THE NEED OF RETHINKING THE PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION SYSTEM IN THE CONTEXT OF THE GROWING POWER OF THE CIVIL SOCIETY

Neamțu Florentina
Transilvania University of Brasov, Doctoral School, Brasov, România
florentinavioletaneamtu@gmail.com

Abstract: *Worldwide, the trend of the last twenty years has been that of globalization and the intense development of the social systems. In this context, nation states are put in a completely new position in which institutions and administrative systems should be flexible to accommodate these changes. In the new coordinates of established geopolitical framework, central and local government is the defining factors in economic competitiveness of a country or economic region. A very important aspect of the globalization is related to the affirming power of civil society emergence and to the concept of social responsibility. What distinguishes the contemporary era from the modern one is the high sensitivity to ethical issues, manifested at the level of individuals and organizations. This fact can be explained by technological advances of communication that allow free access to information about the conduct of national and international communities, less tolerant regarding the business related abuses. We witness thus a process of powerful radicalization of the pressure groups thanks to planetary networks, which inevitably leads to a reassessment of principles and culture of the organization, be it public or private. Romanian society is in a continuous process of change, in which all the economic, social, political and civic factors know a new dynamic in trying to adapt to present conditions. For Romania, under these conditions, all the changes in government acquire new dimensions. Thus, public bodies must respond to new changes in the world economy, but equally to new requirements of integration into EU structures. Public administration reform involves changes in the substance of its major components, both at central government and the local government and public services in general. Furthermore, the development of democracy requires a new relationship between citizens and government, involving the growing and strengthening of the role of local authorities and the reconsideration of the partnership between the civil society and local officials. This paper proposes a theoretical and operational analysis of the new coordinates that define the context of reconstruction of the government - stakeholders relationships.*

Key words: *public administration, social responsibility, morals, ethics, sustainable development.*

JEL classification: *M31*

1. Introduction

An extremely important aspect of globalization is linked to the affirmation of power of civil society and the emergence of the concept of social responsibility.

What distinguishes the contemporary era from the modern one is the high sensitivity to ethical issues, manifested at the level of individuals and organizations (Zait and Prihoanca, 2007). This fact can be explained by technological progress in communications that allow free access to information regarding the behavior of national and international communities, less tolerant towards the abuses of the business environment. We witness thus a process of powerful radicalization of the pressure groups thanks to planetary networks, which inevitably leads to a reassessment of principles and culture of the organization, be it public or private.

2. The affirmation of the power of civil society and its impact on business environment

The complexity of ethic issue increases when placing this concept in the context of global implications (Ballet and De Bry, 2001). It is about the differences especially between morality and ethics even though these two terms originate from a common definition - "a decisive manner to act according to the customs and traditions of a nation"; for example, the terms have the same meaning for Anglo-Saxons nations, but for Latin countries there is a strong distinction between them, with philosophical implications.

It is not so surprising to find that ethics in business will transform with the evolution of ideological patterns and in accord to the place reserved by these patterns to the social-economic role of public and private organizations.

At the cultural level, "morality is not confined to a sub-culture, but it is a structural component that influences in the same time, political and economic spheres of society" (Masse, 2000). Moreover, we can identify another concept – deontology - which in some respects is more expressive compared the ethics; deontology is associated with an action that accompanies the exercise of a function, and it is defined as "all rules and duties of a profession, the conduct of those who exercise it and their relationship with the target audience" (Epuran, 2005). Deontology differs from traditional morality because morality does not imply obligation, it arises only in the exercise of a profession, the associated penalty is provided in the professional code, while morality is based on an a priori principle.

An extensive study regarding this problem was conducted between February 2002 and November 2003 by two well-known specialists: Bollinger and Hofstede (Bollinger and Hofstede, 1987). This research, exhaustive in nature (given the vastness of the areas of investigation and the interdisciplinary essence), was based on analysis of Francophone and Anglophone scientific journals, periodicals and other journals in the period of 1997-2003. The information was supplemented by secondary data obtained from four computerized databases: ProQuest, Emerald (Canada), Delphes and Ebsco, France. Apparent abundance of literature on the interdependence between ethics and business management has been considerably reduced when it has been placed in the context of international marketing. For example, from the total number of articles published in the period of 1998-2003, Emerald database provided only thirteen articles addressing ethics in the context of international marketing. From those, ten of selected items addressed the importance of the stakeholders for the

enterprise, strengthens the reality that the subject is relevant and there is still a need for further studies in the area.

