

Public Administration and Local Autonomy - Public Management Theory Approaches

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Abstract

Offering theoretical and practical support for the organization and functioning of administrative structures, public management is a necessity for public administration. There are not few those who paid attention and have ventured to explain the role and place of public management in public administration.

That government should include in its sphere of activity the managerial dimension is a fact proven by the opinions expressed in this paper.

Equally true is the fact that satisfying the interests of community is and remains the primary aim of the functioning of local autonomy in public administration in territorial-administrative units. In this context, we welcome the investigation of the relevant opinions in the theory of public management referring to its necessity in public administration and the role of autonomy in its organization and function.

Key words: *public management, public administration, local autonomy, territorial-administrative units, local interests*

JEL Classification: *H83*

Introduction

The complexity of challenges that administration has to face and the need to manage public affairs under the best conditions require application of management of public affairs in administration, as its mission is to plan, organize, coordinate, manage and control the actions involved in the development and delivery of public services which would respond to a higher extent to the needs and utility of citizens.

From such a direction, in the pages of this paper we bring attention to the need of management in public administration, without which the latter cannot fulfill the role for which it is established. Once it revealed the importance of management in public administration, this study turns to configuring the architecture of the administrative system, highlighting the decisive role of local autonomy in the organization and functioning of public administration in territorial-administrative units. The importance of autonomy in the management of public administration is undeniable, for which, rightly considered we find it appropriate and useful for our study to mention the relevant opinions on this matter.

Public Management and Public Administration

A distinct sector of management science, a branch of economics, public management has emerged in the eighth decade of the last century as a necessity. A rigid “architecture” and regulatory processes and administrative systems lacking flexibility have characterized most of the twentieth century. In this context, public management makes its appearance, developing as a new way of perception of the functioning of public administration structures and their role in managing the problems which society is facing.

Notable and worth mentioning is the observation made by “the man who invented management”¹, Professor P. Drucker, in a study published in *The Atlantic Monthly*. He says: “Indeed, if this century proves one thing, that is the uselessness of politics. The transformations of this century are not due to political events, but to the social forces that have operated like the ocean currents deep in a sea agitated by a hurricane”². What Professor P. Drucker seems to suggest is that the situations faced by companies cannot be overcome by political action. This is where public management has to interfere, offering theoretical and practical support necessary to manage the changes in society.

From such a point of view, we cannot doubt that the reformation and modernization of public administration is the center of current political and economic debate. Amid the significant changes facing society, the “target” of any reform process of public administration must address the efficiency of public affairs management, reflected in a growing satisfaction of public interest and in better serving the needs of the community as a whole and of each citizen in particular. The implementation of this goal is often illusory. Therefore, public administration should introduce a managerial dimension in its field of activity³. In other words, the functioning of public administration cannot be conceived without implementing the concept of public management.

The continuous concern of analysts to improve the organization and functioning of public administration has led to disciplinary shaping of public management as a science derived from general management.

Considering that public management has different meanings for different specialists and in the absence of a general meaning, in 1986 Professor D. Rosenbloom, in his book *Public Administration. Understanding management, Politics and Law in the Public Sector*, put public management in the framework of a definition. This tells us that public management is the integration of managerial, political and legal approaches in carrying out the mandates of the legislative, executive and judiciary authorities, to ensure regulations and services for society as a whole and for its segments⁴ (see Figure 1).

¹ John A. Byrne, *The Man Who Invented Management: Why Peter Drucker's ideas still matter*, BusinessWeek, no. 28, 2005, available on

http://www.businessweek.com/magazine/content/05_48/b3961001.htm [accessed on 3 September 2011]

² Peter F. Drucker, *The Age of Social Transformation*, *The Atlantic Monthly*, November 1994, Volume 274, no. 5, p. 53, available on <http://www.theatlantic.com/past/docs/issues/95dec/chilearn/drucker.htm> [accessed on 3 September 2011]

³ Georgeta Ghețe, „Managementul administrației publice”, *Revista Economie și Administrație Locală*, Issue 6/1996, p. 16

⁴ David H. Rosenbloom, *Public administration. Understanding management, politics and law in the public sector*, Random House, New York, 1986, p. 13

