECTORS

Since the turn of 1980s and 1990s in many European countries took place a significant change in the approach to public sector management theory. It was caused by the creation of a new concept based on managerialism [van Duersen, Pieterse after Duivebon, Lips 2002]. For the purpose of complying with new conditions in the first place people usually try to adapt existing solutions. The same happened here. Models born of needs from corporation management, primarily based on the theory of marketing, were used to describe reality of the public sector.

Strategic planning and marketing techniques were supposed to help in "selling" a government policy to citizens. They were seen as useful because researchers treated relationship between the state and taxpayers as a regular market exchange – citizens pay for some products and services provided by public sector directly (when they actually had to purchase and pay a price in conditions similar to market reality) or indirectly (through taxes) [Walsh, 1994].

Public institutions inspired by this theoretical approach started informing their stakeholders, but at the beginning it was rather auto promotion than communication. By the time being their activities became a significant support for implementation of public policies [Duersen, Pieterse 2006].

The subject area of internal and external communication has been variously referred as “communication in public administration”, “public agency communication”, “public sector communication”, “administrative communication”. In modern studies the field was named “government publicity”, “public relations in public administration”, “promotion”, “administrative public relations”, “public affairs”, “external communication”, “public relations management in government”, “external relations” or “relationship management” [Lee, 2008, p.6]. Nowadays it is back to the term “government public relations” or “government communication” [Bled, 2010].

The marriage of public sector and the media is nothing new. There are many handbooks and guidelines how to cooperate with journalists and inform the public using media relations. This relationship evolved from competitive through coexisting to cooperative but is still far away from excellence [Lee, 2008, p. 403]. The public perceive government communication as propaganda and government think journalists are persistently trying to uncover scandals and it hasn't changed since the beginning of public relations in 1920s.

First guidelines for communication management in public sector that can be classified as a complete theoretical basis were presented by Hiebert [1981]. Although they were called by the author as the government communication process model, they were more like a set of advice than a theory. Walsh [1994] pointed out increasing role of marketing in public sector. Marketing short-term agenda was accurate for ad hoc promotional and informational needs of public entities. Newly born awareness of communication needs in public administration structures were explained by him as a result of consumerism that forced more sensitivity to citizen's wishes and decentralization of public tasks. It required public entities to expand the range of their services and improve the system of redistribution.

Mission and vision in public sector is not the same as in private, where dominate marketing and public relations goals. For administration staff legal frames and political decisions are crucial [Walsh, 1994]. They often forget the way the public is told about government's policy can be of key importance for its efficacy [Walsh after Deacon, Golding 1991]. Polish reality proves that in post-communistic countries where economy evolved from distribution-

-command model to free market, the creation of structures and tools needed for information exchange in private sector were of utmost importance. As a result changes in public sector were significantly delayed.

In 1990s in the field of Public Relations two-way symmetrical model was presented by Grunig [2001]. It conceptualized how to adapt organization's strategies to effectively address needs of its stakeholders – it was necessary to find a middle ground where could be established a dialog between involved parties where each of them was a sender and receiver of a message and their relationship was based on mutual consensus and satisfaction [Wojcik 2011, p.24]. Grunig's excellency model became the flagship of American researchers in the field of communication, sometimes called also as a mainstream. According to author's assumptions two-way symmetrical model is perfect (excellent), so it can be used for all situations where communication processes are in progress.

Public administration by definition is used to on-way communications that is based on a simplified, one-sided vision of the environment, which in some situations may be more effective because it allows to faster decision making process and announcing decisions and critical information in such situation as an unforeseen crisis. Grunig's model must therefore be seen in the same way as the theory of perfect competition, with full awareness of its limitations. Besides, the author himself was aware the practice does not meet all of the excellent assumptions of his model [Wojcik, 2011, p.27].

