

CONSIDERATIONS ON THE PUBLIC SERVICES IN ROMANIA

Silviu CRIȘAN¹

ABSTRACT

Representing one of the most important fields for the society, the public administration was and continues to be, regardless of the development degree of a country, in a permanent modernization and streamlining process. In the emerging countries, this modernization and streamlining process can be found in actual reforms, on whose deepness and duration is based the final successful outcome, respectively the creation of an operational public administration and the execution, supply and provision of certain services where the principle of destination in the general interest would be dominant and permanent.

This paper approaches the issue of public administration and public service management from the theoretical perspective, pointing both general aspects, usually solved in strong economically developed countries, and the aspects specific to Romania, within the conditions where in our country, after 1989, there were fundamental changes both in economy and in society.

In order to reach the objective set through the elaboration of this paper, where the theoretical content is indented and obvious, the documentary research was mainly used, thus using a bibliography assessed as valuable, current and subsequently useful. The personal experience accumulated throughout time by the author of the paper was also used.

The main result of the elaboration of this paper is the creation of the theoretical basis necessary for a further field research, which will have as main objective the exercise manner of public service management at the level of the central and local public administration, as well as the perception of beneficiaries reported to the variety, utility, quality and opportunity of the public services provided.

KEYWORDS: *public administration, public services, reform, management, performance, general interest.*

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1. INTRODUCTION

The issue which is going to be approached by this paper is represented by an issue of interest, both through its importance and through its permanent timely character.

The importance of the issue of public administration and public services resides from the impact which this institution (the administration) and these activities (the services), which include both the economic and the social components, have of should have in the daily life of people. In the strong economically developed countries, countries which experienced the actual welfare, the public administration, through the services provided, has on people and on their communities an impact which is equally an obvious and positive one. In the less developed countries or in the countries which have been experiencing the economic development and the values of the authentic democracy only for a short time, the public administration searches a certain identity and the sense of evolution which would allow it to represent an important, strong and permanent support for a better, easier and more civilized life.

The timely character of the public administration is also explained by the necessity to connect it to the current dynamics experienced by the human society. Even if on economic and social plan, in

¹ The University "Lucian Blaga" of Sibiu, Romania, crisan_s@yahoo.com

various countries or areas of the world, evolutions but also involutions can be registered, the public administration has to maintain its role and mission, respectively to be useful for the society namely to be of general interest.

After the presentation of the main theoretical aspects which have to be known and correctly applied in practice, the paper mentions the particularities of this field of activity in our country and the manner in which the Romanian public administration, through the reform which it undertook and which is in progress, has to respond in a correspondent, even proactive manner, to the challenges which are generated by the status of Member Country of the European Union.

This paper is intended to be only the beginning of a wider study aimed on the field of public services at the central level and mainly the one from the local level.

2. PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION – CONCEPT, ORGANIZATION AND PRACTICAL ACTIVITY

Mainly in the strong economically developed countries, countries where the democracy proved its stability and expressed its benefic effect, in the current evolution stage, beyond the determining importance of the economic sector, the public administration is increasingly present on various levels of the society.

The role of public administration became an essential one, its influence in the life of people from various communities being significant. This is explained through the fact that, according to the statements of Paul Negulescu expressed more than 90 years ago, the public administration, through the activity it performs, is of general interest. Subsequently, on long term, the administration has to be able to generate the events through which it can supply the services which, in a balanced manner, both for the community and for the modern and civilized human, would create possibly better living and working conditions.

In addition, it is very important that each individual who belongs to a certain community would benefit from the right to participate to the “production” process of public services and to benefit from these services.

A strong developed public administration, regardless of the exercise manner, central or local, which would become “an device where an assembly of activities or the elaboration and enforcement of normative documents, methodological regulations, regulations and political programs would develop” (Androniceanu, 2008, chapter 1, p.13) can play a determining role, not only in the development of the overall society, but in its democratization, in the construction, consolidation and in a significant manner, in the warranty of the constitutional state.

In order to achieve this, the public administration, through the public services it provides to the population, has to be in a permanent development, improvement, modernization and streamlining process. This represents the best and most convincing manner in which the public administration can equitably and beneficially contribute to the redistribution of wealth among the citizens, wealth which was constituted by the individual themselves.

In terms of our county, the public administration can contribute both in the development of an operational market economy, of democratization of the society at all its levels and integration in the Euro – Atlantic structures and from the perspective to adequately answer to the current challenges generated by the economic – financial crisis and by its consequences. All these are possible only if, in this field of activity, a consistent and ample reform is insured, which would allow a correct management of the available resources and the exercise of an efficient management of public services.

