

Călin Hințea

PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION – A MANAGERIAL APPROACH

One of the most often heard words in Romania after 1989 was the word “reform”. The politicians were saying it, the newspapers published articles about it, it was the subjects of many debates and conferences; if the development of the Romanian society would have been directly connected with how often this word was mentioned and used in our political life, probably, at this time, we would have had an enviable position in Europe.

Unfortunately, it is not difficult to observe that we are far from such a position; but anyone can see that the field of public administration was also connected with the idea of reform. Notions like “centralization” or “local autonomy” are often used in professional debates concerning this domain. But, so is the situation in politics...

Thus, we can ask ourselves: is there a clear vision of what a modern public administration system means for Romania? Which are the main characteristics of a possible strategy? Is it the modernization of public administration a top priority? Is it the Romanian administration capable of successfully coping with the challenges of its future? And, the main problem, which and where is the role and the place of administrative science in the architecture of this reform movement?

These questions, as well as many others, inevitably occur when we analyze -even superficially- the Romanian public administration domain. Evidently, the problem of reform in public administration is not a Romanian invention nor it is specific for our country alone. Our society is at a point where it has to choose, in a relatively short period of time, a new model of administrative organization. Romanian public administration must keep the pace with the evolution of the entire society, no matter if the cause of this evolution reside in internal mechanisms or in the desire to tighten the relationship with a unified Europe.

The state, if it is to integrate itself in a democratic conception, has to create the necessary means to allow the citizens to participate at the decision making process in public matters; it is also necessary to have participatory culture, a culture in which the citizens are -explicitly- oriented toward the system as a whole, with its two components - political and administrative- and are prepared to become “ activists of the self in the political system “¹

The development of the administrative science represents a general phenomenon, which imply the strengthening of the institutional support (the development of the education in this

¹ G. Almond, S. Verba - Cultura civica, Ed. Du Style, Bucuresti, p. 49

particular field) and the creation of national institutes or/and magazines and journals in this domain. All these organizations produced new knowledge with a strong political and social impact; all these organizations are, gradually, integrating themselves into the education of civil servant process, thus contributing at the improvement of their until-now-only-juridical education; on the other hand, the administrative science and its information are of great interest for the political actors which want to improve the functioning of the services and institutions they are managing.

Therefore, the administrative science is called to diagnose the Romanian public administration system, to establish its disease(s) and to come up with a cure. But we must not overlook the fact that this actions are not without danger for a social science which has to produce practical results in a not-always gentle environment and with the possibility of becoming a stake in the power game as well as an action guide.

The administrative science was, from its beginnings, divided in many currents and schools. There has not been an agreement on

- the **object** - sometimes seen as limits to the public administration and other times viewed as consisting of all the social organizations
- the **methods** - pendulates between law and sociology
- the **goal** - the goal is a better organization, the best way of functioning of the administration or the goal is obtaining pure knowledge as a result of a selfless effort of analyzing the administrative phenomena /
- the fact that we are speaking about **one** administrative science or about **many** administrative sciences?

At the very beginning of the administrative science's history we find two types of research², that differ one from another because of their object:

- the first one, born very early in Europe, is an approach that focuses on public administration perceived as an instrument of the state
- the second one, come into being lately, in US, is an approach interested in organizations as complex phenomena whose implications and ramifications covers the whole of social life, transcending the differences

These two conceptions (which gave birth to traditions) appeared in a specific social and political context: the creation of the nation-state for the first case and the development of the industrialized society for the second.

² Jaques Chevalier, Science Administrative, PUF, Paris, p. 25

The administrative science is considered to be born in the 60s when it began to separate itself from the administrative law. The **juridical approach**³ considers that the main goal it is to gain better and deeper knowledge of the workings of the public administration system through the study of legal texts (laws). This approach, despite all its efforts, remains very close to that of the administrative law. The object of the administrative science is delineated starting from legal criteria; it is defined in an analogue mode with the object of administrative law; its themes are considered in a legal manner - structures, actions, control.

Law remains a privileged way of knowledge and understanding of the administrative realities; this belief has as its result certain hostility against any attempt of employing sociological methods or concepts in the study of public administration. Speaking about methods, only the deductive approach is recognized -specific for law disciplines- that requires starting with and from regulations and then study the conditions in which the rules could be put to work; the empirical research is considered with a certain degree of suspicion. In conclusion, the meager effort of this conception to concretely approach things does not imply giving up the methods and concepts of the administrative law.

