



Working together
www.rcis.ro

Revista de cercetare și intervenție socială

ISSN: 1583-3410 (print), ISSN: 1584-5397 (electronic)

Selected by coverage in Social Sciences Citation Index, ISI databases

PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION SCHOOLS IN ROMANIA: STRATEGIC CHOICES FOR THE FUTURE

Călin Emilian HINȚEA

Revista de cercetare și intervenție socială, 2013, vol. 42, pp. 294-309

The online version of this article can be found at:

www.rcis.ro, www.doaj.org and www.scopus.com

Published by:

Expert Projects Publishing House



On behalf of:

„Alexandru Ioan Cuza” University,

Department of Sociology and Social Work

and

Holt Romania Foundation

REVISTA DE CERCETARE SI INTERVENTIE SOCIALA

is indexed by ISI Thomson Reuters - Social Sciences Citation Index

(Sociology and Social Work Domains)



Public Administration Schools in Romania: Strategic Choices for the Future

Călin Emilian HINȚEA¹

Abstract

The article addresses the topic of higher education reform process in Central and Eastern Europe in general and in Romania in special and focuses on the challenges public administration schools in this geographical area are currently facing. The author groups these challenges into five categories including students, market, community, decision-makers and academic management. The author argues that in order to develop and implement a sound reform of public administration programs one needs to take into consideration both global challenges common to all counties/programs but also features embedded in the regional context from Central and Eastern Europe. In the conclusion section the author refers to the potential competitive advantage PA programs have and to possible solutions from increasing their chances for a sound development in the future independent from other fundamental fields such as law, economics, etc.

Keywords: higher education; reform in education; transparency; students; public administration; Romania.

Introduction

The universities in Romania are nowadays, after more than 20 years from the collapse of the communist regime, faced with major challenges which concern strategic choices rather than merely operational and tactic aspects. They have to find answers regarding their position on an international market which is extremely dynamic, flexible and fluid; on the other hand they need to significantly alter their way of functioning, which no longer fits the current national context. In this context the article will address a specific field of higher education from Romania, namely administrative sciences. This specialization has important features which distinguish it from other fields but in the same time these features also

¹ Babes Bolyai University, Public Administration Department, Faculty of Political, Administrative and Communication Sciences, Cluj Napoca, ROMANIA. E-mail: Email: hintea@fspac.ro

make it responsible for certain initiatives within the framework of the Romanian universities. Higher education in public administration shares a somewhat common path of evolutions within all the former communist countries. In some countries it was allowed only as an area on the curriculum of the national party schools dedicated to the training of the political elite. The development of these schools was heavily influenced by the doctrine according to which the party and the state administration represent the same thing. From this derives the lack of interest toward the study of emerging concepts and topics within modern public administration such as management, transparency, accountability, efficiency/effectiveness, citizens as customers, etc. Public administration education has been affected (during and after the fall of the communist regimes) by the prevalence of a highly legalistic approach according to which every problem can be solved by issuing a regulation. Once the regulation is in place, the problem is solved. As a consequence of the two characteristics described above, public administration from the Central and Eastern Europe has been confronted with major challenges concerning politization, the relationship with the citizens, and the effective implementation of laws and policies (Rosenbaum, 2013).

Public administration is one of the most interesting fields of study: very often public administration graduates represent a minority among others working in public services. Due to the interdisciplinary nature of the public sector, which is constantly growing alongside the development of the modern state and the diversification of the responsibilities of the public sector, numerous public sector employees are engineers, lawyers, economists, etc. Another interesting trend is represented by the fact that these non-public administration graduates set the rules regarding hiring, evaluation, and operational functioning of the public services. Because of this trend public administration as a field of study is perceived as offering knowledge that is easily acquired and managed – numerous individuals consider themselves experts or specialists in this area and are ready to offer clear solutions which often are superficial. The author of this article has often been amazed by the number of various persons, who, while taking part to different public administration conferences, introduced themselves as experts in various areas of public administration – from regional development to evaluation and strategic planning. Public administration education is perceived as optional rather than something that adds value to one's academic background and represents a prerequisite for working in the public sector.