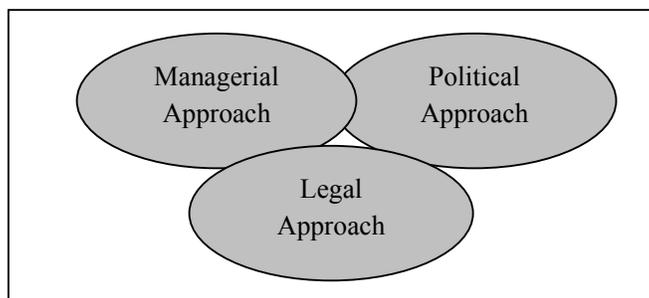


Fig. 1. Tri-dimensional approach to public management

Source: own processing after David H. Rosenbloom, *Public Administration. Understanding management, politics and law in the public sector*, p. 13

Therefore there seems to be three distinct approaches to public management: managerial approach, the political and legal approach, their quota, under theoretical and practical aspects, contributing to further development in the field⁵.

The importance of public management in public administration has been clearly revealed by professors S. Ott, A. J. Hyde and Shafritz. They see public management as an important part within the wider public administration field⁶. We fully acknowledge this point of view.

C. Pollit and G. Bouckaert's position seems very convincing to us as well. It was described in the book *Public Management Reform: a Comparative Analysis*. A sign of modernization, a dynamic force of change, public management may serve as a label of legitimacy for those politicians and civil servants who represent the forces of progress⁷. Equally enlightening is the next idea that is enhanced throughout the same book: public management is not a neutral and technical process, but an activity intimately and inextricably intertwined with politics, law and civil society in general.⁸

From another angle, O. Hughes seems a bit sceptical when it comes to the so-called "standard" opinions above. *Management* and *administration* are not synonyms, and even their application in the public sector differs significantly, says Hughes. In his views, public administration is a department within which there take place a range of activities for the implementation of regulations, methodological rules, political regulations and programs, while public management includes public administration and aims at building a management system appropriate to achieve the objectives with maximum efficiency, with accountability for outcomes achieved; if public administration is focused on processes and procedures, public management involves much more: instead of following instructions, public management is oriented towards getting results and assuming responsibility for this⁹.

⁵ Moise-Ioan Achim, Arcadie Hinescu, Ionela Gavrila-Paven, „Public management – major approaches”, *Annals of the University of Petroșani, Economics*, no. 5/2005, p. 20

⁶ Laurence E. Lynn, Public Management, Prepared for the forthcoming *Handbook of Public Administration*, to be published by Sage Publications, Inc., 2001, *apud* Steven Ott, Albert Hyde and Jay Shafritz, *Public Management: The Essential Readings*, Nelson-Hall Publishers, Chicago, 1991, available on http://harrisschool.uchicago.edu/about/publications/working-papers/pdf/wp_01_24.pdf [accessed on 16 September 2011]

⁷ Christopher, Pollit, Geert Bouckaert, *Public Management Reform: a Comparative Analysis*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2000, translated by Stanciu, Diana, Epigraf Publishing House, Chișinău, 2004, p. 27

⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 28

⁹ Owen E. Hughes, *Public Management & Administration. An introduction*, Second Edition, Published by Palgrave, New York, 1998, pp. 5 – 6

Another strong argument in the demarcation between *administration* and *management* has been offered by Professor D. Rosenbloom. He believes that those who define government in terms of management tend to minimize the distinction between public and private administration¹⁰.

Remarkable is also the contribution of our national researchers in shaping public management. The need to expand this area into the local system gave rise to the first works in this field. In 1999, Professor A. Androniceanu defined public management as a specialized discipline that covers knowledge of processes and management relations of public administration in all their complexity in order to formulate principles and laws for continuous improvement of organization and functioning of administrative structures depending on the values of the political power, the economic and social needs, the degree of technical equipment, the general level of culture and civilization in order to achieve effective public services, adequate to social needs and meeting general public interest¹¹.

Therefore, if we ask what the purpose of public management is, the answer given by Professor P. Filip is quite comprehensive. In his view, public management provides theoretical and methodological instruments to public administration authorities so that by exercising the management functions in the management of resources, the degree of satisfaction of the public interest to be as high as possible¹². Therefore, the purpose of public management is generous - to increase the degree of satisfaction of public interest.

The reformation of the administrative system in our country, which has been spoken about so much, is a long process whose success depends on practicing a management that would allow the government structures to respond and meet the expectations of the members of the community.

From this perspective, the implementation of management in the Romanian public administration should be an inevitable thing, leading to effective management of public affairs and better serving any social requirements.

