Public target space as key factor for public policy implementation

Luminița Gabriela POPESCU
National University of Political and Administrative Studies Bucharest, Romania
luminitapopescu22@gmail.com

Abstract. *The present study focuses on reducing the potential failures met while implementing a new public policy .A determining element for the success of implementing a new public policy, as we are going to demonstrate in this study, is the compatibility between the model of the proposed public policy and the target public space, characterized by a high degree of inertia and manifest tendencies when maintaining the status quo.*
How could there be a compatibility, on the one hand between a public policy whose vision is based on the changing of institutions, organisations and people, and on the other hand the unreformed public space, aligned to obsolete guidelines?
Which are the necessary approaches to achieve compatibility between the models of policies and the target space? What strategies must be chosen?
How must efforts and the resources in the public space be calibrated and oriented so that they become compatible with the model chosen by the policy-makers?
The answers to these questions constitute the main objectives of this study, and the approach initiated to accomplish that meant, firstly, configuring a link between the strategic thinking on which elaborating a public policy is based, the different typologies of the target public space and the calibration of the efforts and resources pegged to them.

Keywords: target public space, policy process, adaptive organizational, culture of target public space.

JEL Classification: O2, O3.

1. Target public space and public policy model

The chosen policy elaboration model and the target public space. This can either mean that technical solution proposed by researchers to be applied within the target space are totally unrealistic or that within the target space there are areas of confusion, instability, unpredictability where the model chosen by policy makers cannot be applied. In these terms *the swamp* represents the reality of complex and uncertain situations. Ron Amann says that within this *swamp* areas of *solid ground* can be identified in which *serious actions* of supporting both policy elaboration modernizing and policy implementation *can take place* (Parsons, p. 41). We see the solid ground described by Ron Amann as representative for the simple and uncertain issues.

Public policies are bearers of values which emerge from the political management's vision on future evolutions of the target public space. Public management is responsible with formalizing, disseminating and creating the climate in which the vision and values will be agreed upon by all actors part of the target space.

Assuming such a behavior by the political management shall positively influence the chosen model for the policy elaboration (see Figure 1).

Within the current context, exigencies aim at democratizing and opening the public policies process; this involves eliminating distorsions and testing perceptions and hypotheses by debates, arguments and talks. In other words, elaborating public policies should turn into a public learning process.

Figure 1. *Strategic concepts of public policies*

Source: Popescu, 2005.

This hypothesis leads to the rational model formulated by H. Simon (1945), adequated to a target space in which issues are linear, simple and certain and which is compatible with traditional bureaucratic structures (see Figure 2a).

The trends of using the rational model have been limited as it became more and more obvious that real world phenomena and events do not follow a linear pattern and therefore, disassembling and reassembling them is no valid solution for an ever changing world.

In this case, strategic thinking imposes the intuitive model, fundamented just on the experience, hunch and intuition of the deciding parties and not on exact analyses (see Figure 2b). Intuitive decisions are taken on the basis of proofs and lessons learned *from*

the previous successes/mistakes; this represents a return to the past despite the „new" and „modern" rhetoric (into a past where a better policy elaboration means elaborating policies on the basis of improving the instrumental rationality). This is the proof-based approach on policies, for which knowledge is the means to control unstable, high-risk situations. From this perspective, the intuitive strategic approach underlines not just a step forward but especially *the best way to what works*.

The 'what works' philosophy is a real opportunity for social sciences to influence the public policies process after a long period in which they were seen as irrelevant (Parsons, 2002, p. 42).

Making the proof-based policy elaboration model compatible with the target space involves strategic approaches oriented towards:
- *academic research*. The challenge consists of influencing *the production of relevant knowledge* so that it can be reproduced in a shape that can be used by policy makers. The proof-based approach trend is, by excellence, a quantitative approach.
- *professional and organizational expertise*. Focusing efforts and resources is meant to contribute to the development of both the system which can facilitate a better learning management and to the governmental- and departmental-level knowledge.

The common characteristic of the two management types is that they are likely to be explicit and encoded. Proof can be aggregated and disseminated within the whole target space. Starting with a certain level this means, on one hand, that structures and procedures are created so that the institutional modes of „knowing what works" and of „learning" can be extracted, stored, found and communicated and, on the other hand, that academic research has to be produced and disseminated according to clear specifications (Parsons, 2002, p. 46).