This article is not intended as an argument in favor of filling all positions in public administration with public administration graduates. As already mentioned, interdisciplinarity constitutes an important advantage of modern administration, faced with a multitude of atypical challenges, impossible to predict and difficult to control in the absence of a multidisciplinary approach. The days when public administration was perceived as a sub-field of administrative law and therefore the answer to all problems presupposed more rules are long gone. The diversity of

the public sector employees' body ranging from architects to biologists to planners, etc. is essential and closely intertwined with a rational necessity of the modern state, forced to cope with a variety of specializations and policy fields. On the other hand, the performance of a modern administration is also defined by the extent to which specialization in the fields of public administration is rationally promoted, integrated and used. The focus of this article does not concern the expectations public administration schools have vis-à-vis the environment in which they operate but rather the internal analysis of the capacities of these schools to respond to the strategic challenges they are confronted with.

In the post-communist era the public administration higher education programs from Romania and Central and Eastern Europe had been faced with common problems. After the fall of the communism, they entered an era best described as the search for an identity. The biggest question for these programs was if higher education in public administration represents a separate field of study or just a sub-field of economics or law. Given the novelty of these studies for the former communist countries, the tendency was for the more traditional programs to absorb the newly emerging field of public administration. This was happening because the older, well established field perceived the attractiveness of this field, the financial advantages associated with it, and from here their effort to keep public administration as a sub-field, thus imposing on it strategic limitations. The fight for 'independence' has defined for many years the profile of higher education programs in public administration; it is still an issue in some countries even today.

The difficulty to establish public administration as a separate field was also related to the peculiarities of the public sector from this geographical area: the supremacy of public law over public administration - a vision which reduces the problem-solving process to issuing and implementing rules and regulations. In this framework, all problems can be easily solved by drafting laws. This has led to what was described as the implementation gap in the countries from Central and Eastern Europe – the managerial capacities are insufficiently developed and knowledge concerning fields such as strategic planning of the public sector, program evaluation or policy analysis is almost inexistent.

Romania has undergone starting with 1989 at least through five different stages of the administrative reform (Hintea, 2011, p. 180): (1) *Legislative reform*, more pronounced immediately after 1989 but which continues even today. There are two main reasons for this stage: the real need for the development and the legalistic tradition described above; (2) *Reform at the level of formal structures and procedures*. Decentralization, the settling of the new relations central-local, the monitoring, control and evaluation mechanisms of performance represent examples; (3) *Reforms at the level of public policies* (Profiroiu, Profiroidiu, Mina, Nica, 2011): reform efforts targeting the human resources, financial mechanisms, and the formulation of public policies; (4) *Structural reforms* (Boc, 2011): the redefinition of the dimensions of the state and of the areas of priority intervention, the

effort to make rational its action regarding the macroeconomic and administrative behavior; (5) We are now in the early stages of phase 5 – *the implementation of a managerial approach* of Western origin, focused on two key factors: quality of services and performance (management and measurement).

Another important goal associated with the development of public administration programs was the reduction of the gap between them and the schools from the western world with regard to teaching, research, academic management, community outreach, etc. This gap had been at the beginning of the development process so significant that certain areas such as community outreach had to be developed from scratch. Basically, the entire post-communist development efforts of schools in PA can be described as a quest for adapting Western models and practices which had both advantages (multiplication of already functional models) and disadvantages (lack of consideration for context-specific variables).

The interdisciplinarity topic has also play an important role. Because of the Eastern European specific context the debate of defining public administration either as a subfield of other more established fields – law, economic, political sciences, or as an interdisciplinary new discipline are far from being over. In Romania, for a long period of time, there was the tendency of creating a so-called national curriculum for PA programs, whose role was to offer a standardize structure for the curriculum in public administration, allowing for little variation. Also, immediately after 1989, the national curriculum used to incorporate ‘exotic’ topics for a PA program such as maritime law (core course in the curriculum of the PA department at Babes Bolyai University). This was a consequence of trying to impose the same curriculum on various programs, each with its own specificity. The pressure coming from the national accreditation commission had been in the first years after 1989 a conservative factor, slowing down tremendously the coherent development of these programs. The pressures towards defining higher education in public administration as part of administrative law has also halter the development of fields such as public management, public policy and evaluation. In recent years, because of the pressure coming from a number of PA programs in Romania but also because of the examples offered by Nispacee, EGPA or EAPAA (Bouckaert, 2013), interdisciplinarity is nowadays more present in the curriculum of PA programs.