Since public interest's satisfaction should be a constant priority, the same should be the management implementation in the public administration in Romania. This is because it offers the possibility of organizing and providing adequate public services, in accordance with the requirements and preferences of the beneficiaries, contributing to improving the relations with the latter. Moreover, the introduction of management in public administration in our country makes it possible to achieve the objective of empowering local communities through the transfer of new decision-making responsibilities and financial resources, at the same time respecting the principle of subsidiarity. This leads to strengthening the power and the role of local administrative structures in the management of the affairs in local administrative-territorial units, for the very purpose of trying to make public administration in our country more efficient.

Thus we are witnessing the transfer of skills related to the management of health units, an action justified by the fact that local authorities are the best when it comes to understanding the needs related to health of the communities they represent. Similarly, for an increase in the quality of school management, we are witnessing the transfer of competencies in the state pre-university education to the local authorities, which are the most entitled to make the best decisions in the administration of schools. These are just some of the areas in which public management proves to be useful, justifies its presence and which enables it to reach its goal, a noble and totally disinterested one, namely satisfying public needs.

¹⁰ Rosenbloom, David H., *op. cit.*, p. 16

¹¹ Armenia Androniceanu, *Management public*, Economic Publishing House, Bucharest, 1999, p. 20

¹² Petru Filip, *Managementul administrației publice locale. O abordare proactivă*, Economic Publishing House, Bucharest, 2007, p. 13

Public Administration and the Role of Autonomy in its Shaping

Like any science, administration as well is entitled to a definition to tell us, in a nutshell, what it is and what it does. Not few are those who dared him to clarify its meaning. We will only mention S. Herbert, V. Thompson and D. Smithburg who in their book *Public Administration* give the following explanation: When two people work together to roll a stone which could neither move alone, there are the rudiments of government. This simple action has the two basic characteristics of what was later called the administration. There is a purpose - to move the stone - and a common action - more people who join powers to carry out something that would not have been done without such a combination. In the broadest sense, administration can be defined as the activity of a group working together to achieve common goals¹³. In our terms, administration is presented as an action of a group of citizens who cooperate to achieve a “target” of interest to them all.

Defining public administration is not easy. Professor D. Rosenbloom sustains that with clarity. He believes that: public administration, like many other human endeavors, is difficult to define. However, we all have a sense of what it is, but we may have different opinions on how it should be done¹⁴. He notes that public administration has different meanings for different observers and has no meaningful, universal, theoretical and practical definition¹⁵.

In an attempt to overcome this shortcoming, teachers S. Herbert, V. Thompson and D. Smithburg tell us that public administration means, in common acceptance, the activities of the executive branch of national, state and local governments¹⁶.

Our emphasis is that public administration can be regarded as a set of authorities working together and operating together as a coherent system which, through its entire activity, aims to satisfy the public interest, continuously and in accordance with social expectations.

Taking as enough this brief overview of the scope of public administration, further on, we are interested in our approach, in the “architecture” of the administrative system on the two “floors”: central and local government.

Thus, studying relevant opinions, we can recognize a unitary position on the decisive role of autonomy in the delimitation of the two public administration levels - central and local. Some specialists consider that public administration, based on the principle of local autonomy, is essentially public administration and not state administration¹⁷. In the demarcation between the two public administration sub-systems, in another view¹⁸ it is argued that, unlike the central administration, the local one fulfills its powers at administrative-territorial level, and the interests it promotes belong to the inhabitants of the administrative-territorial units.

Thus summarizing the above, we admit firstly that local public administration operates in the administrative-territorial units of the state in which local autonomy is exercised and, secondly, that in these administrative-territorial units local interests are present, whose promotion local public administration is in charge of, taking advantage of its autonomy.

¹³ Simon A. Herbert, Victor A. Thompson, Donald W. Smithburg, *Public Administration*, Transaction Publishers, Piscataway, New Jersey, 1991, translated from English by Hârceah, Cătălina, Constantinescu, Simona, Humanitas Publishing House, Bucharest, 2003, p. 27

¹⁴ David H. Rosenbloom, *op. cit.*, p. 4

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 5

¹⁶ Simon A. Herbert, Victor A. Thompson, Donald W. Smithburg, *op. cit.*, p. 32

¹⁷ Armenia Androniceanu, *op. cit.*, p. 18

¹⁸ Eugen Popa, *Autonomia locală în România*, All Beck Publishing House, Bucharest, 1991, p. 19

As such, local government, whose mission is to manage the interests of the local communities, is organized and operates on the principle of local autonomy, without which an efficient management is not possible.