Only an authentic reform, which would insure a convincing and durable process of “decentralization / de-concentration of public services and central public administration by improving the formulation process of public policies” (Profiroiu et al, p.5), is able to radically transform this field of activity.

Inevitably, the public administration has to become the main authority capable to provide the services necessary for the community. Thus, the public administration ceases to be a simple intermediary between the centers of the central power and local ones through which, in view of an unconditioned fulfillment, decisions were submitted, which were not always in the interest of the community and of the individual, as part of the community.

It is extremely important that the provision of public services is performed both within the observance of the principles of market economy, and of the non – discrimination based on race, social status, geographical region, religion or political view.

Considering the important assessment of the same Paul Negulescu, one of the most important promoters of the science of administrative law, assessment through which he indicated that the administration is a state activity subject to the law, developed at central level and local level through which the actual needs of the society are satisfied, the public administration can be characterized as being “a technical activity (German influence), but at the same time also legal, in the sense that each public service develops a variety of technical operations, which however have to take place according to the law” (Nicola, 2007, p.5)

2. PUBLIC SERVICE AND GENERAL INTEREST

Characterized through opening (it addresses to a large and very large number of individuals), equality (the provision is materialized at the same level of expression for all the members of a collectivity) and representation (it refers to and it acts on the behalf of a collectivity) (Brendan, 2004), the public service is an activity of general interest and it is constituted in a fundamental right which the members of a community acquired and from which they can benefit.

Subsequently, the public service has to be perceived as of common interest and intended for everyone, regardless of the manner in which it is provided, to whom it is addressed (to the community or to the individual), what its complexity is, to what intensity it manifests, which is its social and economic role, what its duration of action is and what is the development level reached by the society.

In addition, the public service has to be approached and perceived from the perspective of the responsibility degree which the providers undertake and which is, among the citizens, the credibility of each service provided and subsequently, the creditability of the one who provides that service. (Brendan, 2004).

The public service is intended for the population, being provided in a larger proportion by the institutions of the central or local administration, but also by private companies, the mechanisms of the market economy operating in both versions. This last statement is supported through the fact that the market has the ability to control not only the private business, but also the activities performed or the services provided by the public administration.

One of the important characteristics of the public service is that it is constituted into an offer intended for the citizens from a certain community without taking into consideration the differentiations which can exist or even exist between the revenues of the beneficiaries of a certain public service. Regardless if they are in a small, large or extremely large number, considered from the perspective of the general interest, the public services need to have the attributes to be necessary, useful, qualitative and opportune.

The approach of the complex issue of public service cannot be sufficiently convincing if we did not consider its connections (of the public service) with the concepts of social and political. Such an approach is imposed, because most of the times in the position of decision-maker in terms of the “production”, supply and provision of public services is found an individual or a group of individuals which is the result of certain political options or even political games, materialized at their turn in more or less democratic elections, elections which take place with a certain periodicity. Although the changes following which the elections can also take place in the field of central and

local public administration, this possible situation does not have to adversely influence the process through which the public services are executed and distributed.

One of the most important and difficult issue which both the public and local administrations are facing is the issue of costs attracted by the “production”, provision and supply of public services.

The permanent constraint of a limited budget forces the institutions of the public administration to an efficient management of the available resources. If we take into consideration the fact that, the budget assigned to the public services does not always have a positive trend and that usually between the public services which are necessary to the population and are required by it and the budget assigned for them there is a report which disadvantages the services, the issue of the dualism of public service necessary, useful, consistent, opportune and the performance of certain optimal expenses, reduced or as reduced as possible, remains a permanent one, an issue which claims a correct and realistic approach.

3. MANAGEMENT OF PUBLIC SERVICES

From a mainly punctual perspective, the management of public services includes a set of principles, actions, methods and instruments through which the public services reported to the objectives of the public administration organizations have to become “effective and efficient” (Plumb, et at, 2004, chapter 1, p.2). In other words, acting in an entrepreneurial manner, the management of public services has to insure services whose value would permanently increase.

From a general perspective, the management of public services has to be able “to master the change, to clarify the directions, to insure the necessary means and to motivate the members of the organization to the benefit of the change”. (Plumb, et at, 2004, chapter 1, p.2).

Similar to other field of activity, in terms of the public services, the exercise of a performing management is only possible to the extent where the objectives established are realistic and they comply to what it has to be done, if the strategy realized, on one hand, complies with the interests of the organization, with the interests of the ones finding themselves in various reports with the organization and according to the current and future evolution of the exterior environment, and on the other hand, if the best, most correct and realistic decisions are identified and applied.

Starting from the idea that the management of public services has to find the best ways means through which to reach performance, but also to insure a correspondent evolution of the organization, there are situations where the efficient solution for the management of resources assigned for the “production”, supply and provision of public services are the result of certain reforms which, with a certain periodicity, have to be developed.