PA programs have been confronted also with the necessity to change the traditional teaching processes as well as the educational experiences of both teachers and professors. The process had been slow due to the lack of significant pressures (initially they were only external and very weak) but over the time it has experienced an organic growth due to changes in the profile of relevant stakeholders (faculty staff, students, community, employers, etc.).

Research has represented and still represents a major challenge for the development of high quality higher education programs in public administration. The

traditional emphasis on teaching has made research merely an additional task. Therefore, when research had suddenly become a major factor in the process of performance evaluation (at the initiative of central authorities which understood that most educational rankings and assessments favor research over teaching), the shock for the faculty staff was significant. Research in the field of public administration in Romania is still in its early stages – this is easily to grasp if one examines the low number of articles published in journals relevant at the international level. The research abilities and knowledge needed for the development of a strong research tradition in the field of PA can only be built over time. The integration of research as a major component in defining performance and excellence is still slow.

An interesting feature of the post-communist period concerns the international partnerships. For the PA programs from Romania and Central/Eastern Europe they represented more than just an exercise in international cooperation but rather a search for structural models for strategic development. The impact of these models has been extremely important on the medium and the long run. Jenei, Leloup and van der Berg (2002, p.5) describe the hierarchy of collaborative relationships at 5 levels: *exchange of contacts and information* (initial meeting, interaction, expression of shared interest), *systematic exchange of knowledge and experience* (ongoing dialogues, visits, exchanges, scholarly collaboration), *joint action* (initiation of collaborative organizational projects), *mutual co-operation* (coordinated activities and programs), *institutionalized partnerships* (ongoing, self-sustaining programs and projects). Those who were able to reach the level of institutionalized partnerships also derived the most benefits. The international models have been, in many cases, the main influence towards change and the initiation of successful programs.

Academic management has also required major changes compared to the communist period or the period immediately after the collapse of communism, when it was based on a strict hierarchy and lack of flexibility. Other areas which have also represented challenges immediately after 1989 include the development of training and long-life education and consulting work. A major problem universities in Romania and in Central and Eastern Europe have regards their relationship with the community. The model of the ‘ivory tower’ is so powerfully ingrained in the mindset of the academic community that universities, almost involuntarily, place themselves outside and above the problems within the society. For them the problems that rank high on the public agenda are not necessarily important. As a result, community outreach is limited; the involvement of universities in research/studies supporting the local and national government in their decision-making process is limited, especially by comparison with the activity of private consultants. This type of approach has generated a variety of negative effects for the Romanian universities and it is particularly dangerous for public

administration programs which need to be organically connected to the national, regional and/or local community.

All these challenges have played an important role for determining the framework for the development of PA programs in Romania and in CEE. It is important to define precisely the starting point, in order to understand that, in addition to the strategic challenges universities all over the world are faced with due to globalization, there is a local context which strongly influences the priorities and the capacity of Romanian PA programs to respond to the challenges coming from their external environment. It is difficult to analyze the development and the perspectives of PA schools from Romania outside of this analysis of the environment.

Challenges for the PA Schools in Romania

Besides this preliminary analysis which allows us to determine the starting point in the configuration of the profile of PA schools in Romania after 1989, our attention needs to be also focused on the current challenges. A new academic paradigm is becoming more and more visible. Numerous programs are confronted with predictable strategic effects, however for long ignored. Numerous professors and academic managers found themselves in the position of making atypical and harsh decisions, which however seem unavoidable. The traditional dilemmas had not vanished but new questions are marking the higher education field from Romania and Central and Eastern Europe. In this section we will analyze the main challenges PA programs in Romania face by grouping them into five main categories: students, market, community, decision-makers and academic management.