Speaking about the proof-based approach, W. Parsons thinks that its opportunity to contribute to the improvement of governing is pretty slim, its contribution consisting, in fact, in making relationships between *knowledge* and *policy making* even more confuse.

We can draw the attention, in supporting this point of view, to the existence of leveling risk, simultaneously with the almost complete neglect of the creativity- and innovation-oriented undertakings (Miroiu and Andreescu, 2010).

Thus, the center of gravity in the proof-based health policy is represented by illness and standard procedures for treating the respective illness. The center of gravity of the health policy in fact should be the patient (and not the illness) whose reactions cannot always be standardized. Every patient has his own representation of the way he feels the state of illness. Another example is that of education; imposed regulations and standards tend to level the educational process.
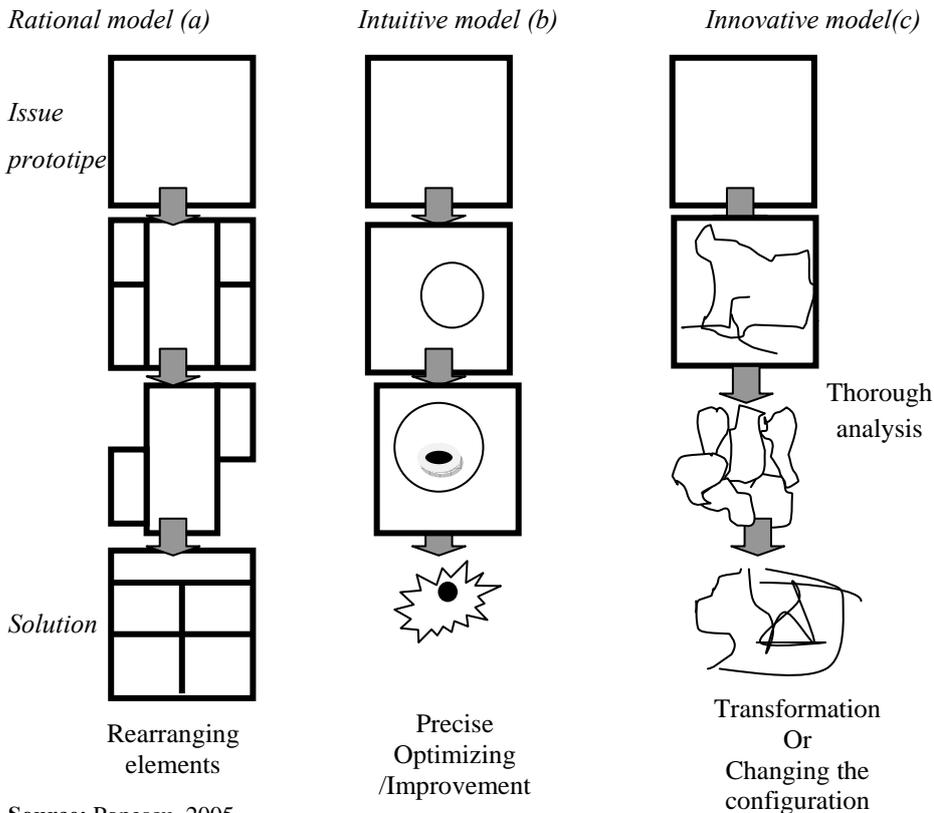
In conclusion, we can say that, aside for certain undisputed contributions, the proof-based approach negatively affects innovation, creativity and, by default, competitiveness. The policy should not be guided by „dogma" but by the knowledge of „what works and why". All proof/knowledge are necessary to policy makers „in order to allow them to measure the effect of A over B."

On the other hand, the advantages of proof-based approach consist of rapid change implementation which is to positively influence other areas. The relatively fast change potential, visible and measurable impact have been the main criteria in choosing the transformational areas. There are good practice examples and successful institutional or managerial models both in Romania and in the region that can serve as a model. Poland, for instance, is a very good model in many fields, starting with the way it solved the issues of its state enterprise sector up to the way it attracts and implements investment projects financed by European funds.

Without minimizing the contribution of this type of approach, we think it is important to underline the fact that *the what works only approach* is not of nature to ensure the success of the implementation process, especially in the case of uncertain and complex situations, most frequent in the world we live in.