Local Autonomy – Approaches to its Meaning and Significance

Many of the works and studies published in the field of public administration are more or less devoted to the subject of autonomy. The literature in the field speaks of “*autonomy*”, “*local autonomy*”, “*local government*”, “*self-government*”, “*administrative self-management*”, “*freedom of local and regional administration*”, all this terminology reflecting and having, in substance, the same meaning.

The correct reception of the meaning of local autonomy is necessary and urges us to investigate the different but not few opinions, given so far.

First, we stop at the formulation offered by Professors S. Herbert, V. Thompson and D. Smithburg. In their paper, they write that autonomy establishes the extent to which a unit is master of its fate and in which it can implement decisions without consultation and lengthy negotiations with other units¹⁹.

A short definition which covers a lot has been offered by Professor M. Preda. In his opinion, local autonomy is the essence of all activities of public administration in territorial-administrative units²⁰. Faced with such a well worded idea, we cannot be but fully satisfied.

D. Rais, A. Simionescu and T. Pendiuc as as concise as M. Preda. According to them, local autonomy “materializes the administration’s freedom of action”²¹.

Trying to capture the meaning of local autonomy, G. Bobocea tells us that this is an issue of the relationship between the general interests of the state and the interests of different communities or territorial collectivities within it; the contents of this issue has always been the recognition by the central authority and sanction by law of several rights and freedoms for local authorities to decide on issues of interest for the respective administrative-territorial units²².

In another opinion²³, local autonomy is regarded as the legal ability of autonomous authorities to decide, independently and under own responsibility, within the law, on the regional issues of the local community in which they operate.

Professor M. Onofrei expresses his opinion that local autonomy is associated with the establishment of a distinct status of local communities and authorities in relation to state administration, revealing the degree of independence of local authorities in relation to central government²⁴.

¹⁹ Simon A. Herbert, Victor A. Thompson, Donald W. Smithburg, *op. cit.*, p. 9

²⁰ Mircea Preda, *Drept administrativ, Partea generală*, Lumina Lex Publishing House, Bucharest, 2006, p. 350

²¹ Dorian Rais, Aurelian Simionescu, Tudor Pendiuc, *Managementul administrației publice*, Independența Economic Independence Publishing House, Brăila, 1999, p. 29

²² Gheorghe Bobocea, *Dezvoltarea autonomiei locale în R. S. România*, Policy Publishing House, Bucharest, 1999, p. 7

²³ Verginia Vedinaș, *Drept administrativ*, Third Edition, Universul Juridic Publishing House, Bucharest, 2007, p. 363

²⁴ Mihaela Onofrei, *Administrație Publică, Fundamente științifice și bune practici*, Universitatea „Alexandru Ioan Cuza” Publishing House, Iași, 2007, pp. 57-58

In connection with local autonomy the following two aspects cannot be ignored²⁵:

- local autonomy is both a right and an obligation for the representative authorities of local communities, who have the mission to manage and solve all the problems of the population of their administrative-territorial jurisdiction;
- all the rights and liabilities resulting from the content of the local autonomy principle are exercised on behalf of the local community, as a consequence of the powers given to them by those who they represent, in other words, only on the basis of the mandate given by the electorate.

In the line of the argument, we must say that there is a legal framework which expressly enshrines the principle of local autonomy. Local public administration law defines local autonomy as “the right and effective capacity of local public administration authorities to address and manage, on behalf and in the interest of the local community they represent, public affairs, under the law”²⁶. Further, it is stated that this right is exercised by local councils and mayors, as well as by local county councils and their presidents, local government authorities elected by universal, equal, direct, secret and freely expressed vote.

In a similar manner, this provision is found in the European Charter of Local Self-Government²⁷, a reference document in the field, according to which through local autonomy is intended the right and effective ability of local authorities to address and manage, within the law, in its own name and in the interest of local people, an important part of public affairs, a right exercised by councils or assemblies composed of members elected by free, secret, equal, direct and universal vote, which may have executive and deliberative bodies that are responsible in front of them.

But, as the matters of local interest should be resolved by communes, towns, cities and counties, so they must have financial resources that they can use for self-management. Similarly, we believe that estimating the degree of interest of local implicitly financial autonomy is of interest. To calculate the local autonomy the following formula has to be used:

$$Gal = \frac{V_p}{V_t} \times 100 \quad (1)$$

where:

G_{al} = the degree of local implicitly financial autonomy;

V_p = the revenues of local authorities;

V_t = total income of local authorities.