Students

One of the main challenges PA programs in Romania are faced with regards the new profile of the students. Many schools seem to not completely understand the profound changes which are taking place at this level. The current students are highly oriented toward academic mobility (the international offer is very attractive and, in many cases, the financial costs are low), interactions that go beyond his/her close surroundings/contacts and international/multicultural experiences. The growing mobility at the level of the Romanian society could not leave unaffected such a specific sector such as higher education, already prone to diversity (Jemna, & Curelaru, 2009). The current prototype student is more and more focused on a comparative assessment of the educational services he/she receives, which automatically leads to higher expectations. This represents both a challenge and an opportunity: the stimulation of critical thinking by PA programs is encountered

with receptivity and may lead to excellent results for a group of future public managers, capable of influencing the society at various levels.

Also, universities need to interact with the web-oriented student, used to the advantages of online services (from banking services to social communication). Are universities capable of meeting the needs/expectations of students in terms of intelligent use of communication technologies? A vast majority of programs and schools are still focusing in their marketing efforts on the traditional media, even though their clients are more present in the virtual environment. Are the organizational culture of the universities and their structures capable to respond in a coherent way to the students' expectations?

The way in which universities perceive the students has the potential to negatively influence this relationship on the long run and even decrease the chances for success of an academic program. After 1989 numerous universities due to reasons such as an increase in the number of universities/schools, an increase in the number of students, the existence of demand for academic program despite their quality/services offered to students, etc., tended to view students only as tuition-paying subjects. Increasing enrollment and the expectation, often implicit, of high graduation rate, were directly related with increasing financing available to universities. At the same time, the philosophy of universities was quite simple – the students need to pay tuition fees, to be bothered with exams as little as possible, to graduate and to quietly leave the university, making room for the next cohorts of students. At a first glance this approach seems purely economic, maximizing the profit with minimal efforts; however, on the long run this has generated significant negative effects including: lack of any type of loyalty or sense of pride on the behalf of students regarding the university/school they graduated from; lack of involvement on the professors' side, whose main mission was to 'process' high, depersonalized masses of students. This is directly correlated with the fact that Romanian graduates seldom if ever are willing to come back to their universities/schools and get involved – the level of donations from alumni is almost non-existent. Very often people from Romania who are involved in the management of academic programs ask themselves why American students who pay high tuition fees for their studies is willing to later come back and get involved, including through donations, while Romanian graduates, who paid nothing for their college education, are almost eager to cut back all ties with their alma matter?

Every time when students are perceived as more than simply tuition paying individuals, the results are impressive – a positive experience for both teachers and students; upon graduation students are not only well trained in their professions but also willing to come back and give something back to universities. Demographic changes need to be also taken into consideration. Romania is undergoing major transformations regarding the number of high school graduates, both because there are fewer students (low birth rates after 1989) and because increased

requirements for graduating high school. Traditionally universities were focused only on high school graduates while ignoring other potential ‘clients’ (the training of public servants without a bachelor degree was done superficially). At the same time there is a need for training and professional reconversion of an increasing number of people. This means a redefining of the target groups for universities, of their capacities and teaching methods; it also implies a new type of educational offer and marketing tools. Long life learning and distance education (coupled with the use of communication technologies) represents answers that should not be neglected.

Market

Currently one of the most debated issues on the public agenda in Romania refers to the incapacity of universities to respond to the market’s needs. Recently, in a newspaper article, public administration specialization was deemed useless mainly because the graduates have a hard time getting jobs in the context of financial austerity and budgetary cuts. Employers tend to often have a negative perception concerning the outputs of the universities’ activities – this applies to both research as well as the training of the students whose knowledge and abilities are not considered as relevant in light of the requirements of the labor market. This problem does not concern only public administration graduates (Frunza & Frunza, 2010).

Upon a closer scrutiny, things are far more complicated than this in the field of public administration. A big threat for public administration schools is represented by the fact that very often the schools themselves tend to define narrowly the jobs/ fields that can be occupied by their graduates. The demarcation lines between the public and private/non-profit sectors are different from the ones that existed 40-50 years ago. These lines are currently very fluid, determined by different cultural perceptions, political values and global trends: services are moving from one sector to another thus changing the label for areas that in the past very clearly separate and different. D. Waldo (1980) states that ‘public and private are not natural categories; they are constructed through history, culture and law’. On the other hand, the profile of employees from the public, private and non-profit sectors tend to become more alike, especially when it comes to certain positions. This is leading to increased mobility among sectors, especially with regard to managerial positions. In this context the measure for the success of a public administration program should not be based exclusively on the number of graduates who get employed in the public sector. A program should be deemed successful if it is capable of educating graduates whose skills, abilities and knowledge allow them to work and professionally thrive in their field of choice; they should be employees capable of bringing their contribution to the functioning of the organizations and/or community they are part of. If a graduate of a public