Different from the law point of view, the **managerial conception** focus on pragmatic purposes, on the administration process, in order to find out and put at work the most rational and efficient methods of organization. This approach is similar with the traditional approach of the organizational science: find out how to best manage and administrate an organization. Its goal is to find out the algorithm that allows organizations to achieve their proposed goals with maximum efficiency and effectiveness. At a closer look, though, one can observe a more accentuated degree of formalization than in the case of the traditional organizational science; the conceptual and theoretical dimensions are essentials for management, which has the tendency of combining practice with “ a representation of the reality which considers itself scientifically”, “an assembly of practices ... where pragmatism combines with scientific knowledge”⁴

Public administration has a number of specific traits that forbids an “unconditional surrender” to the managerial point of view. In order to point this out, it is enough to mention the five main characteristics of a public organization in a democratic environment⁵

1. **Following of external objectives.** Meanwhile a private organization is following, in an autonomous manner, internal objectives (survival, development), public

³ see R. Drago, Les cours du droit, 1971-1972; Traite du science administrative, sous la direction de G. Langrod, 1996

⁴ J. P. Nioche - Science administrative, management public et analyse des politiques publiques, in *Revue française d'Administration publique*, nr. 24, oct-dec. 1989, p. 9-23

⁵ V. M. Santo, P. E. Verrier, Le management public, PUF, Paris, 1993, p.5

organizations are following external objectives, defined by law (national defense, education, etc.). Thus, their strategy is shaped by those external and general goals; because of that, public organizations have at their disposal means of coercion of actors that constitutes their external environment (law, police forces, finance regulations, courts, etc.). Their goals being very long run type, the public organizations show little concern for survival problems.

2. **The lack of financial profitability.** Public organizations are non-profit organizations, because they are not interested in the financial aspect of their actions. The new created value is not a crucial concept for this type of services (for example, the process of building a new building for a ministry is not analyzed in terms of costs/benefits but in terms of the money that are allotted from the budget for that particular activity).
3. **The competition is practically zero** for a public organization. The lack of competition represents a specific trait of the public administration activities. This situation of total or quasi-total monopoly⁶ makes all the requirements of the free market total irrelevant. A consequence of that is the fact that public organizations have a real problem in adapting themselves to a changing environment. This leads to a “robotization” of their activity that generates frequent confusions between actions for the benefit of the public and actions for the benefit of the organization.
4. **Very complex and segmented systems.** Public organizations are characterized by a high degree of complexity, because of different factors:
 - their highly heterogeneous missions (for instance, county councils run many operations: constructions, public safety, urbanism, parks, etc.)
 - their size is rather big (the number of agencies that work for a ministry can be impressive)
 - their hierarchical organization is very complex (because of numerous positions, classifications and different statuses characteristic for public activities).
5. **The relation between political and administrative action.** A necessary consequence of the existence of the state is that administrative actions are subordinated to political decisions. Thus, every election represents a break of the rhythm of the administrative strategies that are oriented toward “actions with electoral value”. This situation can

⁶ see W. A. Niskanen, **Bureaucracy and Representative Government**, Ed. Atherton Aldine, 1971

favor clientelist attitudes and generate internal or external lobbies. The ultimate results are costs higher than anything from the private sector.

These five general characteristics are closely connected with the systemic analyze and the concepts developed by D. Easton⁷, especially those of “inputs” and their transformation in “outputs” and their place and role in the existing environment. Actually, systemic analyze, insisting on the “book-keeping” of the production and of results as a measure of a system’s degree of adaptability, meets the basics of the public management. The systemic analyze provides then necessary coherence for public management in order to become an autonomous discipline.

These particular characteristics will generate a management well adapted to the administrative action. The degree of specificity⁸ is contested: there are some voices who said that things are, basically, identical; only the strategic choices differs, according to the different goals. For others, public management should develop its own models and methods and it has to forbid itself the imitation of the management of private organizations. For instance, the Anglo-Saxon managerial doctrine consider that the main difference between the private and the public sector is the resource distribution, meanwhile the French point of view considers activities in the two sectors as two different anthropological categories.

The main problem is axiological and refers to the concept of effectiveness which, for public administration, can not be reduced at simple efficiency. Of course, like any private enterprise, a public organization should put its means to the best use. But its effectiveness is evaluated after the degree in which its goals are fulfilled and not after its financial gains. And here occur one of the greatest problems of the administration, generated by the notions of “effectiveness” and “compromise”. E. Chelimsky⁹ captures very well that “ Every political act is a compromise. When a law is voted in the Parliament (...) the purpose of this effort is not to have the ideal law but to find the political position that will allow a good law to pass. This fact necessarily implies a vague, unprecise language - the language of the compromise.”