Burma [2001] presented in his research communications activities based on the concept of market exchange. In the first version of the analysis, public administration bodies acted to implement a policy addressed to a limited number of consumers with whom they had direct contact. According to the stages distinguished on the basis of several key concepts from Koster's exchange model, the citizens were first informed about the implementation of a policy, and if they showed interest in participating in it they took part in negotiations concerning further cooperation. Then each party fulfilled its obligations. Finally, citizens verified the economic profitability of their choices in the market reality.

Exchange with a multitude of customers, it is not possible for public administration to Get in touch with each of them individually and negotiate separately terms of participation. So naturally there is a huge need for information to extend citizen's knowledge about public policies and programs, which Burma [2001] treats as "marketing mix" – conditions determining of cost-effectiveness of taken activities. An example of such a situation are limitation

in use of pesticides in food production. According to a relevant government policy food producers have specific responsibilities. If their products don't follow the rules they will be excluded of market exchange and the producers will have to pay fines or will be a subject of other sanctions. From the social point of view, the creation of appropriate attitude in the field of environmental protection and healthcare was an added value obtained thanks to the exchange by public entities.

Buurma's model describe public activities in an appropriate way, but the use of marketing concepts from private sector don't fit accurately into the public frames. If we followed its findings there would be a natural conclusion that citizens act only because they want to maximize their utility and personal profits without any attention to the meaning of behaviors in the societal dimension, where money is less important than relations between people. Although many people act in this way, such assumption makes the whole analysis too simple and not realistic.

Synthesis model of public sector crisis communication proposed by Horsley and Barker [2002], can be applied to limited number of situations. Authors pointed out series of actions that enables public entities to face a crisis situation. The model includes six stages: ongoing public relations efforts, identification of and preparation for potential crises, internal training and rehearsal, the crisis event, evaluation and revision of public relations efforts, and interagency and political coordination analysis [Liu, Horsley, 2007]. It is a rather specific approach to government communication theory that applies only to crisis situations and are more like a guides for self-improvement within a public organization than its interactions with the external environment.

The most complex model of public communications management is proposed by Liu and Horsley [2007, p.378-381]. They differentiated eight factors determining the way of communications in public sector:

- political dimension is of great importance and can influence not only relations between institutions but also links between different lobby groups,
- the goal behind establishing public institutions and agendas is public good, so there is less attention paid to market aspects of their activities
- legal constraints,
- media scrutiny,

- devaluation of communication, what results in cutting costs on this activities in public budgets
- poor public perception – public opinion see communication processes as a form of propaganda
- lagging professional development of public sector behind private sectors federalism.

When creating model of communication all the limitations should be taken into consideration. An attempt to do it resulted in creation of the government communications wheel model, that is based upon four coexisting, complementary microenvironments [Liu, Horsley 2007, p.384-386]:

- multilevel, where two or more levels of administration collaborate on a single issue,
- intra-governmental, inside of an institution or agency,
- intergovernmental, where cooperate units of the same governmental level,
- external, where stakeholders are involved especially private sector and NGOs

In all four microenvironments managers share expertise and resources as well as coordinate communication [Liu, Horsley, 2007, p.387]. In each of them information can be exchanged through different channels directly (direct-to-public communication) or indirectly (mediated). In practice, government's agencies are strongly hierarchical. Its economic resources are limited and given to particular entities as planned in central budget and budgets of individual public bodies. Communication management is not perceived as important for public activities and agencies are busy with administrative tasks on a daily basis, so it is not surprising cooperation in this field is not as perfect as it should be according to the model. It should be noted that communication management, even if only by websites or bulletin boards placed in institutions and media relations, are more common also in Poland. Because of that the model proposed by Liu and Horsley [2007] has a chance to become the starting point for a theory of government communication in the public sector.

THE CASE OF THE POLISH ENERGY SECTOR

Energy sector in Poland has four subsectors – fuel, electricity, heating and gas. While the last three operate under similar market conditions, fuel subsector is different than those because of features of products and services offered in there.

For over a decade, Polish energy sector has been changing on a structural level. In 1990s public monopolies were divided into smaller companies. It was the first attempt to introduce competition and market mechanisms to the sector. European integration, the need to face global concerns entering the market and lack of investment capability were the reasons why new structure was not good for the long-term sector development. Thus close to Millennium previously divided companies were once again consolidated. It led to the birth of several key player in the market of monopoly structure.

