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Public service performance and good administration. Socio economic empirical evaluations

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Abstract

The field literature reveals multiple approaches of local public service performance. Directly managed by public administrative institutions or by private agents through concession or public-private partnership, the public services should respond to important requirements concerning the higher level of citizens' satisfaction. In this context, the periodical evaluation both of citizens' satisfaction and of the economic performance achieved by the public services becomes necessary in view to accomplish good administration of a local community. Based on the field literature and a series of socio-economic empirical evaluations, the current paper aims to present both comparative results and relevant conclusions from the prospect of the principles of good administration. Our approach is based on the concept of good governance making indirectly the necessary assertions for good administration.

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1. Introduction

Good governance and the right to good governance represent relatively recent important concerns both for the national and the European governmental authorities.

The two concepts reside from the quasi-unanimous understanding regarding the introducing of a new, managerial, manner of thinking in the national or local public administration systems.

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This tendency was operationalized through the theories and practices specific to the New Public Management or to the New Weberianism, being also supported by international bodies, such as: the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund or OECD. Torma (2010) reveals the fact that the national attitudes have been diverse, starting from explicit support – United Kingdom, the Scandinavian states or the Netherlands – until reserve, as is the case of France, Germany, Italy and certain South-Eastern European states.

Referring to the wider framework of governance of public sector organizations, Laegraid and Verhoest (2010) identify the evolutions of this process by means of proliferation and specialization, autonomy and control in a context of increased complexity in the public organizations. At the same time, the mentioned authors discuss the possible influence of the specific managerial instruments on governance in the situation in which “specific contextual factors are controlled” (Laegraid and Verhoest, 2010, p. 211).

Based on the constitutive documents of the European Union, Statskontoret (2005) or Nassis (2009) develop and make operational the concept of good administration simultaneously with that of good governance.

Referring to performance, on the basis of relevant literature, the same authors conclude that it must be admitted to be multidimensional. Boyne (2003, 2004) argues that the potential influences on organizational performance in the public sector can be categorized into three broad sets of variables: the external environment, internal organizational characteristics and managerial strategies.

Heffron (1989) grounds a more comprising concept on the performance of the public sector, by grouping 35 criteria in five approaches, from the point of view of objectives, human resources, internal processes, systems and policies.

2. Theoretical perspectives on measuring performance of public service

Public organizations are typically required to meet multiple and potentially conflicting organizational goals (Rainey, 2010).

The citizens desire high quality services, and the public administrations wish to supply public services with a high degree of professionalism, in conditions of efficiency, effectiveness and economy for using the resources. In supplying public services, the local public authorities and institutions have the duty to perform their activity in the achievement of the general interest, applying the principles of good governance.

The following principles of good administration are embraced by most Member States (Statskontoret, 2005, p. 71) implicitly by Romania: 1. The principles of lawfulness, non-discrimination, proportionality; 2. The right to have ones affairs handled impartially and fairly and; 3. within a reasonable time; 4. The right to be heard before any individual measure is taken that would affect the citizen adversely; 5. The right to have access to his or her file, regarding any individual measure that would affect him or her; 6. The right of access to documents; 7. The obligation to state reasons in writing for all decisions; 8. The obligation to give an indication of remedies available to all persons concerned; 9. The obligation to notify all persons concerned of a decision; 10. The obligation to be service-minded.

Based on the principles of good governance, accepted by most European states, ICGGPS (2004) presents “the good governance standard for public policies”, which comprises the focus on outcomes for citizens, transparency of decision, risk management, development of the capacity and capability for efficient governance, real accountability etc.

With the undertaking of these principles, one must become aware of the need to measure performance in the public services and how it might be done better.

There are authors (Behn, 2003 and Bird, 2005) who argue the necessity of performance measurement in the public sector.

Bird et al. (2005, p. 2) suggests that there are three main reasons for measuring the performance of public services: to see what works, to identify the functional competence, to support public accountability.

Behn (2003, p. 588) suggests also eight reasons for the measurement of performance in public sector: to evaluate

how well is the government agency performing; to control how can public managers steer their subordinates in the right direction so as to ensure excellent performance; to budget the programs, people or projects for which the government should spend the public money; to motivate, namely how can public managers motivate line staff, middle managers, nonprofit and for-profit collaborators, stakeholders and citizens to do the things necessary in view to improve performance; to promote, namely how can public managers convince political superiors, legislators, stakeholders, journalists and citizens that their agency is doing a good job; to celebrate what accomplishments are worthy for the important organisational ritual of celebrating success; to learn why is something working, or not working; to improve, in other words what exactly should be done differently to improve performance.

Behn's list is clearly much more extensive than that of Bird et al. (2005), though there are clearly some overlaps within it.

The performance of public services is complex and multidimensional.

The different interests of various stakeholder groups therefore influence the conceptualization and measurement of performance of public services.

Measuring the performance of public agencies and programmes is essential, as it helps to ensure that citizens enjoy high quality services and enables governments to ensure that taxpayers receive value for their taxes. As such, good performance measurement is a crucial component of improvement and planning, monitoring and control, comparison and benchmarking and also ensures democratic accountability (Pidd, 2012, p. 1).

3. Performance in good local administration. Case of Romania

ICGGPS (2004, pp. 27-33) formulates several issues for administrators, citizens, their representatives in view to evaluate the standards of good governance in the public services.

Several preoccupations of the academic and research environment in Romania inscribe in the above context.

We mention the paper of Matei and Balaceanu (2014), which accomplishes a critical overview concerning performance through the Common Assessment Framework, focused on the local administration in Romania.

The same preoccupations are revealed by two studies of Matei and Balaceanu (2013), Matei and Baiesiu (2014),

The above studies describe, from different perspectives, the direct connection between performance and good governance at local level in Romania.

Matei and Balaceanu (2013) describe a study on 63 administrative-territorial units in Romania, investigated in relation with six dimensions:

- a) human resources for the functional structures of the administrative-territorial units;
- b) weight and capacity of community services of public utility;
- c) mechanisms of adjustment for the activity of every community service;
- d) performance of the administrative-territorial units based on the administrative acts;
- e) flow of the administrative acts and documents;
- f) concrete expression of decisional transparency.

The complexity of the above study reveals the standards of good governance for the public services.

For Matei and Baiesiu (2014) the research is based on the principles of good administration and it analyses the perception of this concept by the citizens of Brasov Municipality in Romania.

The authors emphasise the regulations and actions of the authorities for a better relationship with the citizens in view to ensure their participation in the administrative process.

4. Conclusions

The current paper emphasises, in a brief manner, the role of public service performance in promoting good governance. The relationship between the two processes – performance and good governance – is biunivoque, each one contributing in a specific manner to the other's development. In fact also the field literature (Talbot, 2010; Matei, 2004; Bird et al. 2005; Behn, 2003) reveal this reality and the theoretical constructions concerning the standards of good governance of public services are based on this assertion.

Similar to democracy, the promotion of good governance leads to social, political or financial costs, which could represent the focus of the researchers in future.

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