administration program becomes the manager of a multi-national company this should not be regarded as a failure because the said graduate does not work in a public organization. On the contrary, he/she is an example of a successful managerial program and an asset for any organization, no matter whether it belongs to the public, private or non-profit sectors (perhaps we should note here that there are more and more private managers who are managing public organization based on a strict contract). However, public administration programs need to clearly define their mission and strategic objectives regarding the profile of their graduates.

Another question is whether PA programs should simply and only respond to the market demand or they should create a market/demand. In a country such as Romania, which is trying to burn staging in evolving from a pre-bureaucratic administrative model to a post-bureaucratic one, the deficiencies in the functioning of the market are huge. The demand may not coincide with what is needed and certain fields need to be clearly defined and developed with the help of universities. We should ask ourselves how many people in important positions in public organizations truly understand the importance of specialists in strategic planning, public policy analysis or evaluation so that they can generate a significant demand on the job market. If such demand does not currently exist or is limited, this should not mean that public administration doesn't need these specialists. In fact, the role of public administration schools from Romania should go beyond responding to the market's demand; they should rather stimulate the creation of new demand and help the administrative system in its efforts toward modernization. Along the same lines, another serious challenge for PA programs refers to their capacity to interact with key players on the market. As a follow up of the ivory tower philosophy, these programs seem isolated from the decision-making centers and lack relevance from their perspective. The incapacity or lack of interest toward establishing structural relationships with the political decision-makers is dangerous and can influence on the long run the success of the PA schools.

Another strategic choice regarding the positioning on the market of PA programs is linked to the definition of the interest zone – are PA programs regional, sub-national, national or global actors? Depending on which the answer is, the competitive advantage can then be defined, also the partners, performance standards, positioning on the market marketing, etc. All choices outlined above are important also from the standpoint of the relevance of PA programs. The global educational market has undergone in the recent years through significant financial cut backs which have affected the way in which educational programs function. During crisis, educational managers tend to focus on programs that bring added value in terms of financial resources (such as advanced medical research, informatics) and social sciences are regarded as a field that you need to discard. This has led to numerous painful decisions for public administration programs both in

the US and in Europe. One of them consists in the merger of various programs in social sciences, programs deemed incapable to bring in significant financial resources. PA schools need to be very careful to surpass the survival mode and move toward a pro-active approach capable of placing them on the market that is full of both opportunities as well as threats.

Community

The relationship with the community (for higher education programs in general and for PA programs in special) it is far more important than one could guess at a first glance. The concept of community outreach means more than a superficial involvement in marginal activities or a reaction to the occurrence of a stimulus or external pressure. It refers to a strategic choice regarding long-term involvement in the local or national community in the expertise area of the program. As already discussed the positioning of the university outside and above the community has long-term effects regarding its capacity to gather community support, to maintain a long-term relationship with the alumni and to use its capacity and expertise in relevant areas, capable of bringing added value to students, professors, and the community. The type of partnership that a PA program develops with or for the community is defining for its activity. No matter if we talk about partnerships focused on purely technical issues or partnerships which also bring volunteering and activism to the table, they are all extremely important both for the education of the students as well as for the competitive profile of the program.

An interesting example is represented by the partnership developed by the Faculty of Political, Administrative and Communication Sciences, Babes Bolyai University called 'adopt a Community'. The original idea of this project was to see to what extent the involvement of a faculty in a community facing structural problems (Belis, Cluj County) can positively influence the life of the community. Each department of the faculty freely chooses what project to implement within the community, of course in its field of expertise: (1) Public Administration Department is helping the city hall to develop the master plan for the community (more than 80 students and faculty are working on this task); (2) Journalism Department, and more specific its Photo club, is involved in putting together a presentation brochure for the community; (3) Communication and PR Department is supporting the city hall in its effort to build a local brand (including the development of a web site); (4) Political Sciences offer training opportunities for the local councilors; (5) Public Health Department is involved in awareness raising programs regarding illnesses that have a high incidence rate within the community.