For a long time the main limitation for energy sector has been strongly limited access to transportation infrastructure. It was a barrier of entry and favored companies existing on the market over new ones. A solution to this problem was implementation of principles of unbundling and Third Party Access in accordance with EU directives. Although they didn't solve all the problems at least some foundation for changes in order to improve efficacy and increase the importance of the demand side, especially the most dispersed group as individual customers, was provided.

Now the state is present in energy sector in two roles. As a regulatory body in the board meaning of the term (table 1) it establishes legal frames of business activity, approves of the tariffs and decide how many information will be told to the public. The state is also the owner of the transportation grid and shareholder in majority of Polish energy companies. Because public funds are engaged in energy sector it can be classified as a part of public sector.

The main goal of government's activities engaging public funds in energy sector is to secure energy supplies and (mostly by encouraging investments and restructuring of the sector) and to create environmental friendly behaviors and attitudes (educational campaigns and factors of legal and economic nature). Interventionism of the state is limited by definition. Social values protected by Polish government more than market mechanisms are according to the approved policy only energy security and fulfilling international commitments on environmental protection and nuclear safety [Ministry of Economy, 2009].

Table 1. Entities responsible for regulatory issues in Polish energy sector.

The nature of regulation	The regulatory body	Main areas and regulatory tools
institutional	Parliament	energy law
	Minister of The State	corporate governance
		privatisation
	Minister of Economy	energy policy
		taking part in corporate governance
	President of Energy Regulatory Office	demonopolization
Office of Competition and Consumer Protection		
administrative	Institutions like	
	– Agency of Energy Market	
	– Foundation of Development and Saving Energy	
	– Polish Association of Professional Heating Companies	
	– Polish Association of transmission and Distribution of Electric Energy	
	– Economic Association Polish Powerhouses	
	– The Board of Industrial Power	
	Minister of Economy	system standards – regulations
		President of Energy Regulatory Office
	economic	Parliament
Minister of Economy		accelerated depreciation of assets
President of Energy Regulatory Office		penalties
Stock Exchange		prices
persuasive	NGOs	sharing knowledge about technologies of production and models of consumption that saves energy
	President of Energy Regulatory Office	consulting projects of development plans

Source: Dobroczyńska A., Juchniewicz L., Zaleski B., 2001, *Regulacja energetyki w Polsce*, Toruń, Wyd. Adam Marszałek, p.37.

The government led by Donald Tusk during the first term of office has decided to improve the efficiency of Polish energy market through deregulation and privatization (it is written in government's documents such as Polish energy policy till 2030, Privatization plan for years 2008-2011 and its continuation – Privatization plan for years 2012-2013). They planned the changes to be not in organizational structures but also in ownership. As a result there should be significant increase of efficacy, reduction of costs, making the market structure more clear and separating ancillary activities as independent business entities [polskiportalenergetyczny.blogspot.com 2012].