Highly visible in the business environment, the specific actions associated to the concept of social responsibility generate benefits for all stakeholders; on the one hand we witness the growth of confidence of stakeholders in the organizations and on the other hand, we can see that legal entities achieve significant economic performance and clear position in terms of the underserved targets, often being seen as "favorite companies". These organizations respond to a new set of social values based on the increasing role of corporations in society, defined by the term of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR).

CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) is a concept related to the contribution that companies must have in the development of modern society. Over time, this contribution was theorized differently through the many streams of thought. In the context of the diverse currents of thought, the initiatives of „responsible" companies were called by a variety of terms: corporate citizenship, corporate philanthropy, corporate societal marketing, community affairs, community development, etc.

Representing an evolving concept, and not having a standard definition or a set of specific accepted criteria, CSR is generally perceived as being "the manner in which an organization achieve a balance or realize an integration of economic, environmental and social factors, answering the expectations of shareholders and other stakeholders".

Societal marketing concept is the new philosophy of the five that comprise marketing management. Basically, societal marketing comes in response to a series of questions that dominate the actual business context:

- There is classic marketing concept still adequate in an era of environmental problems, with limited resources, global economic issues and neglected social services?
- The global firms still keep looking to meet individual needs and to work to consumers and society benefit in the long run?

Societal marketing concept is based on the consideration that the organization should establish and adequately meet the needs, wants and interests of its target in a more efficient manner than competitors, in order to maintain and improve the welfare of society in general and consumers in particular.

3. The pillars in the reconstruction of public administration in the context of the affirmation of civil society power

To support the marketing implications over the measures taken in the public system, we can extend the realities of the business environment in the sphere of government action; practical, due to increased public power, whether considered individually or collectively, central and local government must place on the basis of all their performed actions the community interests.

As the states and international institutions have realized that the adoption of the CSR principles by the companies serves the objectives of sustainable development, we can witness the emergence of the need for international standards that define what a "desirable corporate behavior" is.

The United Nations, European Union and Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development are three of the most important institutions that were involved in

developing a CSR framework, defining and establishing indicators that can be transparently measured.

The European Union grants an great importance to the dimension of social responsibility, as a means to achieve the goal set at the Lisbon European Council in 2000, namely to become "the most competitive and dynamic economic system in the world, capable of supporting economic development through more and better jobs and greater social cohesion" (Profiroiu, 2005). In order to guide companies and institutions in implementing the concept of social responsibility, the European Union has developed a two-dimensional framework for the relationship between organizations and communities:

- an internal dimension, which concerns the relationship between the organization/public institution and employees with the following objectives: ensuring better quality of life of the employees, ensuring a safe and healthy working environment, the responsible approach to restructuring in a crisis period, taking into account the interests of all parties involved, minimize the impact of the operations with impact on the environment and natural resources.
- an external dimension, which concerns the relationship between organization / public institution and stakeholders, with the following directions: development of local communities, development of local economic systems through partnerships with various categories of stakeholders, protect and encourage the implementation of environmental standards at central and local levels. This framework was accompanied by recommendations and principles to guide states and local authorities in policy formulation, to ensure transparency and promote activities on the one hand, and support CSR initiatives, on the other.

Therefore, in order to demonstrate that is „socially responsible", a company must understand the internationally promoted principles of CSR and moreover has to regularly report on integrating these principles into its work.

Several factors explain the increased interest of the organizations and public institutions for the operationalization of the concept of corporate social responsibility, as follows:

- the new concerns and expectations of individuals, consumers, public power and investor in the context of globalization and changes in the public sector;
- the social criteria influencing the investment decisions of individuals and / or organizations;
- the discontent regarding those activities detrimental to the natural environment.

Regarding the concept of sustainable development, it was launched 30 years ago, first theoretically, and then passed through the spheres of politics, becoming now an undeniable current practice.

As with social responsibility, sustainable development concept is presented as a result of multiform forces and pressure, generated by groups and actors with different interests and motivations.

Implemented within the public domain, sustainable development implies "sustainable growth that meets the needs of the present, without affecting or compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs". Basically, beyond the known elements of the sustainable development approach (genuine concept of marketing

field) - often associated with environmental protection - it involves a balance between three components: economy, society and environment, an element that justifies its existence in the reform process of public administration.

The interest of public institutions taking steps towards social responsibility, business ethics and sustainable development in society, it is becoming more evident through the measures proposed in the reform strategies that can be found in every government programs.