There is also a project that is common for all departments which involve the restoring of the fish population from the lake that is the main asset within the community. This implies the attraction of private financial resources – the whole image campaign is carried out with the help and under the supervision of students

and faculty from journalism and PR. This project can not only enhance the touristic potential of the community but also the environmental health of several ecosystems within the community. It can also raise awareness among people who are not interested in the academic/educational side of such projects.

Relationship with decision-makers (politicians and public managers)

As already stated, the relationship with the decision-makers is essential for PA programs which have the duty to take part in the difficult effort to reform public administration from a former communist country, whose state system had been extremely complex and had built-in deficiencies. The problem of the relationship with the decision-makers and the practitioners is not an Easter European problem per se but it exhibits specific characteristics.

*How Scholars Can Improve International Relations,
The Chronicle of Higher Education, November 26, 2012*

Something is seriously wrong in the relationship between universities and the policy community..... The worlds of policy making and academic research should be in constant, productive conversation, and scholars and researchers should be an invaluable resource for policy makers, but they are not...One hears perennial laments from those in academe that their valuable work is being ignored by policy makers. And, on the other hand, policy makers complain they can get nothing useful from the academy. They may all be right.

There has been a theoretical turn across the social sciences and humanities that has cut off academic discourse from the way ordinary people and working professionals speak and think. The validity and elegance of the models have become the focus, rather than whether those models can be used to understand real-world situations.That has created a profession that is inward-looking and concerned with arcane debate—a result that provokes and deserves all the insults thrown at the ivory tower from the world of policy and practice....

Thus, the university department can turn into a guild, favoring credentialing over relevance and orthodoxy over impact..... Students are then being prepared for careers that do not exist outside of academe and given tools that are not useful except to their academic discipline....

*Robert L. Gallucci, president of the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation.
Former dean of Georgetown University's Edmund A. Walsh School of Foreign Service.*

The main question for PA programs is: What do universities and PA programs have to offer to the reformers, to those who truly intend to modify the way in which central and local public administration works? Do these programs have something relevant to say? Moreover, do they really care about what happens within the administrative system? Are universities/programs willing to openly and publicly associate themselves with the reform efforts?

Ideally, PA programs should be major providers of reform models for the public sector. In reality, their presence on the market is fairly limited. Even where there is involvement, this is based on individual rather than institutional initiatives. For the most part, decision-makers are interested in ideas and models that would help them modernize the institutions and the managerial systems. However, the capacity of PA schools to intervene is hard to identify. Sound empirical researches capable of helping political decision-makers are often missing (Neamtu, 2012). The universities' attitude is defensive and studies, where they do exist, are kept inside the academic realm. Because of this type of behavior, the consulting sector from Romania is composed of mostly private consulting companies. The universities represent a small percentage on this market. PA programs should concern themselves, from a strategic standpoint, with the necessity to make an impact and a difference with regard to providing expertise for major administrative and political decisions.

Academic management

Academic management in Romania is facing nowadays a variety of challenges which are most visible at the level of financial flows. The main financial sources are the traditional ones: public money (coming from the state budget) and students' tuition fees. The third most important source in the case of prestigious international universities, private endowments, is currently inexistent in Romania. For example, Harvard University has an endowment fund of over 40 billion US dollars while Oxford's endowment is over 1.3 billion pounds and Cambridge over 4.5 billion pounds. Western European Universities, such as Oslo, have endowments around 652 million euros. The big advantage of these funds is that they offer to the universities a stable source of financing which allows them to escape the vicious circle of raising more money by accepting more students and allow for a different structuring from a qualitative standpoint of the teaching and research process. Why is this funding source virtually unknown in Romania and Eastern Europe? On the one hand, there are limitations concerning the know-how of university management, on the other hand there is a lack of tradition with regard to donations in this field. It is here that we can see the effects of the separation of the university from the community and of the depersonalized, mechanical relationship with the students.

The educational management from Romania in the field of public administration should strive to reach, at a strategic level, alternative approaches to typical financial solutions during times of massive budgetary cuts. For the success of these programs it is essential the managerial capacity to ensure financial sustainability, beyond national educational policies (which are more or less stimulating). Institutional capacity is directly dependent on the financial performance and the traditional solutions are currently proving their limits.