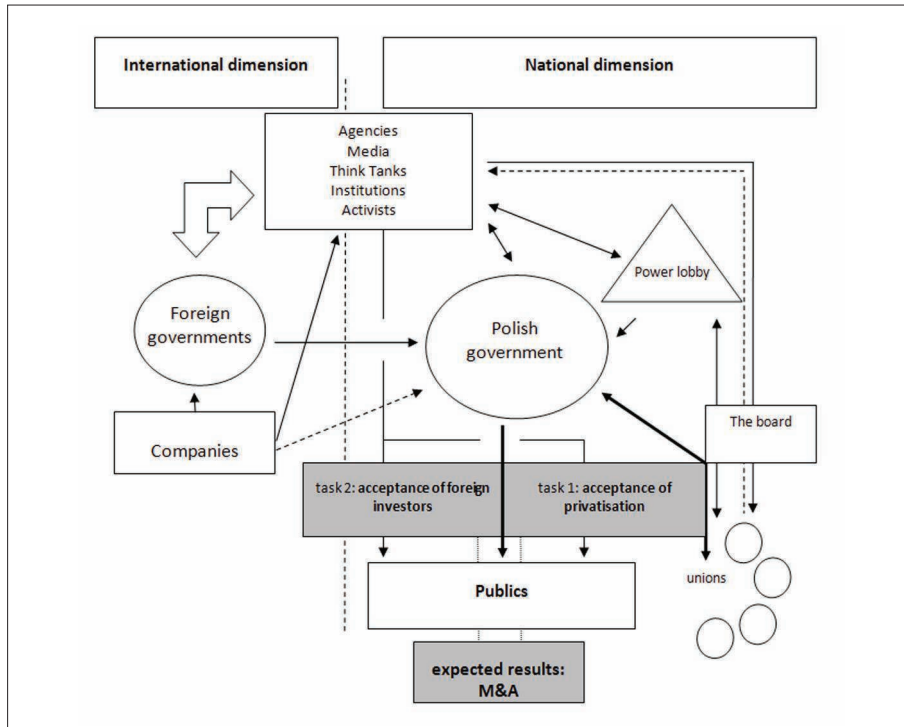


Figure 2. Stakeholders of communications management processes in Polish energy sector.

Source: Bogdat M., Models of communication during M&A in the Polish power supply sector [in:] Challenges for Communications management and public relations in international mergers and acquisitions (ed.) R. Ławniczak, Poznań, Wyd. Naukowe CONTACT, 2011.

Companies of strategic importance for national energy security will be privatized only partially. Despite these limitations in M&A transactions on

Polish energy market are interested domestic and international players (fig. 2). For Polish government it is not going to be easy task, because it must face communication management in favor of not only the privatization itself, but also its form and acceptance of potential investors. It is even more important because public opinion don't approve of privatization not only in energy sector but in the whole economy [OnBoard PR Ecco Network, 2010].

That issue is not simple. Even government officials are aware of huge communication needs in energy sector. Ministry of State Treasury Mikołaj Budzanowski said in one of interviews that endless public debate and decision-making paralysis will be unfavorable for the long term development strategy of Polish economy [Stefaniak, 2012]. Taking into consideration the importance of information management for the efficiency of economic processes, he is right.

Currently, Polish energy sector, particularly gas and electricity subsectors, are being prepared for the liberalization. There is a plan to make prices of electric energy and gas totally independent from the protection of President of the Energy Regulatory Office. Companies support the idea, because they claim to operate on a market where given prices are lower than costs of production what effectively blocks future investments [Paczewska, 2012]. For end users this could mean increased market efficiency and improved customer service, but not necessarily at low prices, especially for individuals whose market power is not large [Szczepaniuk, 2012]. The final effect of this change depends on the actual changes in market structure on the supply side. This will be allowed only by better access to information about conditions of transactions on the demand side.

Because of the transformation of energy sector from controlled by government into liberalized, the market desperately needs to face several problems on different levels [Bogdat, 2012, s.100]:

- organizational, related mainly to over employment and existing model of managing energy companies,
- operational, related to high costs of running a business in energy industry,
- caused by a lack of capital for investment in generation capacity and transport infrastructure (for transmission and distribution of energy) or needs to improve the allocation of resources, especially financial ones.

For each of these levels, there are information needs the government has to meet directly or acting through its agenda. When analyzing those who are

involved in processes taking place on the energy market, it is clear that private sector and public sector coexists on two levels – national and international.

According to it the analysis based on the model suggested by Liu and Horsley [2007] would need some modifications. The microenvironment should be analyzed in the two mentioned dimensions, which further intertwine. This may be a little bit difficult, because energy sector is not internally consistent. Therefore the degree of state intervention and the need to manage information in each of subsectors will be different. The solution to this conceptual dilemma can be a creation of a general model for the sector with variations for each of subsectors. However, further research in this field requires to pay more attention to stakeholder characteristics and instruments efficiency, as the model describes only general principles and possible sphere of interaction for government communication.

