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Article

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CES Working Papers

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Suggested Citation: Cioclea, Alexandra Ema (2012) : Principles of the European Administrative Space and their Impact on Performance in Public Organizations, CES Working Papers, ISSN 2067-7693, Alexandru Ioan Cuza University of Iasi, Centre for European Studies, Iasi, Vol. 4, Iss. 3, pp. 288-295

This Version is available at:
https://hdl.handle.net/10419/198176

PRINCIPLES OF THE EUROPEAN ADMINISTRATIVE SPACE AND THEIR IMPACT ON PERFORMANCE IN PUBLIC ORGANIZATIONS*

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Abstract: *The European Union is interested in ensuring that each national administration offers comparable administrative capacity through quality of public services and professionalism from the civil servants. At the same time, the European states are characterised by long and varied institutional histories, with different trajectories in their evolution. That is why, public administration structures and regulations vary among the Member States and a set of common principles can guide them towards administrative convergence and performance.*

This paper aims to analyze the shared principles of a common European Administrative Space and also to address the link between these principles and the performance of public institutions from a managerial point of view. The study is based on review and analysis of academic research, government documents and personal perspectives, extracting and linking key findings from existing research and practice.

The paper argues that managerial theories on performance are compatible with public administration organizations and some of the criteria are common to those promoted by the principles of the European Administrative Space.

Keywords: principles, administration, performance, convergence
JEL Classification: D73, H11

INTRODUCTION

The constitutional treaties of the European Union do not include a common model of public administrative system for the Member States, but there are important administrative principles that have been established by the Treaty of Rome, such as the judicial review of administrative decisions issued by the European institutions (art. 173) or the obligation to justify the EU administrative decisions (art. 190).

In addition, the European Ombudsman issued a "Code of Good Administrative Behavior" for European institutions, which was adopted in 2001 by the European Parliament and that includes rules and principles, mostly administrative, for institutions to respect in their interaction with the resortisants: legality, proportionality, protection of legitimate rights and interests.

* ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS*:* This work was supported by the the European Social Fund in Romania, under the responsibility of the Managing Authority for the Sectoral Operational Programme for Human Resources Development 2007-2013 [grant POSDRU/88/1.5/S/47646].

Moreover, the European administrative convergence of the Member States is a key factor in reaching EU"s goals and criteria such as good governance, administrative cooperation, improved administrative capacity, subsidiarity and proportionality principles are promoted through European White Papers on administration and through the decisions of European Court of Justice.

The European Administrative Space (EAS) is, in fact, an innovative concept, because a traditional sovereign domain, the public administration, is now of interest not only for the national states, but for all EU Member States and for the good functioning of EU as a whole. The EAS is a metaphorical illustration of a set of principles and criteria, standards and best practices for citizen-oriented administration.

On another hand, Hofmann (2008) considered that the term "European Administrative Space" has been used to describe an increasing convergence of administrative practices at the EU level and in various member states towards a common European model. It also has been used to describe the phenomenon of the coordinated implementation of EU law and the Europeanization of national law (Kadelbach, 2002).

1. PRINCIPLES OF THE EUROPEAN ADMINISTRATIVE SPACE

The European Administrative Space (EAS) is based on a common set of principles that guide the actions/activity within national public administration. The national horizontal administrative systems of the Member States are expected to meet key requirements that support a high capacity for the entire administration. In practice, there is now a wide consensus on these key principles, which are also considered part of the acquis communautaire. They also serve as guiding lines for the reforms initiated by candidate states.

There are four main categories of EAS principles (Cardona, 2009):

- *Rule of law*, as legal certainty and predictability of administrative actions and decisions, which refers to the principle of legality as opposed to arbitrariness in public decision-making and to the need for respect of legitimate expectations of individuals;
- *Openness and transparency*, aimed at ensuring the sound scrutiny of administrative processes and outcomes and its consistency with pre-established rules;
- *Accountability* of public administration to other administrative, legislative or judicial authorities, aimed at ensuring compliance with the rule of law;
- *Efficiency* in the use of public resources and effectiveness in accomplishing the policy goals establishing in legislation and in enforcing legislation.