Another managerial problem deals with organizational challenges (Mora, 2012): public administration schools have the tendency to criticize public administration and to expect that it will reform itself based on New Public Management type of concepts. One could ask if universities really apply what they preach when it comes to their own activities. Are universities management models for other institutions? Are universities learning organizations, pro-active and supporters of quality management? Do they take any risks?

Performance evaluation is an important part of the quality of higher education management systems. How do universities/programs evaluate their performance? What kind of standards should we use, national or international ones? Should we focus on standards set by a national governmental accreditation body or on peer review? In the case of public administration there is a key European player which is becoming more and more important in terms of quality assurance - EAPAA (European Association for Public Administration Accreditation). This is in addition to other similar international organizations with a similar role such as IASIA, NASPAA, etc. Recently a new university-based initiative was established in Romania meant to promote peer review type evaluation. The signatories of the agreement – Academy of Economic Studies, Bucharest, Babes Bolyai University Cluj, National School for Political and Administrative Studies, Bucharest, and Al. I. Cuza University, Iasi have developed this agreement with the goal of drafting an evaluation methodology and using it for conducting an annual evaluation of the four programs forming the club. There will be three main dimensions of the evaluation. They are:

1. *Leadership, strategy and institutional framework* – it includes the strategic dimension concerning the process for quality assurance, the involvement of leadership in quality management as well as the existing institutional structure. This dimension looks at the extent to which quality and performance are formally acknowledged by the leadership of the program: (a) strategy; (b) regular evaluation of the strategy; (c) performance; (d) formal acknowledgement of the concept of quality by leadership; (e) institutional framework; (f) financial resources; (g) human resources; (h) academic integrity.
2. *Procedures and mechanisms for quality assurance* – it includes all processes which take place at the institution's level and which are meant to ensure and enhance the quality of the programs. This dimension has as the main goal the identification of all formal mechanisms which exist at the level of the master program whose role is to maintain high quality standards: (a) policies and procedures for quality assurance; (b) involvement of stakeholders in the quality assurance process; (c) regular monitoring and evaluation of the program; (d) students' evaluation; (e) quality assurance at the level of academic staff; (f) resources suitable for learning; (g) informational systems; (h) transparency.

3. *Results* – this dimension has as main goal the evaluation of the way in which the quality assurance management system includes learning outcomes of the educational process. Also, this dimension looks at the way in which the information produced by evaluation studies.

The new global market of public administration higher education contains threats regarding international competition which can generate serious pressures for the Romanian PA programs. On the other hand, the same globalization process also allows for strategic choices based on cooperation which are meant to increase the competitive advantage of the program: dual degrees which increase the attractiveness of the program, joint on line courses with international partners, comparative research for students and professors, etc. In this respect as well it is important the capacity of the program to integrate new technologies in their effort to modernize teaching methods and research. Ultimately, managerial choices can be different but they need to offer a clear answer to the question: is this PA program flexible and innovative or, on the contrary is it conservative and static?

Competitive advantage?

Besides the strategic challenges described above, an essential problem is whether there is a competitive advantage that can support PA programs in public administration throughout their future evolution. The main positive characteristic of PA program from Romanian and Central and Eastern Europe refers to extensive knowledge concerning the transition from totalitarian regimes/ societies to democratic ones. The public administration programs from Central and Eastern Europe can have an important strength: extensive knowledge concerning the transition from totalitarian regimes/societies to democratic ones. More than 20 years of transition, the strive to develop programs similar to those from the west, the surpassing of the challenges specific to post-totalitarian countries have determined an enhancement of the capacity of these programs with regard to teaching, research, and training focused on societies in transition. The type of expertise mentioned above is relevant at this moment given the international context: the evolution from the Arab countries, the former Soviet Union, Africa, and parts of Asia are examples that the way in which transition from a dictatorial regime toward a democratic one is taking place represents a relevant topic. The involvement of the experts from western countries is necessary. It can however become even more relevant by means of involving the programs from Central and Eastern Europe which can share success stories.