This indicator reflects the stage reached at a local level, in terms of local and financial autonomy²⁸. The high level of this indicator reflects a high degree of autonomy, and vice versa. The higher the share of own revenues of local authorities in the total income is, the higher local autonomy is.

Based on the formula depicted above, we will calculate the degree of autonomy, for 2009, in the counties of North-East of Romania (see Table no. 1).

²⁵ Stelian Ivan, Mihai Bădescu, Aurel Neagu, *Administrație Publică*, Lumina Lex Publishing House, Bucharest, 2002, p. 39

²⁶ *Law no. 215/2001 regarding local public administration*, art. 3, paragraph 1.

²⁷ *European Charter of Local Self-Government*, art. 3.

²⁸ V. A. Munteanu, *Management public local*, Tipo Moldova Publishing House, Iași, 2009, p. 68.

Table 1. The degree of autonomy in the counties of North-East Romania in 2009

Name of indicator	U.M.	Bacău	Botoșani	Iași	Neamț	Suceava	Vaslui
Total income	Thous and lei	1,104,670	704,661	1,425,649.31	858,549	1,209,851	740,881
Own revenues	Thous and lei	322,903	180,615	578,008.52	267,591	387,366	177,409
Degree of autonomy	%	29.23	25.63	40.54	31.16	32.01	23.94

Source: after reports regarding local government finance in 2009, by the Court of Accounts, available on <http://www.curteadeconturi.ro/sites/ccr/RO/Publicatii/Pagini/Rapoartele%20privind%20finan%C8%9Be%20publice%20locale%202009.aspx> [accessed on 14 December 2011]

Analyzing the data from the table, we see that for the North-Eastern Region, the greatest degree of autonomy is registered in Iasi County (40.54%). Then, in the county of Suceava, the value of this indicator is 32.01% and the minimum degree of autonomy of 23.94% is in Vaslui County. A close value of the indicator to 100 reflects a high degree of autonomy (as in Iasi county) and a further value of 100 indicates a low autonomy (the case of Vaslui county).

These results allow us to have an image of the degree of autonomy, and place the local administrative systems in North-Eastern Romania in a comparative analysis.

In our view, we believe that for the success of the local government and for the progress of the communities in the administrative-territorial units, the local government needs managerial and financial autonomy in managing the public affairs of the community. The entire responsibility should not be left on the shoulders of local authorities, but certainly they are the main players in reforming and streamlining public administration in the territorial-administrative units.

Conclusions

In light of the facts presented in this study, we are entitled to conclude that investigating different views that relevant literature in the field offers us meets the need of knowing the thinking about public management, and about its role in the functioning of public administration.

Beyond the theoretical aspects, public management is a necessity for public administration, without which the mission which it was formed and functioning for is not accomplishable. Moreover, on the implementation of management in public administration depends, we could say, the successful administration reform process in our country. The aim of any reform cannot be other than building an efficient administration, reported to the multitude and diversity of public needs. The diversity of the changes that characterize the current public administration as well as the inconsistency of nowadays socio-economic processes generate some of the most complex and difficult challenges, which can be overcome through efficient management practice.

Then, also in this direction, we notice the essential role of autonomy in shaping the administrative system. Our emphasis is that local autonomy is a key factor in the management of public administration, influencing the management of affairs in the territorial-administrative

units. In a few words, administration needs autonomy in managing public affairs, in this regard all opinions being, as we have seen, unanimous.

Without claiming to have exhausted the subject, we believe that without the implementation of management in public administration and without the recognition of the autonomy at local level, both society as a whole and especially the members of the local communities would suffer as their varied needs could not be met in terms of efficiency and effectiveness.

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Administrația publică și autonomia locală – abordări în teoria managementului public

Rezumat

Oferind suportul teoretic și practic pentru organizarea și funcționarea structurilor administrative, managementul public se prezintă ca o necesitate pentru administrația publică. Nu sunt puțini cei care au acordat atenție și au cuit să lămurească rolul și locul managementului public în domeniul administrației publice.

Opiniile expuse în articolul de față accentuează faptul că administrația publică trebuie să cuprindă în sfera sa de activitate dimensiunea managerială.

La fel de adevărat este și faptul că satisfacerea intereselor comunităților este și rămâne scopul primordial al funcționării autonomiei locale în administrația publică din unitățile administrativ-teritoriale. În acest registru, socotim binevenită investigarea opiniilor relevante în teoria managementului public referitoare la necesitatea acestuia în administrația publică și la rolul autonomiei în organizarea și funcționarea ei.