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## Article

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Czech journal of social sciences, business and economics

## Provided in Cooperation with:

Czech journal of social sciences, business and economics

*Reference:* Prudzienica, Maja/Markowska-Przybyła, Urszula (2017). Partnership, cross-sector partnership and cooperation as manifestation of social capital. In: Czech journal of social sciences, business and economics 6 (4), S. 19 - 30.  
doi:10.24984/cjsbe.2017.6.4.2.

This Version is available at:  
<http://hdl.handle.net/11159/1952>

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*Article history: Received 18.10.2017; last revision 27. 11.2017; accepted 29. 11 2017; doi: 10.24984/cjssbe.2017.6.4.2*

## **PARTNERSHIP, CROSS-SECTOR PARTNERSHIPS AND COOPERATION AS MANIFESTATIONS OF SOCIAL CAPITAL**

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### **Abstract**

*Partnerships between various entities and citizens have become increasingly visible in recent years. The “noticeability” of cooperation between various entities is primarily due to the fact that they occasionally remain interdependent and the goals of one organization can often be achieved only in partnership with other entities or citizens.*

*Partnerships can create the “cooperation of benefits” by generating additional knowledge and also material, financial, non-material or human resources. From this perspective the intended objectives can be achieved for the benefit of all interested parties. At this point it should, however, be emphasized that their implementation would not be possible if approached on an individual basis.*

**Key words:** partnership, cross-sectorpartnership, cooperation, social capital, experimental game theory, generalised trust

**JEL classification:** C70, C72, L30, L31, L32, L33

### **Introduction**

Social capital refers to such characteristics of a society organization as trust, standards and relationships, which can enhance the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated actions (see for example Putnam, 1996). All these factors are achieved owing to cooperation and the establishment of partnerships. However, it should be emphasized that trust, standards and relationships are essential for the existence of partnerships and cooperation.

The purpose of this paper is to attempt determining the significance of establishing partnerships and entering into cooperation, and also determining the extent to which both of these phenomena represent the manifestations of social capital.

Moreover, the authors aim at conducting a comparative analysis of the empirical research results covering the described area and attempt to inspire further discussion about the possibilities and limitations in the creation and implementation of partnerships, including cross-sector partnerships and establishing cooperation as the manifestation of social capital development.

The paper starts with the overview of the reserch literature. It continues with the description of partnership and cooperation in Polish and European practice. Then, the paper focuses on

social capital, partnership, and cooperation in Poland and presents the results of the authors' own research. Finally, the paper concludes with final remarks and policy recommendations.

### **Overview of the research literature**

Social capital is considered as one of the factors influencing – directly or indirectly – the broadly approached level of socio-economic development – not only in terms of life quality issues, but also the size of the social product. Social capital can be defined in many ways: Coleman (1998) defines social capital as a structure of relationships between actors (operating entities), which can be represented by both individual people and institutions supporting some activities (also including the manufacturing ones). These structures are developed by such relationships as commitments, expectations, trust, information flow channels, standards and sanctions. combines social capital with the skills of interpersonal cooperation within groups and organizations in order to carry out common objectives. In this context, the development of cooperation within the framework of partnerships can be successfully considered as the component of social capital strengthening in a particular area.

Putnam (1995) had a major impact on using the concept of social capital in socio-economic research, which explains the phenomena of partnership and cooperation. He referred this concept to such characteristics of a social organization as trust, standards and networks, which can improve the efficiency of public activities by facilitating their coordination. This concept is suitable for presenting the process of institutionalizing both needs, and interests of a given territory residents, who influence the directions and development pace of a local system (inhabited area) and demonstrate their willingness to cooperate with the local authorities to solve common problems and to implement convergent interests. The implication of recognizing the value of social capital as an important development factor in regional or local policy is paying more attention to bottom-up initiatives of a given territory residents, for whom formal NGOs can represent an institutional tool (see Partycki, 2000).

Thus, social capital defines the relationships emerging between people in the course of their activities both in formal and informal networks, taking into account such attributes as e.g. credibility, trust, honesty, solidarity.