We appreciate we can compare the swamp Schon referes to with this ever changing reality facing complex and uncertain issues for whose solving scenarios have to be imagined different from the ones existing. In these conditions, exigencies deriving from current imperatives lead to the reconfiguration of the target space in a way meant to stimulate innovative thinking (see Figure 2c)

Figure 2. *Strategic public policy elaboration models*

Rational model (a)   *Intuitive model (b)*   *Innovative model(c)*

Issue

prototipe

Thorough
analysis

Solution

Rearranging
elements

Precise
Optimizing
/Improvement

Transformation
Or
Changing the
configuration

Source: Popescu, 2005.

In a 2014 Financial Times interview, Nobel laureate Edmund Phelps stressed that, aside from the financial crisis, Europe's issue consists of the fact that politicians blocked innovation or reduced bonuses for those willing to innovate. After a major slowdown in dynamism in the 60s, the productivity increase rhythm dropped in almost all Western states, halved in the US in the 70s and almost stopped in France, Germany and the UK in the end of the 90s.

Politicians introduced regulations repressing competition – presided over interest groups, diverting advantageous contracts towards them. They have blocked innovation or cut down incentives for those eager to innovate. Thus, despite a more and more pregnant need of innovative models, the officials' answer is still long in coming. The success of implementing new innovative models in the target public space involves, according to the supposition from the beginning of this chapter, the *increase* of the target space up to the level it can answer to as higher a number of challenges (cognitive, informational, resource limitation, behavioral and cultural) as possible, associated to the initial innovative policies. The risk of an implementation failure is determined by directing resources and efforts to other directions than those appropriate to surmount challenges. In other words, neglecting or ignoring the compatibilization of the target space with the new introduced by the public policy initiated leads to major malfunctions that can go all the way to totally compromising the public policy project. Out of the plethora of challenges we underline culture, that is the values of the target public space, which, in our opinion, are the most difficult to get consistent. According to Lasswell's theory, values represent the essence of a public policy. More than that, he sees values as true obstacles that can affect the objectivity of the perspective on what works (Lasswell, 1951).

2. Target public space: from culture to action

In order to grasp all the implications we will analyze the essential aspects of the target space.

An organization is not only a conglomerate of people and resources. It is a set of values and hypotheses determining its own climate and organizational culture. Moreover, the maturity of an organization positively reflects upon the organizational culture.

Irrespective of the way they are structured, organizations are not lifeless machines. The people involved, their experience in the organization's past, their own beliefs and values system, all contribute to the liveliness of the organization. As it gathers knowledge and manages to solve the complex issues it faces, the organization matures. *Culture beareres* can likewise be change drivers or elements of maintaining *the status quo*, function of the values they explicit by their manifest behavior (and not by the values they publicly state they support). We underline the fact that the success of any type of public policy is strictly conditioned by changing the culture of the target public space, in the sense of political socialization. Culture is the way members of a group communicate both among them and with other groups within the society. Behaviors, habits, practices, values, beliefs and common visions of the future are emphasized in the progress of the

communication process. The target space culture reflects and becomes palpable if initiated policies are turned into actions.

The importance of a new culture, formulated together with the transformation targeted by implementing a public policy, consists of the facets of the change project. Sequential implementation of just those new practices seeming more useful or with a higher degree of suitability, can have remarkable short-term effects. Fragmented effects cannot however support long-term performance. For instance, consumer protection policies can only be successful on the short term, with the lack of a solid consumer culture.

The result of completing the concepts illustrated in Figure 1 with these considerations appears in Figure 3. Just the organizational environments compatible with the public policies – these promoters of the new and of change – are capable or acknowledging the importance of the newly promoted values.