Looking at government communication activities in energy sector, there are usually taken following actions that concerns:

- informing about energy needs of a country, publishing reports and statements on the implementation of energy policy,
- educating the public about economic frames of energy market and changes that are taking place in there and teaching socially responsible attitudes in the field of energy consumption,
- making consumers and producers more familiar with their rights and obligations arising from existing regulations,
- providing information about economic activities of the state in the energy sector and implementation of corporate governance, especially about the issues regarding transport of energy,
- promoting the state's energy policy by engaging society in its implementation, i.e. on promotion of new environmentally friendly energy sources.

Presented classification is related to Polish energy policy to 2030, in which communication management performed by government's agencies and public institutions involved in R&D are pointed out as one of most important instruments of the policy.

CONCLUSIONS

In fact an access to information is of key importance for competitive economy of information society is indisputable. Information has become not

only one of production factors and the source of innovation in micro scale, but also an element of competitive advantage over other participants in a market game. Lack of information can lead to the creation of barriers to entry and indicate transformation in macro scale. In public sector, in where are often adapted models copied from private sectors and employed staff educated in the field of corporate communication, the awareness of profits generated by communication management is constantly increasing.

Nowadays most of public entities has its own departments responsible for creating and spreading information about their activities. Especially central governments are willing to use different instruments to promote their actions. However, the application of marketing and Public Relations techniques is not what we can identify as strategic planning and professional management. It is important to remember about social trust in a long-term perspective.

The fact some social needs were fulfilled doesn't guarantee the system of production and distribution works as it should [Walsh 1994]. Government in public sphere has to not only manage but also educate. Increasing awareness about rights and responsibilities of citizens is possible only thanks to public campaigns and private system of information exchange based on gossips and WOMM effect. To have it work according to expectations and assumptions made in implemented politics government must improve communication management and pay more attention to the feedback from the public so that it will be possible to know needs and expectations of its "sovereign". Social negotiations and consultations are of key importance for these processes.

Society can be fully democratic only when it became aware of public issues. Acceptance of government's policy by citizens should increase efficacy of resources allocation in public sector. Thanks to growing involvement of social factors in the realization of a policy its costs will be lower and productivity (effectiveness) of taken actions will be higher. Corrosion of monopoly position of public sector in country's economy create the need for strategic approach to not only business but also public activities [Walsh, 1994]. The lack of theoretical background that would provide sufficient communications models fit for public environment, with it differences from private sectors (especially high level of political influence and continuous attention paid by the media) is not helpful. Solutions provided for communication management in business like corporate Public Relations can't fulfill the gap. It is necessary to further develop distinctive models such as the one proposed by Liu and Horsley [2007].

An example of coexisting public and private sectors is Polish energy sector. This is particularly important, because of its strategic meaning for a country's wealth and safety. The implementation of policy aiming for increase of market efficiency by stimulating competition and liberalization, public entities are forced to play double role – as a regulatory body and a business player. Privatization processes that has been taking place in there since 1990s involve both domestic and international stakeholders, what makes communication processes even more complicated, especially when looking at legal restrictions regarding disclosure of certain information.

Because the role of government on the energy market is definitely dominant, the problem of introducing competition close to the perfect one is quite controversial. Even if it will be possible, social costs to pay by consumers seem to be huge. They can be lowered by appropriate communication management that will enable to provide the public with information about restructuring processes and other changes. The access to information about transactions determines the perfection of market mechanisms, because these activities have to be properly planned and coordinated. But let's be honest, it is not possible to fully eliminate them, so again it is a fighting zone for different economic theories and the result of this battle will determine what is more important – market or social aspects.

Changes taking place in energy sector are of socio-economic background. Instead of fighting with public policies, more rational would be spend public money for other purposes important for society. It is clear, public relations is crucial for supporting rationalizing public management. This paper was not to analyze the efficiency of particular instruments of energy policy in general and in case of Poland. However, it is an important issue that should be investigated in further research, especially the place of communication tools in these frames. Without it a solid model of government communication cannot be created.

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