Conclusions

The prerequisite for success in this field is represented by an ‘integration of internationalization’: International relations have to evolve, for programs in public administration, from being an added activity, based on ‘classical’ activities such as faculty and students exchanges, to being a core activity, which can offer universities structural competitive advantage on the international market (integration of internationalization). Under such an approach the focus shifts toward complex objectives such as dual/joint degrees, comparative research, international consulting.

From this perspective potential solutions could include:

- East/West partnerships for public administration education within transitional societies. Two major problems here: the functioning administrative capacity and the identification of the necessary financial resources. Aside from common problems related to joint or dual degrees, there are problems concerning recruitment, financing, curriculum, differences in organizational culture, etc. if these challenges can be overcome, the opportunities offered by this type of public administration education based on the west-east cooperation are tremendous in an international context that is mobile, fluid, and a lot more demanding in what it concerns public administration education.
- Establishing international educational hubs: master programs, training for top executives in public sector, applied research and consulting for central/local PA.
- Promoting basic common values and standards for the PA schools in Europe (East and West). Do we have the administrative capacity and financial resources? Do we share a common performance culture?
- More aggressive in terms of offering solutions for governments: There is a huge need for rational and creative minds for the national/ European leaders.

Like it or not, the “classic” approaches are not working anymore. PA programs from Romania need to accept the idea that they are currently undergoing a new development stage. Osborne and Gaebler (1992, p. 229) argue that ‘there are three types of people in the world: those who make things happen; those who watch things happen; and those who don’t know what hit them’. It would be preferable that PA schools from Romania place themselves in the first category. If Romanian universities want their PA programs to become significant players at the national, regional or European level then they need to take into consideration all five types of major challenges and to try to transform them from threats into items that bring a competitive advantage.

References

- Boc, E. (2011). The Reform of the State in Romania (2009-2011). *Transylvanian Review of Administrative Sciences*, 34 E, 5-21.
- Bouckaert, G. (2013). Nispacee as an Institution and as a Partner in Dialogue. In Vintar, M., Rosenbaum, A., Jenei, G., Drechsler, W., *The Past, Present and the Future of Public Administration in Central and Eastern Europe*, Bratislava: Nispacee Press.
- Frunza, S., & Frunza, M. (2010). Philosophy and the Labour Market in Romania. *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies*, 9, 25, 28-58.
- Gallucci, R. (2012). How Scholars Can Improve International Relations. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, November 26, <http://chronicle.com/article/How-Scholars-Can-Improve/135898/>
- Hintea, C. (2011). Reform and Management in Romania. Strategy and Structural Change. *Revista de cercetare si interventie sociala*, 34, 177-196.
- Jemna, D., Curelaru, M. (2009). Values and Students' Political Participation. *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies*, 8, 24, 168-188.
- Jenei, G., Leloup, L., van der Berg, F. (2002). East West Co-operation in public administration - a framework for assessment. In van der Berg, F., Jeney, J., Leloup, L., *East West Co-operation in Public Sector Reform*, Amstardan: IOS Press.
- Mora, C. (2012). Transformational Leadership in Education: Concept Analysis. *Transylvanian Review of Administrative Sciences*, Special Issue, 184-192.
- Neamtu, B. (2012). Measuring the Social Sustainability of Urban Communities: The Role of Local Authorities. *Transylvanian Review of Administrative Sciences*, 37 E, 112-127.
- Osborne, D., & Gaebler, T. (1993). *Reinventing Government: How the Entrepreneurial Spirit is Transforming the Public Sector*, London: Plume.
- Profiroiu, M., Profiroiu, A., Mina, L., Nica, M. (2011). Romania –New Member State, A New Phase of Its Transition. *Transylvanian Review of Administrative Sciences*, 33 E, 277-294.
- Rosenbaum, A. (2013). Political, Economic and Administrative Reforms in Central and Eastern Europe: Much Accomplished, but What Have we Learned? In Vintar, M., Rosenbaum, A., Jenei, G., Drechsler, W., *The Past, Present and the Future of Public Administration in Central and Eastern Europe*, Bratislava: Nispacee Press.
- Waldo, D. (1980). *The Enterprise of Public Administration*, Novato: Chandler & Sharp Publishers.