Networks represent a resource which enables their participants to access information and allows reducing transaction costs (see Przyemeński, 2005). Social capital should provide revenues, as “social relationships can ensure cooperation between partners, owing to which individual resources are replenished, combined and multiplied in order to gain mutual benefits” (Warren, 2008). The function of this capital is to take joint actions, having better effects than the dispersed actions of individual people, i.e. through a specific synergy effect (see Działek, 2011). Establishing relationships with others facilitates an individual in gaining support, acquiring new information, learning collective activities, building trust, making new acquaintances and integrating with other people. Knowledge is accumulated, exchanged and developed through relationships and networks of contacts between the structures and standards of public, private and social sector.

Social capital is an active, partnership-oriented cooperation between public, social and economic sector leaders, i.e. demonstrates the characteristics of cross-sector partnership aimed at an ongoing inflow of benefits. Partners cooperate in the implementation of programs and projects taking the form of innovative, formal or informal organizational structures. Their cooperation should be based on trust and credibility, mutual exchange of competences, skills, knowledge and experience. Partners should take full advantage of their resources and capabilities to develop their strategic initiative, be responsible for specific results affecting the development of social capital in a local, regional, national and sometimes also an international scale (see e.g. Čábelková and Strielkowski, 2013; or Strielkowski and Čábelková, 2015).

Putnam (2003, 2008, 1993), based on the research carried out in Italy, presented arguments and justified the great economic importance of social capital. Therefore, the level of economic development can be approached as the effect of social capital, or as one of its functions. In addition, social capital is used for:

- social integration and solidarity – it counteracts social exclusion and discrimination (voluntary service, the development of the third sector);
- supplementing and replacing inefficient state institutions (voluntary service, the development of the third sector, establishing cross-sector partnerships);
- government sector control and enforcing its responsibility (voluntary service, the development of the third sector, establishing cross-sector partnerships);
- commercial sector control (the phenomenon of social responsibility, the emergence of local initiatives);
- development and protection of local culture against its commercialization (voluntary service, the development of the third sector, local action groups – LAG).

The so-called third sector (voluntary non-governmental and non-family organizations – associations and foundations) – a network of formal relationships, represents the space within which social capital is created and developed. The network of informal relationships (family, social) can also create social capital, but in this case its effectiveness may be smaller, as the risk of maximizing particular benefits (family, cliquey, mafia oriented) is greater at the expense of the common good (see e.g. Czapiński, 2004c, 2008 ; Sztumski, 1997).

In Poland the term “partnership” and “cooperation” is used increasingly frequently, primarily in terms of social capital development and, therefore, it is important to analyse this concept.

Thus, partnership is a dynamic relationship between various entities, based on the mutually agreed goals, carried out following the shared understanding of the most rational division of labour, taking into account the comparative advantage of each partner.

Partnership involves interaction accompanied by paying careful attention to balance between rapprochement and autonomy, covering mutual respect, equal participation in the decision-making process, reciprocal accountability and transparency (see e.g. Brinkerhoff, 2002).

Partnership should meet the following conditions: have a formally organized activity structure, the potential of involving stakeholders from different social groups, a common long-term and multidimensional program of action and also a joint goal. However, as far as the specific type of partnership is concerned, in the context of social capital development – cross-sector partnership, according to the definition provided by the Overseas Development Institute (*ODI*) and the International Business Leaders Forum (*IBLF*), it is a voluntary, deliberate and strategic alliance of partners representing various sectors: public, commercial and non-governmental one. The assumption is that all partners jointly bear the risk and share the benefits resulting from achieving both collective and individual goals.

Partnership also refers to mutual assistance along with respecting independence and integration activities as one of the tasks falling within the priorities of local authorities (Łukowski, 2011, 2012).

### **Partnership and cooperation in Polish and European practice**

Over the last decades Europe has experienced a clear evaluation of the system of mutual relationships between entities originating from different sectors and also citizens (society). This process has a different course depending on social policy models adopted by the particular countries, however, it actually goes through similar phases everywhere. The model of public administration as the only or even the main provider of social services is being

gradually abandoned. It results from the perception of the need for deconcentration, privatization as well as contracting and entrusting public tasks.

All these elements are also present in Poland, even though it is easily noticeable that it is a chaotic process, in which the absence of a clearly defined vision of the “division of labour” between individual institutions and sectors can be observed. In many areas the “bipolar” model is the dominating one (the State and the Market – local government units-enterprise or the State and the Third Sector – local government units – NGOs), the “tri-polar” model (the State-the Market – the Third Sector) is practically not used at all.