In practice, public management aims to ameliorate the quality of actions by employing new administrative procedures, to mitigate certain inflexibility in organization and to improve the communications with the environment. After the end of the 70s, public management experienced

⁷ D. Easton, A System Analysis of Political Life, Ed. J. Wiley, New York, 1965

⁸ see M. Bower, Effective public management in Harvard Business Review, April-May 1977, p. 131-140; L. Jr. Lynn, Public management: what do we know? What should we know and how will know it?, in Journal of Policy Analysis and Management, vol.1, 1987; J. P. Nioche, Science administrative, management public et des action publiques, Rapport au Premier Revue Francaise d’Administration Publique, nr. 24, Oct.-Dec. 1982; M. Massenet, La nouvelle gestion publique: pour un Etat sans bureaucratie, Paris, Ed. hommes et Techniques, 1980

a new dimension, due to the fact that it was applied to public policies; a few important currents (policy analysis, for example) joins management in its attempt to ameliorate the decision making process or the effectiveness of collective choices. Beyond the limits of the organization, this effort creates a global vision of the political and administrative action by taking into consideration its effects; this managerial conception developed both in US and Europe¹⁰.

Without any doubt, the attempt of implement such concepts in Romania will have to face the “famous” problems of national characteristics and national traditions and customs already in place. We can ask ourselves in what measure the institutional history of Romania and its organizational culture are preparing the administrative system for such a re-orientation, for an importation of techniques from the private sector. We can ask ourselves about the status of public management in a country still under the fascination of the myth of the “effective state”. And we have to consider all this in the context of a powerful resistance of the old structures and that of the incompatibility that exists between the way in which the administrative reform is evaluated and the political constraints that structures their implementation.

Anyway, for a good understanding of the specificity of the Romanian system, one should use historical research and structural analysis; the public management should concern itself with the origins of administration and its representation structure “ latent structures that alone can explain the apparent relationships”¹¹. Only the thesis of “resistance to change” can but superficially justify the reactions we observe, not allowing us to understand the complexity and intensity of the real situation of Romanian public administration.

The management approach means the death of an image for public administration, the collapse of certain symbols. It is a painful conflict, unknown in countries in which the symbols allow the association of public and private sector from the point of view of its organization. Let us not forget the fact that the Anglo- Saxon managerial doctrine supports the non-existence of an impenetrable barrier between the public and the private domains. But, in other cases (the Romanian case, for example), this managerial rationality is not as welcomed, it does not come along painlessly; in France, for instance, the implementation of the managerial perspective was the solution of the last resort “because there was not any other chance for France”, as Jean Monnet said in the Armand-Rueff rapport¹².

⁹ E. Chelimsky, quoted in P. Viveret, *L'évaluation des politiques et des action publiques*, Rapport au Premier Ministre, La documentation française, 1989, p. 102

¹⁰ see R. Romain, A. Burlaud - *Management public. Gestion et legitimité*, Dalloz, 1980, Paris

¹¹ C. Lei-Strauss, *Anthropologie structurale*, Paris, 1958, p. 306

¹² see Armand-Rueff, *Rapport general sur le premier plan de modernisation de d'équipements*, Imprimerie nationale, Paris, 1960

The occurrence of a crisis in the field of public administration is very possible for Romania, in the near future. Such a crisis could be generated by traditional as well as external factors:

- economic pressures (fewer money coming from the budget)
- industrial pressures (informatization, for example)
- “clients” pressures - the citizens, who are the beneficiaries of public administration’s services, are more and more inclined to compare what they get from the public services with what they receive from the private sector
- legal pressures - a future integration of Romania in the European Community will impose a radical change of the administrative structures

These pressures, together with others, could raise the problem of the legitimacy of the public services models and actions. Thus, we are looking (or we will be looking) at a legitimization crisis, which will demand more flexible structures and procedures in order to effectively solve the problems and associate the managerial and authority themes. By supporting the idea that such a model -the managerial model- could not be implemented in Romania we will only succeed in maintaining old-fashioned organizational structures and we will delay the modernization and democratization of our society; we will only succeed to make the crisis more acute and to make its solution harder to implement. In the field of public management dogmatism and inflexibility are totally counter-productive; what we must understand is the fact that the Romanian society experiences phenomena known to other societies from their history of development; we must understand that we can learn from others’ experience and put to good use what we have learned.

“ The development of the public management is not a fashion but a reality of the historical evolution; the reality of the legitimized systems that allow the organization to express their authority”¹³

¹³ R. Laufer, A. Burlaud, op. Cit., p.8