The above principles should not remain only theoretical, they represent the foundation for the European Administrative Space and the convergence and coherence of public administration is reflected through the implementation of these standards in legislation and especially in practice. In most Member States, these principles are enforced by the national constitution and included in administrative legislation (civil servants act, local administration act, administrative procedures) and also in financial control systems, internal and external audit, and public procurement.

They are standards useful in evaluating administrative capacity, civil servants professionalism, and rationality of decision-making. There are gradual steps in adopting, implementing and integrating these principles as public values. In consequence, the European Administrative Space is the result of a complex process based on Europeanization, convergence and administrative dynamic.

2. PERFORMANCE IN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION – OPERATIONALISING PRINCIPLES

Not only in practice, but also in research articles the need for "reinventing" public administration became a much discussed subject and the solution seemed to be a transition from a bureaucratic system to a coherent and flexible one, able to respond, to react to changes and challenges, to provide services at the lowest cost.

We presented above, for the European Union, the principles that, at a macro-level, should guide the public administration in all Member States, but for each public institution/organization these principles become, at a micro-level, performance standards and so the concept of performance includes all four of them and much more.

In the last 20 years there has been an increase in research papers that place the notion of performance on the main page (Johnson and Kaplan 1987; Carter, Day and Klein 1992; Neely, 1999; Behn, 2003; Hood, 2006). Public performance is not an objective reality, easily available to be measured and evaluated, it is in fact a social construct, distinctly perceived by different stakeholders (Ghobadian, 2009) and it must be defined broadly enough to include all key dimensions as they are perceived by the major stakeholders.

In terms of overall performance in administration, there are specific factors (Ghobadian, 2009) that should be taken into account:

- *Uncertainty* – there are many external circumstances influencing the activity of the organization and the accuracy of performance indicators;

▪*Diversity* – a high number of stakeholders with different interests make it difficult to achieve consensus in setting the goal and the objectives of the organization;

▪*Interdependence* – between resources, processes and decisions;

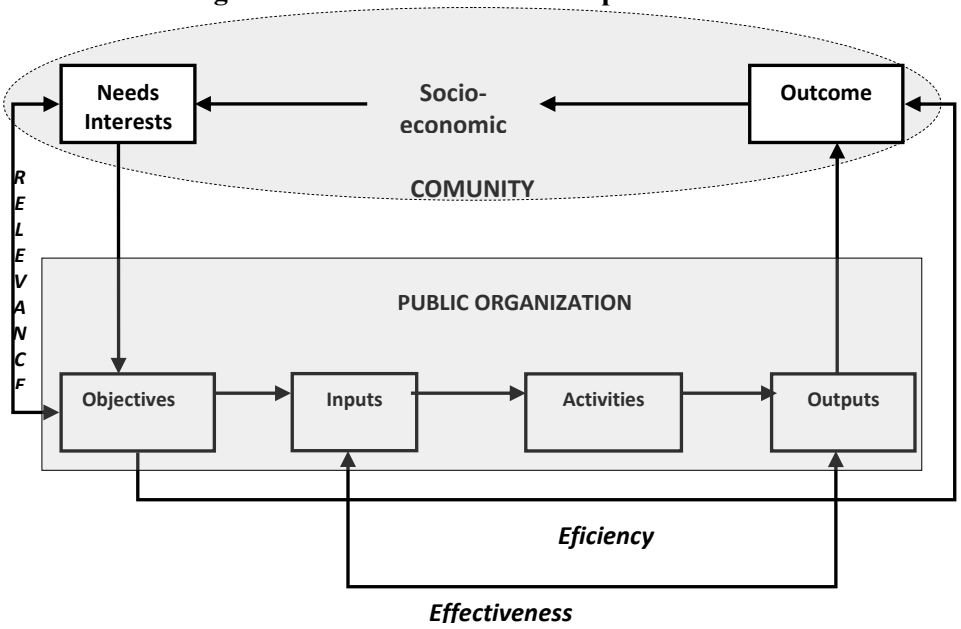
▪*Instability* – social, economic and technological changes have an important impact on the policies, goals and objectives already established.