The state, and public administration representing it, should perceive and recognize the distinctiveness of entities it creates relationships with to be capable of using partnership effectively. It should remain appreciative for their competences and uniqueness, even when public institution/s could perform tasks independently, or by taking the role of a payer and impose accepting their own preferences on their partners. Abandoning this kind of a specific “annuity position” is very difficult for the administration in practice and requires enormous maturity (see e.g. Handzlik and Głowacki, 2012).

The form and time of cooperation to be called partnership is doubtful, because each partnership means the cooperation of entities, however, the cooperation itself does not always represent partnership. Numerous interactions of entities originating from various sectors can be observed. They frequently take the form of de facto formula, unnamed by the parties. Cooperation can constitute the initial stage on the way towards partnership. It is difficult to identify objectively this particular moment, however, the below listed components can indicate that:

- agreement between the parties, if it extends beyond a one-off order and remains a long-term one,
- repeatability of agreements,
- establishing organizational foundations (councils, steering groups, etc.).

Cooperation is characterized by a lower degree of interaction, a one-off/short-term nature of the signed cooperation agreement and maintaining hierarchical relationships between the participants of cooperative relationship, which means that one of them plays the role of a commissioning party and the other of a contractor. The entitlements of the commissioning party are essentially of a disposable nature to all participants of the cooperative relationship.

In turn, partnership is the form of cooperation characterized by a higher degree of cooperation – long-term cooperation agreement, its cyclical nature, as well as maintaining horizontal relationships between the participants of cooperative relationship, which is translated into their equal roles. The absence of a managerial centre located in one of the entities is important from the perspective of establishing a partnership. It seems, however, that partners may voluntarily appoint a managing body.

Defining partnership as an agreement – either formal or informal – between various entities, concluded in order to implement specific, common goals does not eliminate all the factors affecting its durability and effectiveness. If the quality and nature of such cooperation is taken into account, a man-man relationship will always have to be dealt with, rather than an agreement between entities. The quality of these relationships does not depend on agreement provisions or other factors. The partnership relationship between partners is established following a long-term process of developing mutual trust, respect, open communication, understanding, constructive conflict resolution, responsibility, acceptance, awareness of strengths and weaknesses as well as many other factors. Having assumed that the quality of partnership is not only determined by formal factors but, above all, by human ones, it should

be borne in mind that establishing good cooperation between partners remains the primary basis for developing partnerships.

In this context all activities contributing to the phenomenon of partnership and cooperation, such as e.g. organizing a community network into formal partner groups is considered one of the social capital measures, perceived as the positive factor of economic development (see e.g. Shucksmith, 2000; Kołodziejczyk, 2003).

### **Social capital, partnership, and cooperation in Poland**

International research shows that Poland does not meet either one of the two civil society criteria, i.e. mutual trust and a significant share of voluntary service within the population of economically active people. In terms of general confidence Poland was ranked at the bottom of the list among countries covered by the European Social Survey (19%) in 2008, i.e. over three times less than in the case of Denmark, Norway and Finland, which in terms of life quality were ranked as 19, 1 and 16 respectively, among 199 countries in 2010. In Poland, according to the study published in the *Social Diagnosis 2011 – The conditions and quality of life of Poles*, only 10.5% of the respondents in 2003 and 2005, 11.5% in 2007, 13.4% in 2009 and the same number in 2011 agreed with the opinion that “the majority of people can be trusted”. Even though this tendency is continuously increasing, it is still a very poor result comparing to the above-mentioned countries. In terms of meeting the second criterion related to the development of a civil society, i.e. the third sector, in Poland the tendency to be active in organizations operating in this sector, mainly associations and foundations, presented the level of 14.8% in 2011.

The social confidence index was slightly changing in the period from 1992 (10.3%) till 2011 (13.4%), i.e. remained at the level 2-3 times lower than the European Union average. In turn, the percentage of volunteers among adult Poles presented an increasing tendency till 2005 (23%) and later showed a decline to the level from before 2003 (10%, 11%), whereas in 2011 it went up to 20% (see e.g. Czapiński and Panek 2004; Czapiński and Panek, 2006; Czapiński and Panek, 2007; Czapiński and Panek, 2009). However, literature and empirical studies carried out by the authors do not fully support the above findings.