Figure 3. *From culture to action*
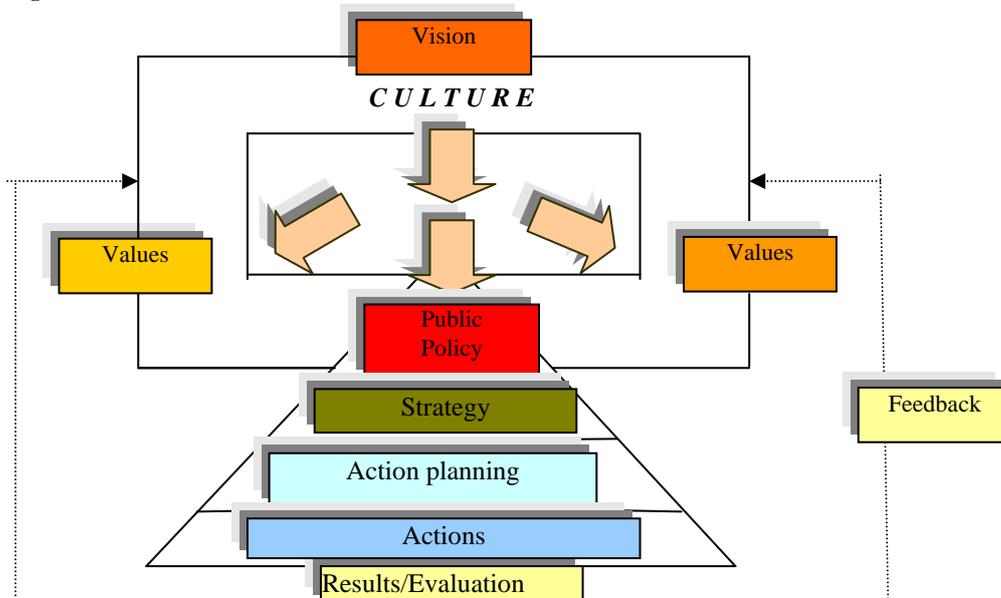
Source: Popescu, 2005.

From this perspective, the organizational analysis brings forth *the adaptive organization*, characterized by:
- sophistication and maturity; flexibility and not rigid bureaucracy;
- proactively;
- motivational mechanisms promoting openness and engagement towards the organization;
- cooperation climate favoring teamwork;
- interest for being open towards the community;
- decisional transparency;

▪ Constant preoccupation for the development of the organization so that it can be capable of permanent changes.

Efforts and resources have to be therefore assigned towards the development of the target space, including from a cultural perspective.

3. Cultural diversity of target public space

The public space culture, defined as a conglomerate of cultures belonging to the actors involved (public organizations, business organizations, civic organizations, local communities' and societal ones interested in a certain public policy), has to be harmonized with the values and ethics that the public policy promotes while making way through the Scylla of goodwill and Charybda of bureaucracy. This is a difficult process in need of a strong culture.

The force of a culture resides in its real contents and the adequacy of the solutions found for the public policies' issues. A strong culture assumes the consent of actors on the way a public policy has to be elaborated, implemented and evaluated.

A strong culture does not mean unconditional acceptance but consensus on values and attitudes. Building such a culture involves time and substantial efforts for its learning and consolidation. Target public space is a complex structure, network type, composed of all the actors   that defined it and are involved in the implementation process. We will call this structure, meta-organization.

In other words, meta-organization is a conglomerate of private and public organizations, national, international and transnational. Its culture is the common place of cultural diversity that should provide coherence and consistence to the complex structure it defines. Public and private, national, international, transnational NGOs are accepted into the complex, network-like structure characteristic for public policies.

Despite the fact that one does not attempt to level these cultures, it is necessary for a certain compatibility to exist. It involves the engagement of entities, component of the meta-organization, into intense efforts directed to creating a new value - and beliefs-based culture, adequate to the success of the public policy projects.

Diminishing societal performance is a result of the difference between the environment opportunities and the ability to promote public projects that capitalize these opportunities. The improvement of public projects' quality, of future evolutions and real-time risk-taking forecasts represent the ability to eliminate this disparity.

In these conditions, the mechanist cultural model, characteristic for the bureaucracy, is totally outdated. The cultural model of the organic organization is the one towards which all the initiatives of changing the organizational culture of meta-organization members should be directed to.

For an overwhelming majority, the only answer of the bureaucracies to the various and serious issues they face is to create new institutions and elaborate new projects in the hope of overcoming challenges and solve issues.

Such an approach does not, most often, offer the expected satisfaction, due to erroneous circumstances on which answers are initiated – that is one attempts to solve a behavioral issue by a structural solution. Cases are frequent when institutions wait for the replacement of existing programs with new ones; unfortunately, in their implementation the same routines are used, favoring the "same clientele".