Although the implementation is difficult and expensive, requiring a coherent reform in the rest of the areas of national interest, in the foundation and development of the processes following the strategy to develop a citizen-oriented administration there is consistency and clarity. The objectives of such a strategy are properly defined in terms of added value for citizens, as follows:

- focusing the attention to a greater extent from the contributions to results and awareness, to the need for government to provide services that are able to meet community needs;
- establishment of appropriate quality standards according to the expectations of the citizens;
- generalization of the system of „one stop shop".

Developing such a strategy, however, needs to have as its starting point a set of logical and coherent principles, interrelated with the need for transparency in the activities of government and according to the desire for information and participation of local communities in decision-making, in order to allow:

- creation of an administration closer to citizens;
- applying a system for the standardization of services designed to define quality requirements to be fulfilled by them. Moreover, granting a higher importance to the results of public consultation mechanisms is a prerequisite for determining more detailed needs of citizens;
- awards for quality of services, to increase motivation of service providers;
- ensuring permanent services (non-stop hotline to provide important information, Internet, etc.).

Governmental institutions that make the interests of their citizens the basis for their activities will benefit from many advantages: increase stakeholders' confidence in their activities, quality services, motivating human resources, reputation and good image, cost reduction, etc.

The operationalization of the development strategy requires creating, developing and using specific marketing approach, whether we consider improving the offered services and their proper communication to citizens, whether we aim to develop sustainable relationships with various interest groups as follows:

- *creating effective consultation mechanisms for citizens in order to horizontally diversify the range of services and getting direct feedback on the quality of services.*

According to marketing approach, the manner in which public service is provided is very important, but it is also important to ensure correspondence between what citizens want and what government provides. According to the middle function of marketing approach, that aims to connect organizations to the external environment, in order to increase the targeting ability, the need for information and participation of citizens in decision making must be one of the in premises in the establishment and development of citizen-centric strategy. In this context, policy makers in central and

local governments will be able to develop services to meet the needs of groups with different interests. Government-citizen interaction through wider consultation and participation of citizens in determining the type and level of service to be provided will generate significant results in terms of efficiency of government activities. The practices of the developed countries reveal that consultation and cooperation between different levels of organization of government and citizens support the efforts to create motivating and innovative standards in public services.

▪ integration of services.

In order to be are available, the services should be consolidated in a physical or virtual center, according to the needs and expectations of citizens and not in the logic provided by rigid administrative structures. Adding value to citizens by providing time and place utility implies service integration both vertically through a collaboration between the different organizational levels of government and horizontally, through the relationship between the public and private sectors. It entails a change in organizational architecture, in terms of deployment processes and significant changes in organizational culture; for example, making one stop shop requires several steps, preceded by simple integration solutions (telephone information services, web portal, and so on).

▪ *the use of information and communication technology.*

The information technology opens new opportunities both for service providers and citizens. A government that works on the principle of 7x24 (7 days a week and 24 hours of 24) helps to create a more accessible and transparent government.

▪ *bureaucratic mentality change.*

Improving the quality of public services require changing the way of thinking and to address various issues, managing the transition from a rigid to flexible thinking activities, results and action-oriented in accordance with predetermined objectives.

Through the steps for taken sustainable development, often associated with the concept of social responsibility, public services should be designed in such a way to generate good results in increasing the quality of the life of society, and local communities in particular. The arguments supporting the sustainable development approach in the public sector are related to the need to modernize the infrastructure in order to reduce the influence of pollutant factors (waste water treatment, waste disposal). The compliance with environmental requirements throughout the whole life cycle of municipal services infrastructure (construction - operation - maintenance - demolition) acquires a particular importance within the concept of sustainable development. Therefore, the Government should make efforts to align the Romanian standards and practices of public services to EU requirements by: the harmonization of the regulations governing municipal services with the EU directives on water, waste, energy and transport; financial support for co-development programs including infrastructure measures (ISPA, SAPARD, PDR, MUDP 3, TECP 2, and so on).

In addition to the efforts to develop the sustainable development strategies and those which target at citizens, policy makers must manage other types of stakeholder interests, and taking considerable efforts in promoting social partnerships. Today, policy makers of local government attaches great importance to the participation of all social partners in making the decisions, with a major impact on the quality of community life. Public services are essential in the solidarity of the citizens, in maintaining the social peace.

Based on this principle, the Government should target programs that investigated a number of issues:

- the amplification of the involvement of civil society structures, mainly trade unions and employers in developing strategies, policies and sectorial programs;
- the implementation of partnership projects in order to strengthen ties with associations representing the interests of beneficiaries of water services;
- ensuring the continuous training of all workers in the field of municipal services.