One of the studies aimed at estimating social capital understood in this way was the research carried out in 2014 using experimental economics method: namely, a detailed description of the research procedure, its implementation mode and the characteristics of the research sample are included in the studies (Markowska-Przybyła and Ramsey, 2014; Markowska-Przybyła and Ramsey, 2015). The research covered the sample of 1540 students of state universities in 16 Polish cities (regional capitals). Three standard games were used to assess social capital: “trust”, “public good” and “ultimatum”. They allowed assessing the components of social capital: trust, credibility, cooperation for the common good, aversion for unfair distribution and also – by using a questionnaire as an additional research tool – to capture the gap between what was declared and actually observed.

Regarding the aspect of cooperation analysed in this paper, the research has shown that the experiment participants present their willingness to cooperate for the common good, even though it is not rationally justified (In the public good game - PG, the players decide how much of their private money received from the experimenter will be spent on public purposes. They take up their decision in the conditions of independence from other players. The total amount allocated for “public” purposes is multiplied by a value higher than 1 and lower than the number of players, and then divided among all players, even among those who did not contribute anything to the joint fund. The payments for all participants will be maximized when all players will spend all their funds on the common good, however, Nash equilibrium will take place when all players will allocate 0 for the common goal. Nash equilibrium occurs

when the strategy of each player is optimal, in this case each rational player should bring in 0, because regardless of what other players do, it is the best choice for him/her. However, Nash equilibrium situation is rarely observed in the public good game, although the players do not have any individual motives to contribute anything to the common pot - the assumption *homo oeconomicus* is not met. The amount of players' contributions is indicative of the so-called free-rider attitude or may explain the pro-social attitude of the players. In the course of the game each participant faces the necessity to choose between individual benefits and the group ones, whereas the commitment to the group may result in individual benefits - however, the risk exists that the cost of such involvement will be higher than the benefits gained, but the absence of this involvement can also result in such benefits - free-rider's attitude). Only 58 out of 1540 players turned out to be "pure rationalists".

The average transfer to the common pool of Polish students amounted to PLN 11.96, i.e. 59.8% of the owned amount (PLN 20), with women transferring on average 60.5% of their amount (PLN 12.09) and men PLN 11.60 i.e. 58%. This is relatively much – as the Authors' research has shown – even in international conditions. In this game, played in many countries worldwide, the participants were most often contributing 40-60% of their owned amount. Inputs exceeding 60% were quite rare (for a more detailed analysis see Markowska-Przybyła and Ramsey, 2017a). The contribution to the common pool of Polish players exceeds contributions in similar games and even the ones in which their design favoured higher contributions, e.g. higher return games. Higher contributions to the common pool were observed only in the research by M. Finocchiaro Castro, which were referred to by the author himself as "(...) *a quite high level of contribution*" (see: Finocchiaro C., 2008).

The inputs of Polish players were statistically significantly varied depending on the region. The lowest transfers took place in Świętokrzyskie and Mazowieckie regions (below 55%), the highest in Pomorskie (65.8%) and Wielkopolskie (64.2%) regions. The highest contributions in the game were offered by the residents of the smallest localities (up to 5000 inhabitants – 61.5% of the amount owned), the lowest – medium-sized cities (20-100 thousand inhabitants – 58.5%), the highest by the rural areas inhabitants (61.2%), the lowest – metropolises' residents (58.6%), although neither the size of the inhabited locality nor the character of the inhabited area remain the factors which statistically significantly differentiate students in terms of the contributions value in the "public good" game (Markowska-Przybyła, 2017; Markowska-Przybyła et al., 2017; Markowska-Przybyła and Ramsey, 2017b). However, what is important from the point of view of the subject presented at work and confirms Putnam's thesis, students involved in the activities of the organization showed a number of attributes characteristic of social capital, among others declared a higher level of trust and gave higher (statistically significant) transfers in the public good (Markowska-Przybyła and Ramsey, 2016).

In the context of social capital and its indispensable component i.e. relationship networks, it is necessary to answer the question which relationship networks are beneficial for cooperation, which networks offer adequate resources and allow accessing them.