The "classical" dimensions of performance have been considered *efficiency, effectiveness and economy*, but recent theories added other E"s to the well-known trio, such as equity, excellence, and ethics. Still, most evaluation frameworks focus on the first three:

- *Efficiency* – the ratio between inputs and outputs;
- *Effectiveness* – the impact achieved (outcome) related to planned objectives;
- *Economy* – minimum resource consumption.

As there are many causal relations between organizational objectives, the needs of the community and the three E", the illustration below is useful for understanding the concept of performance.

Figure 1 - Performance – a conceptual model

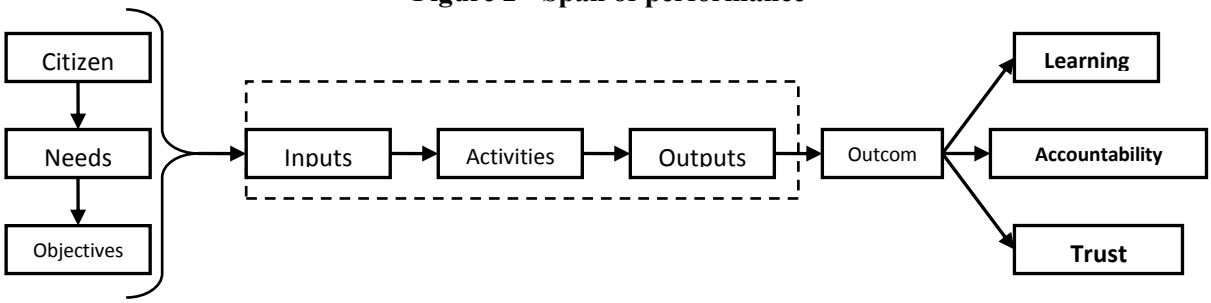


Source: Adapted after Pollit & Bouckaert (2004)

Even in the model suggested by Pollitt & Bouckaert (2004), performance links results to the initial objectives, taking into account *not only what the results are, but also how they are achieved*. Under these considerations, Brumbach (1988) defines the concept of performance as both behaviors and results. The behavior of those involved transforms performance into action (Armstrong, 2006).

In a more recent book, Bouckaert and this time Halligan (2008) add new considerations on the concept of performance. They identify two facets of performance: the *span of performance* and the *depth of performance*. The *span of performance* is actually illustrated in the 2004 model above, as it comprises of relations between input, activity, output and effects/outcome and an additional element – trust. The widest span of performance should emphasize on generating positive feedback form the stakeholders, as synthetically shown below.

Figure 2 - Span of performance



Source: Bouckaert & Halligan, 2008.

On the other side, the *depth of performance* is based on the distinction of three levels of performance:

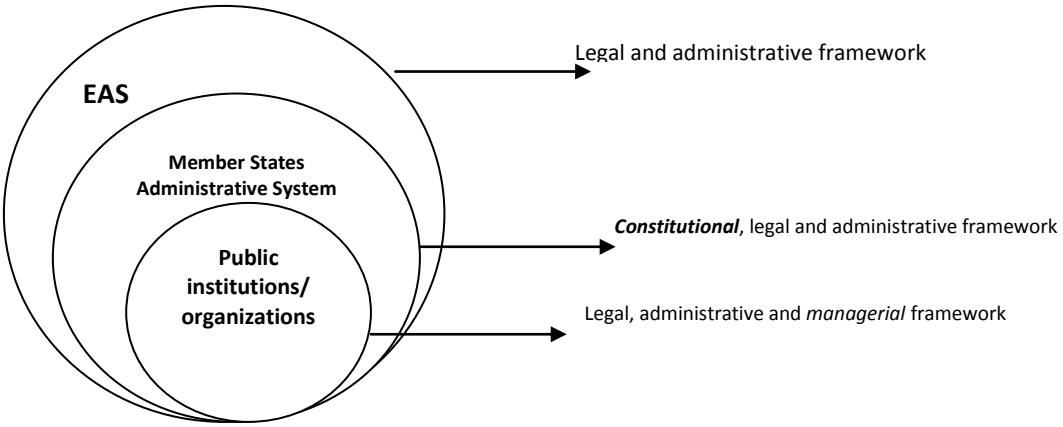
- Micro performance refers to the individual public sector organization;
- Meso performance to a policy;
- Macro performance to the government or governance as a whole (Bouckaert & Halligan, 2008).