Moreover, there can be situations where a good reform in the field of public administration, reform which would create the premises of a performing management, would be generated by austerity, at its turn imposed by the social or economic problems or by the social – economic problems.

One also has to mention the fact that, talking about the field of public services, a performing management, easily and fully justified, is associated with the performance of the government or, as applicable, with the performance of the local administration.

From the perspective of public services, one can assess that the performance of a government or the performance of a local public administration is identified with the activity and correct and efficient expression of the assembly “capacity – flexibility – resilience” (Forbes et at, 2005, p. 15.).

The capacity consists in the actual possibility to respond to certain extremely concrete requirements of the beneficiaries, regardless if they are individuals or communities.

The flexibility is related to the capacity, not only to adapt in an opportune manner and without high costs, to the modifications which occur in the social – economic environment, but also to proactively act to the possible challenges of the exterior environment.

The resilience has to be perceived through the resistance which the public administration institution can oppose to the occurrence of certain chocks which can come from the imbalances due to certain economic, social or political causes.

Subsequently, in the public administration field, it is necessary to exercise such a management which would reunite in optimal proportions the observance of the law, the establishment and observance of rules and procedures, skill, reconcilability, liability, transparency, determination and respect for the human being. Thus, the performance can be insured in this field of activity, which is extremely visible. Through performance we have to understand the fulfillment of the objectives which the public administration organization establishes within the conditions where it can provide and supply goods and services for the population, accepted by it and which would correspondingly satisfy clearly shaped and expressed needs.

It also has to be mentioned the fact that the actual performance in this field of activity represents not only the insurance of certain offer of public services corresponding to the requirement of the beneficiaries and at a quantitative and qualitative level which the provider established to reach, but also the fact that the services have to be "produced" at low costs and that the best means were identified to supply the necessary services for a best and correct usage (of the services provided) by the individual or by the community.

In terms of our country, the overall issue of the public services and subsequently of the management of public services, presents certain particularities due to the reduced development level of this field of activity, level existing more than two decades ago. The reduced level of service in that period was expressed both as number, variety, quality and opportunity and through the manner in which the services were managed and provided, a certain differentiation between the beneficiary communities being a frequent phenomenon.

Due to these realities, after 1989, the basic issue, both of the overall public administration and of the public services, was their repositioning on new, modern coordinates where the scientific, social and economic aspects would experience a new approach means, being mandatory to take into consideration the mechanisms of the market economy and the principles of the constitutional state, of the democratic state.

Along with the accession of Romania to the Euro – Atlantic structures, the commitments generated by this status forced the central and local public administration to initiate an extended process of changes, under an in-depth reform, reform which would provide to this field of activity not only efficiency, but also the capacity to correctly and opportunely respond to the increasing, more varied and higher challenges of the exterior environment.

Another aspect which has to be considered in the exercise of a performing management of public services is related to the fact that the state ceased to be the sole provider of public services, the private companies acquiring this right and obviously using it in a skillful manner in view of obtaining profit.

The reform in the public administration field can only be successful only to the extent where, within the condition of modernization and decentralization of the activities, a performing management of public services is developed, which would use modern management instruments and models, including the ones of the quality management both in the top structures and in the operational structures from the public administration field.

Finally, it has to be mentioned that the reform in the public administration field in our country needs to have as finality the formation of the conviction that this field of activity was reconfigured, it operates to the benefit of people and their community, that the public administration does not only serve the interests of certain persons or of certain group of persons favored through their social status, through economic power or through a certain political membership.

CONCLUSIONS

Throughout time, on longer or lower durations, with higher or lower intensity, the public services experienced an upwards evolution, becoming an extremely important field of activity, with strong insertions in the national economy and in the social life.

In a certain way, the public administration represents a barometer which measures the development level of a country.

Strong public administrations, dedicated to individuals, were built and work in strong economically developed countries and where the democracy is equally tradition, consolidated and authentic.

Even if the public administration system from a certain country operates with a certain efficiency, even if the services provided are positively perceived by their beneficiaries, due to the various constraints which occur even in the richest countries, the public administration field, similar to other fields of activity, has to be subject to a reformation process, most of the times continuous, process which it would be able to maintain performing and to observe the mission it undertook.

In terms of our country, the achievements in the overall public administration field and of the public services in particular, are real, maybe even notable, however, without reaching the development level from the strong developed countries, countries existing both within the European Union space, and outside this space.

The reform engaged in this field, reform which, despite the economic - financial crisis, is in progress, can represent the best answer to the commitment undertaken by our country along with the decision to access to the Euro - Atlantic structures: modernization, democratization and streamlining of each field of activity from the Romanian society, thus also the field of public administration.

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