While responsible bureaucracies, the so-called *learning organizations* are preoccupied by the value they add to the processes they develop, the above-mentioned organizations only become active when signals appear referring to the necessity of giving up satisfying the "clientele".

The public policies' responsible have not only to quickly accumulate innovative and creative capabilities necessary for the definition of new horizons, but also to facilitate turning them into practice. In other words, one has to give up the old paradigms and total engagement, in spirit and action, within a long-term-defined change process, in the sense of complex systems' management exigencies.

The situations in which no differences appear between the cultures of actors participating in the implementation of a policy are desirable and coincide with the situation in which the entities have a common corporate past. Certitudes, aspirations and behavior are specific and reflect the activities undergoing within the entity, but preserve the general features identical with the culture of the meta-organization. It is essential that between the base culture and the cultures of the actors should not appear too considerable differences or irreconcilable conflicts. In the absence of solid arguments the cultural leveling attempt is a source of conflicts.

Sometimes, considerable cultural differences among entities obstruct communication and cooperation among them or with various expert groups participating in the public policies project. Public policies management favors this kind of cultural diversity as long as it does not affect the implementation (Popescu, 2005, pp. 269-271).

Dedicated surveys have proven that public organizations that benefit from an adaptive culture experience a remarkable growth from the perspective of the development of the public policies process they take part in, if compared to the institutions that do not enjoy such a culture.

Any meta-organizational culture is formed of, as previously mentioned, the cultures of those participating entities in public policies. A meta-organization culture may become superimposed on the cultures of participating entities in public policies when those entities share a mutual past. Beliefs, aspirations and behaviour are then characteristic and reflect the activities carried on within the respective entity by keeping up with general features that are identical to the meta-organization culture. What's essential is that no major discrepancies or irreconcilable conflicts occur between the basic culture and the cultures of the players.

Huge cultural differences between entities may sometimes impede communication and cooperation among them or with different expert groups who take part in the public policy project. Public policy management favors such cultural diversity kinds, as long as they do not have any effect on the best development of the public policy process.

Any attempt to achieve cultural uniformity without appealing to sound arguments is a source that generates conflict. It is necessary to give up the old paradigms and to assume total commitment, in spirit and deed, as part of a long-term process of change, which means to meet the demands of a complex system management.

Against the background of a strong organizational culture, the team players of a public organization give up their old mentalities exclusively defined as their expectancy for material incentives and rewards, and favor new mentalities where personal expansion is prevalent.

Relationship developed under these conditions is far stronger than associations exclusively based on material reward. Moreover, this type of connecting tends to create true networks within the organization. If this networking is subject to pressures from driving forces, the effect will be the expected one, i.e. will entail change of the organizational culture.

The relevance of the new culture consists in the implications that arise from implementing the change project. Sequence implementation of those new practices that seem best fit, more useful and with a higher degree of appropriateness, can have outstanding short-term effects. Disjointed efforts cannot sustain long-term performance.

To this end, total commitment is needed in approaching the new public management, which will favor reduction of cultural differences and ultimately the growth of a new culture to substantially contribute to achieving performance expertise, and increased institutional capacity towards the development of new effective public policies.

4. Conclusion

By this study we tried to bring to attention the implementing barriers caused by a target public space stuck in a time warp, and which refuses to accept the new thing represented by the public policy.

More than that, the values, whose vectors are represented by the public policies, are considered a real obstacle that might affect the objectivity of the perspective on what functions, because the new characteristics which should be taken into consideration when elaborating policies necessarily implies changes at the level of the actors composing the target space.

These new requirements focus on the democratization and opening of the process of public policy, which means eliminating distortions and testing perceptions and hypotheses through debates in the public arena

In other words, formulating public policies should turn into a process of public learning. Fulfilling these requirements raises a new issue that is whether the vectors of change (organisations, authorities and officials) are able to pressure for changing and adapting to the present context, more and more precarious and less predictable.

In conclusion, the vectors of change must be able not only to transform their organisations as a reaction to changes confronting our modern world, but also to create and develop organisations as real learning systems that are able to continue to transform.

To this purpose, total engagement in the approaches of the new own public management is necessary, which will favour the diminishing of cultural differences, and lastly the development of a new culture that will contribute substantially to achieving professionalism, performance, to increasing institutional capacities in order to develop national policies at a level similar to the European/international one.

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