Performance has a somewhat elusive conceptual content; it is not easy to find a general accepted definition. From the above model and mentioned authors we can only try to identify its main dimensions. We have already identified the classic 3 E's and the logical chain input-activity-output-outcome.

3. ADMINISTRATIVE CONVERGENCE THROUGH PERFORMANCE

In order to integrate both the principles of the European Administrative Space and the managerial approach based on performance of public organizations, we suggest the following structure.

Figure 3 - Integrative structure: EAS principles – performance



Source: Author˝s own design

The design above identifies a pattern that explains the causal relations between the three main components: the European Administrative Space, the administrative systems of each Member State (specifically defined by national constitution) and the individual public organizations (including a strong managerial dimension). At micro – level, in public institution, the replication of EAS principles is possible through organizational performance.

Summermatter and Siegel, in 2009, have conducted a very helpful research, based on papers, selected from 14 academic journals and dealing explicitly with theoretical or empirical aspects of performance management or measurement in the public sector. They analyzed the content of the papers and searched for definitions or statements about the concept of performance. They classified the terms and concepts they had found in the categories from the table below:

Tabel 1 - Terms and concepts of performance dimensions

Dimension	Subsumed terms and concepts
Input	costs, budgets, expenses, revenue, expenditure, economy, resources
Throughput	process, production process, organizational processes, activities, capacities, operations, volume of work, workload, levels of activity or of proficiency, operating characteristics
Output	end results of the production process; quantity and quality of outputs, services
Outcome	effects, results, impacts, benefits, public value, accomplishments, consequences
Efficiency	relation of "efforts to outputs", the "ratio of output to input", technical efficiency, "cost per unit of output", relative efficiency
Effectiveness	"how well services or programs meet their objectives", "a measure of outcome, illustrating the result or impact of a service", "the extent to which customer requirements are met, "cost-outcome measures"
Additional types of ratios	Productivity, "value for money", cost effectiveness, return on investment, "return on taxpayer money", unit or per capita costs
Quality	Quality of staff activity, services or outputs, "extent to which the nature of the output and its delivery meet requirements or are suitable to their purpose", "conformance, reliability, on-time delivery".
Requirements	Targets, goals, objectives, standards, timeliness, pledges, benchmarks
Stakeholder-	"consumer„s evaluation of various features or facets of the product or service, based on

related aspects	a re-cent consumption experience", satisfaction, trust of actors and stakeholders, customer satisfaction
Value and ethical aspects	"equity, transparency, or other democratic values", equity, "equitable distribution of benefits", fairness

Source: Summermatter and Siegel, 2009

The dimensions identified by Summermatter and Siegel (2009) prove there is no explicit or implicit consensus about performance of public institutions and the authors also refer to Brewer and Selden (2000) which considered performance as a phenomenon that is subjective, complex and particularly hard to measure in the public sector. But each European Administrative Space principle has one ore more corresponding dimensions of performance at organizational level: *efficiency effectiveness*, *openness and transparency* as value and ethical aspects, *accountability* as requirements and stakeholder-related aspects.

CONCLUSIONS

The European Administrative Space is a complex, multidimensional concept and it promotes intensive cooperation between administrative actors and activities from each level. The EAS is not a new administrative tier, it is comprised of administrative systems and institutions that cooperate and adhere to the same administrative values.

The four categories of principles define the identity of European Administrative Space, as an informal entity based on a legal and administrative framework.

On the other hand, the EAS principles set the strategic direction for each public organization (at micro level). As any other organization, with formal and clearly defined attributions and activities, public institutions have a clear and necessary approach. The particularity of this approach in public administration is that it integrates the general EAS principles and concentrates them in the concept of performance.

Performance in public administration is in fact European Administrative Space principles put to work.

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