Networkins as a method of creating cohesive communities in multicultural environments. The phenomenon of the *Welcoming America* initiative. Abstract

Welcoming America is an initiative to build social cohesion in multicultural environments, which has been born and established in a profound crisis of theoretical concepts and social practices commonly referred to as multiculturalism. Established in 2009, *Welcoming America* is a bottom-up, civic initiative that has received government support (top-down). It develops dynamically, using the "networking" strategy. According to the declaration on the website, the mission of *Welcoming America* is to create a world that will become a home for all people, not excluding immigrants and refugees - *„Our vision is a world in which all people - including immigrants and refugees - feel at home. We believe the work of accomplishing that vision begins in local communities, with all sectors working together to build community cohesion and advance institutional inclusion"*.

The paper is a case study in sociology. Considering the aim of the study, which is to explain the phenomenon of a dynamically developing initiative, the approach represented by the Dutch researcher Anton C. Zijderveld was considered adequate. Zijderveld combines an institutional perspective with a network of social analyses, known as the "institutional imperative".

The work consists of nine chapters. The first three are theoretical in nature, the fourth chapter is devoted to methodological issues, while the remaining five are composed of an empirical part. The first chapter discusses the global and local contexts of intercultural relations. A review of classical and contemporary theoretical concepts on cultural diversity is provided, and, based on a review of theoretical and empirical positions, the basic terms used in the context of the consideration of intercultural relations, such as multiculturalism, multiculturalism and interculturalism, are defined. The last part of the chapter discusses the factors that contribute to the contexts of shaping intercultural relations. These include: migration, populism, xenophobia in the form of racism and Islamophobia and Islamic terrorism.

The second chapter, which contains a description of the intellectual context of building intercultural relations, is a kind of continuation of chapter one. It opens with a chronological description of the changing fate of the idea of multiculturalism, from its initial triumphalism to its deep crisis. The next chapter presents in thematic order the

main currents of criticism of multiculturalism, ordered in terms of the theoretical perspective adopted by critics. Thus, the right and left-wing currents of criticism, the assumptions of feminist and cosmopolitan criticism, as well as the criticism of multiculturalism from an axiological perspective were discussed. The chapter closes with an attempt to answer the question of whether multiculturalism is really dysfunctional and whether the other concepts of interculturalism, such as inter-culturalism or cosmopolitanism, that appear in the context of the criticism of multiculturalism actually constitute a new value, or are merely a veiled attempt to replace the discredited, in the opinion of many, word "multiculturalism".

The third chapter is a record of the search for a theoretical perspective adequate to the presentation and explanation of a social phenomenon called *Welcoming America*. The starting point was the institutional perspective emphasizing the epistemological-normative dimension of the institution. Due to the nature of the phenomenon under investigation, the concept of network society and the figure of social capital, related to the issues of ties and relations, also proved useful in its description and explanation. Therefore, it was necessary to search for a paradigm combining the aforementioned concepts and thus enabling a holistic view of the examined issues. The theoretical concept known as Anton C. Zijderveld's institutional imperative proved to be an answer to these dilemmas. Starting from a critical analysis of classical institutional approaches, and equally critical of anti-institutionalism and the associated Western subjectivism, the Dutch sociologist builds his concept of an "institution-network interface", which provides an adequate theoretical perspective for his planned research.

Chapter four presents methodological assumptions of the work. In order to explain the phenomenon of the dynamic development of the *Welcoming America* initiative and to try to assess the chances of dissemination of its approach to building social cohesion in multicultural environments, a qualitative research orientation was adopted. The paper is a case study of a descriptive and exploratory nature. The choice of the method is based on the theoreticians' recommendations concerning factors such as: the type of questions asked, the extent of the researcher's control over the behavioural facts occurring in reality and the degree of the researcher's interest in contemporary facts as opposed to those of a historical nature. In justifying the choice of the method, reference was also made to objections raised to the case study regarding possible manipulations, generalization possibilities or lack of comparative advantage. In the epistemological dimension, the assumption was made that there is one reality

independent of the researcher. The thesis, research problems and justification for the choice of research issues are also presented here.

The findings made in the first four chapters are a point of reference for the data and interpretations presented in the empirical part of the paper, which consists of the next five chapters. The purpose of the fifth chapter is to present the socio-cultural context, i.e., the external conditions in which Welcoming America was born, as well as to describe the assumptions that constitute the core curriculum of the initiative. Chapter six contains information about *Welcoming America's* social actors. The profiles of the initiative's creator and other non-welcoming America activists are presented in a way that exposes their resources and areas of activity. The result is a collective portrait of the activist, which is made up of numerous information available in the public space and in silence at the same time. The purpose of Chapter Seven is to explain the mechanism of *Welcoming America's* development of the networking strategy. During the ten years of its existence, the original local initiative has grown to create a network that extends beyond the borders of the United States, nodes of which are the voluntary associates who are dependent on their place in the network. Chapter eight is a proposal to look at the initiative from an institutional perspective. Its aim is to determine what level of institutionalization and formalization the *Welcoming America* initiative has achieved and whether, in its current form, it is capable of effectively working towards social change defined in the program assumptions in the form of vision and mission. The last, ninth chapter includes reflections on the opportunities and barriers to the dissemination of the approach to building social cohesion in multicultural environments developed under the *Welcoming America* initiative. It presents both arguments for the thesis of adequacy of the methods used here, and critical voices. The social and political context that has generated and formed the initiative in the past still remains an important determinant for its future. The second important factor is the institutional and organizational shape of the network and the social capital in the form of resources available in the network. The conclusion of the work referred, among other things, to the issue of dissemination of this approach to social cohesion in our country.

With reference to the considerations of the theoretical part of the work, it should be emphasized that the attempt to establish the ideological and theoretical basis of the initiative's activity is a task that goes beyond the possibilities of unambiguous categorization. However, no matter within which trend, multiculturalism or interculturalism, *Welcoming America's* activities will be placed, the fact is that the

momentum and expansion of the initiative has the power to bring about a change that may significantly bring about the realization of the ideal of a "world that will become home to all people".