4. Conclusions

The legitimacy of the state actions cannot be reduced only to issues of management and effectiveness, but must take into account the interactions between global and local level, so that the accelerating effects of territorial phenomena on public management should not be neglected. Moreover, the state should develop innovation and development strategies to facilitate achieving conferred society mission of the public services.

The involvement of civil society in decision-making within the public structures, the development of the public-private partnership and the dropping of the vertical management of the communities are realities that require rethinking government reform strategies as a factor in maintaining social dynamism engine.

For Romania, under these conditions, all the changes in government structures and actions acquire new dimensions. Thus, public bodies must respond to new changes in the world economy, but equally new requirements of integration into EU structures. Public administration reform involves changes in the substance of its major components, both at central government and the local government, and public services in general. Furthermore, the development of democracy requires a new relationship between citizens and government, growing and strengthening the role of local authorities and the reconsideration of the partnership with civil society and local officials.

A democratic system is functional when the economy records positive results and to the extent that develops a democratic spirit in social mentality. In the broader transformation of Romanian society it cannot be ignored the public administration system, and the need to introduce a European dimension in this field, in accordance with the values of the new administrative space. By developing consistent and ongoing decentralization process, in the near future we could assist to the increase of the quality and efficiency of public services as a result of developing the capacity of local governments to respond to a greater extent to the needs of citizens and local development.

Given the positive experience of developed countries, and national trends, we estimate that the inclusion and consideration of stakeholder influence in public structures will generate medium to long term benefits for all beneficiaries, such as: reduction of public expenditure, thus combating bureaucracy and corruption in the public institutions; increasing the transparency of the use and management of public funds; improving access to information and services, in accordance with the law on the protection of personal data and the free access to public information; eliminating direct contact between the counter-clerk and citizen through e-government portals; providing information and public services by electronic means; strengthening the

administrative capacity of public institutions to carry out the role and its objectives and ensure delivery in a transparent manner of the information and public services; promoting collaboration between public institutions for providing electronic public services; redefine the relationship between citizen and government, and between business and government, with the purpose of facilitating their access to public services and information through information technology; promoting the use of Internet and High-tech in public institutions (Tudorel et al; Moon, 2002; Abbasi, 2005).

In conclusion, in order to combine the classic administrative hierarchy with modern creative and focused on citizens management in a unitary organization of the public sector, the "architecture" of the overall system it should be changed, redesigning the systems and internal decision-making processes, the modes and levels of participation and social inclusion of decision-making and implementation of policies, the targeting systems, the performance measurement, the asset allocation, the accountability, the supervision and control.

To support this process in an overall consistent and coherent reform, we believe it is necessary to have a stable network to promote change, which must be established both by decision-makers and operational staff from the local government, parts of a county and by citizens and interested organizations as primary beneficiaries. However, the creation of this network is not a simple issue; it calls from the parties a fair and thorough knowledge and understanding of the structural elements necessary to implement the reform, in general, and of the guiding principles by various stakeholders, in particular.

References

Abbasi, S. (2005) „Capacity building and institutional framework for e-Governance", *Centre for Science, Development and Media Studies, India,* vol.1, nr. 5.

Ballet, J., De Bry, F. (2001) *L'entreprise et l'éthique*, Edition du Seuil, Paris.

Bollinger, D., Hofstede, G (1987) *Les différences culturelles dans le management: comment chaque pays gère-t-il ses hommes?*, Les Editions d'organisation, Paris.

Epuran, Ghe., (2005) "Morală, deontologie şi responsabilitate în acţiunile de marketing. Observaţii preliminare, istorice şi conceptuale", *Marketing - Management. Studii, cercetări, consulting*, AROMAR, vol.1.

Masse, R., (2000) "L'anthropologie au défi de l'éthique", *Anthropologie et sociétés*, vol 24, nr.2.

Moon, M.J. (2002) "The evolution of e-Government among municipalities. Rethoric or reality?", *Public Administration Review*, vol. 62, nr. 4.

Prihoanca, D., Zait, L. (2007) "*The Ethical Risk in the International Marketing. Responsability and Deontology"*, The Risk in the Contemporary Ecomomy, Editura Europlus, Galaţi.

Profiroiu, A., (2005) "Reforma administraţiei publice în contextual agendei de la Lisabona", *Administraţie şi Management Public*, nr.4.

Tudorel A., Profiroiu, M., Turturean, M. "Reforma administraţiei publice locale. Cazul României", Available http://www.ectap.ro/articole/38.pdf [14 march 2013]