As yet there is no good justification whether indeed – as Putnam observed – denser, stronger networks – result in higher confidence. There is also no theoretical justification of how the trust developed within associations, clubs (if any) is generalized over the entire society. However, strong ties in communities may also promote the conformism-oriented tendencies, the rejection of new social trends and innovative entrepreneurship. Community ties will not generate economic benefits outside a given community either if loyalty to "their folks" e.g. family will prove more important than rational action: group solidarity is not conducive to trusting "strangers" – members of other social groups or other societies (Putnam, 1995).

Moreover, there are disputes about what social networks are the expression of social capital – dense, or whether as Burt (2001) argues the absence of ties, the so-called structural holes are

better in the context of social capital, formal or informal, vertical or horizontal, permanent or unstable as argued by Olson, characterised by strong or weak ties as Granovetter argues (Granovette, 1973). R. Putnam pointed out that informal, personal and horizontal relationships between people determine social capital, as they have a beneficial impact on economy. Putnam believed that the networks of civic engagement remain the essential form of social capital: the denser the social networks, the more likely the citizens are willing to cooperate for common benefits. Networks of civic engagement increase the costs of non-cooperative behaviour and facilitate the flow of information about people in the network. R. Putnam also draws attention to the network nature – horizontal links are important, whereas vertical links, especially the strong ones, such as the church or mafia, bring about the opposite effect – reduce the efficiency and effectiveness of collective actions, do not contribute to the growth of trust or cooperation.

Answering such questions requires numerous, in-depth, qualitative research. It is theoretically justified that engaging in the activities of non-governmental organizations may translate into effects in the form of social capital development. The research carried out by the Authors indicates that those declaring active participation in an organization donated by 4.84% more in the “public good” game than those not participating in any organizations. This difference is particularly visible among men: their contributions were by 12.3% higher. Players active in political, local, artistic, sport and environment protection organizations were making particularly high contributions (Markowska-Przybyła and Ramsey, in press).

The purpose of the research conducted (the first studies were carried out in 2012 and are being continued) by M. Prudzienica Phd was to obtain information on the essence of NGOs’ functioning in Great Britain and Poland, to assess the degree of their existence awareness, to identify the conditions for their functioning and to obtain information on cross-sector partnerships and cooperation entered into or implemented by the analysed institutions. The research material was collected by conducting a direct questionnaire interview with the CEO (Chief Executive Officer) and other employees of CDI Europe in Great Britain and the interviews carried out with the presidents and employees of non-governmental organizations operating in Poland, in the area of assistance provided for persons with disabilities, the Author’s own observations and the Internet sources (Prudzienica and Młodzińska-Granek, 2014).

The identification of conditions in which organizations undertake the execution of objectives within cross-sector partnerships remains an important task for their managers. CDI Europe and other analysed institutions are no exception in this matter. The empirical research carried out by the Author shows that both CDI Europe and other studied institutions consciously strive to develop and continue cross-sector partnerships.

By engaging in the activities aimed at establishing permanent cooperation with public institutions or enterprises, the examined institutions drew attention to the need for performing continuous and precise identification of the conditions determining the form, quality and type of such relationships. These conditions can be divided into internal and external ones, which also results from empirical research. Among internal determinants the following can be listed: socio-financial and organizational potential, agency (focus on general issues, not only limited to individual problems and interests, noticing connections between one's own interest and public benefit, ability to perceive long-term benefits), mobilization to cooperate with other social partners (Gumkowska et al., 2008).

External conditions are present in the environment, i.e. the attitude of institutions to the idea of cooperation (the level of awareness and mentality), the tradition of cooperation, the level and quality of legislation, political conditions and the quality of local networks.

The above information indicates the need to identify the discussed conditions, also from the perspective of diagnosing the existence or manifestations of social capital

establishment/development. Therefore, as a summary of the discussion covering the conditions of cross-sector partnerships' functioning, their systematisation can be attempted (Table 1 presents the classification and description of internal and external conditions for entering into cross-sector partnerships, analysed from the perspective of NGOs).

**Table 1:** Internal and external conditions for entering into cross-sector partnerships in Poland

Conditions	Description
Socio-financial and organizational potential	The majority of co-workers carry out statutory goals and tasks following the rules of voluntary service, therefore an extensive fluctuation can be observed and the resulting human resources instability. Fundraising is poorly developed, the donation and granting systems are practically non-existent. There is a huge problem with obtaining funds, which results in large destabilization of an organization functioning. Due to an extensive fluctuation of co-workers the clearly defined requirements or formal structures are missing. Management system depends on leadership skills of an organization's leader. Despite these negative phenomena, the functioning of non-governmental organizations is characterized by great creativity, entrepreneurship and the ability of finding solutions, even in adverse conditions. There is also great awareness of cooperation importance and the need to create partnerships.
Agency	Establishing the studied organizations was determined by the social demand resulting from an unresolved gap in providing assistance and supporting people in need. Unfortunately, the compatibility of individual tasks and public tasks is not fully implemented. Efforts are made to ingrain the existence and functioning of an organization in the public awareness.
Cooperation level	High awareness of cooperation need and entering into partnerships, unfortunately quite low feasibility. However, this phenomenon is beginning to change and becoming more and more feasible.
Approach of institutions to cooperation	Nowadays, the institutions representing such diversity of sectors aim at establishing partnerships as they realize the importance of using the synergy effect, owing to which the statutory objectives and tasks can be achieved to a much greater extent.
Cooperation traditions	Practically there are no cooperation traditions, however, a positive phenomenon is observed that organizations are determined to and make swift progress in establishing their foundations.
Legislation level	Low, apart from the Act on Public-Private Partnership (The Act dated 19 <sup>th</sup> December 2008 on Public-Private Partnership) and the provision included in the Act on Public Benefit and Voluntary Service concerning local initiatives (The Act dated by the 24 <sup>th</sup> April 2003 on Public Benefit and Voluntary Service), there are no clearly defined legal regulations.
Political conditions	There is a very good political climate manifested by full support of local, regional and national authorities for actions aimed at entering into cross-sector partnerships.

**Source:** Own research

According to the prevailing opinion in Poland, undertaking cooperation within cross-sector partnerships, be it bipolar or bipolar, remains a very important factor determining the implementation of statutory objectives and tasks.

In spite of what results from the data presented in the table, there are major difficulties in achieving these goals, however, non-governmental organizations do not give them up, but rather seek ways to carry them out.

## Conclusions and implications

Partnership, including cross-sector partnerships and cooperation, mean establishing mutual understanding, respect, trust, supporting the implementation of socially useful tasks and, above all, allow for common problem solving and effective relationship management among partners.

As a result, the authors are using various methods (experimental economics, descriptive studies based on quantitative research) which allows them to confront the existing research outcomes and results and their effects of predominantly survey nature.

We have found that undertaking cooperation and creating partnerships owing to e.g. increasing trust, willingness to cooperate, investing in the common good and eagerness to cooperate, as well as creating partnerships by various entities, where the above variables (cross-sector partnerships) also occur, represent a very positive phenomenon aimed at creating/forming and developing social capital, and also constituting its essential manifestation.

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### Acknowledgements:

This research was partly financed from the means of the National Science Centre granted following the Decision No. DEC-2012/07/B/HS5/03954 in Poland.

Dr Maja Prudzienica within the framework of her scientific interests and a long-term cooperation with NGOs, as the member of the Association of Hearing Impaired Persons "LIRA" is involved in permanent cooperation with the Social Dialogue Department of Jelenia Góra Town Office. She was the coordinator of the "Karkonosze for all" project carried out by the Karkonosze Parliament of Persons with Disabilities, co-funded by the European Union under the European Regional Development Fund and by the state budget through the Euroregion Nisse, and also the substantive Coordinator in the project "Cooperation for the

activation of persons with disabilities” co-funded by the European Union under the European Social Fund. She was also a co-organizer of the seminar on the “Practical aspects of Poland's ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities” and a conference on the “Practical aspects of the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities”.

Dr Urszula Markowska-Przybyła would like to express her gratitude within the framework of the project financed from the means of the National Science Centre granted following the Decision No. DEC-2012/07/B/HS5/03954 and within the framework of cooperation with Professor D. Ramsey Wrocław University of Science and Technology.