

UNIVERSITIES AND THE TRAINING OF LOCAL OFFICIALS

Viorel STĂNICĂ

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Lecturer, Department of Public Administration, Faculty of Political, Administrative and Communication Sciences, Babeş-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania
Tel.: 0040-264-431.505
E-mail: stanica@fspac.ro

Abstract

The article analyzes the training provided to civil servants by different types of institutions, indicating that the universities have the potential to become important actors in this field. In a disorganized market of training programs for civil servants and elected officials, in which the competences of the actors involved are unclear and the standards for training programs are decided by different providers, the capitalization of the universities' potential of providing training programs for the public sector is currently at a low level.

Universities ought to abandon the existent approach based only on the current needs of the administrative domain. They have to anticipate and even to determine tendencies or directions of evolution and to offer appropriate programs to administrative institutions. They have to move beyond the frame of traditional disciplines and adapt to permanent social changes (through educational programs with an interdisciplinary character in fields that are imposed by the major issues of public administration).

Keywords: lifelong education, training needs, training providers, universities, civil servants.



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1. The regulations for lifelong learning in Romania

The strategy for the continuous training of civil servants in Romania is based on a semi-decentralized system and organization. Thus, the identification and the assessment of training needs are organized based on a bottom-up approach, while setting the priorities, the strategic orientations and the drafting of the training plan are based on a top-down approach. The delivery of training programs is performed by state structures and by private companies and NGOs as well.

After the 1989 revolution the first attempt to constitute a structure for training of civil servants was made through Governmental Decision no. 179/1990 which established a network of centers for perfecting the personnel subordinated to some ministries and state agencies. The network was under the coordination of the Bucharest Center for Perfecting the Personnel from the Local State Administration.

According to the Governmental Decision no. 220/1/PR from January 19th, 1990 the Faculty for Higher Political Studies was established. The next step was the establishment of the National School of Political and Administrative Studies (NSPAS), based on the Governmental Decision no. 183/1991. In its first years of existence this school provided post-graduate studies. In 1995 NSPAS was accredited as an academic institution (state university) incorporating also the Romanian Institute for Management and The Center for Perfecting Civil Servants from the Central and Local Administration, together with its five territorial centers. These institutes operated formally under the tutelage of the Department for Local Public Administration.

Because NSPAS became a university and no longer provided lifelong learning, in 1998 the government decided to establish the National Center for Continuous Training (lifelong learning) for Public Administration (NCCTPA). According to Governmental Decision no. 850/1998 eight territorial centers were created under the coordination of the national center; the centers were decentralized, autonomous and self-sustained. In 2001 the NCCTPA was reorganized under the name of National Institute for Public Administration (NIA) which focused on the methodological coordination of the regional centers.

NIA provided the following types of courses for executive or managing civil servants: (1) one year special programs for senior civil servants; (2) programs for civil servants in managing positions; (3) The Young Professional Scheme, a one year program specially designed for young civil servants (six months training and six months practice in EU countries); (4) post-graduate programs of 180 hours for civil servants from central and local administration, and (5) training programs for civil servants.

The last three categories of programs were undertaken by NIA and the eight regional centers in partnership with a number of universities, including Babeş-Bolyai University. Through these programs, the Department of Public Administration from the Faculty of Political, Administrative and Communication Sciences of Babeş-Bolyai University provided courses to several hundreds of civil servants from the North-West part of Romania.

The NIA functioned until 2009 when it was included in the National Agency for Civil Servants (NACS) and the regional centers were also subordinated to NACS, as institutions financed entirely from the state budget. The role of NIA and of the regional centers in the training process was thus seriously diminished.

2. The current providers of training in the field of civil service in Romania

The current providers of training in the field of civil service in Romania are:

1. The National Agency for Civil Servants (NACS) that organizes training programs for senior civil servants and occasionally offers training for regular civil servants, in partnership with private companies and NGOs. Very often there are allegations that these courses are not very well organized and sometimes are considered a form of tourism;
2. Training centers belonging to strong ministries or other governmental agencies (Finance Ministry, The Inspectorate for Emergency Situations, Labor Inspection, The National Institute for Statistics, some state companies like the Railroad Company);
3. Different types of associations like the Association of the Communes, the Association of the Municipalities, unions of the civil servants (in partnership with private companies);
4. Private companies authorized by the National Authority for Qualifications (which was established through Government Decision no. 556/2011). These companies provide training such as qualification, specialization and training for people who seek to work in the private sector. However, public institutions are also their clients because it is much easier for them to obtain money from the public budgets;
5. Chambers of Commerce and Industry also developed training capacities that are addressed to specific categories of civil servants;
6. The non-profit sector organizes courses, usually on their fields of expertise such as: environment protection, sustainable development, child protection, equality of chances, community development, and project management; and
7. Public and private universities that have academic programs in the field of public administration or in related fields (economy, law) which also developed lifelong learning centers.

In most of the cases these providers are not real partners for the public institutions as they are unable to develop an integrated training process with all the necessary components (Pynes, 2009; Edwards, Scott and Raju, 2003).

The market for training is strongly influenced by the European pre-accession or post accession funds. The trainings delivered within the projects initiated by local authorities (by themselves or in partnership with universities or NGOs) are in accordance with their training policies and are organized, in general, based on training needs assessment (TNA). Even so, in many cases, the topics of the training courses are based on imaginary needs or suggested/imposed by the guides issued by the funding institutions and are not in accordance with the real training needs, the training plans existing in institutions (if there are any) or with the national strategy. The provision of these training sessions

in integrated forms targeting groups from the local administrations (that are most of the time passive beneficiaries) leads to redundancy and inefficiency.

The legal framework requires all local and central public institutions to submit to NACS their annual plans for the training of civil servants along with the budgets allocated for these actions; the strategic directions and the priorities are based on a descendent (top-down) process. These plans are based on the evaluation of individual performance from the previous year. From a qualitative perspective, we can argue that the methodology used to establish the annual training plans is based on an incomplete analysis of the training needs of civil servants, because it privileges the institutional perspective regarding the training needs, thus ignoring the needs of the leadership, working teams or individuals.

From a quantitative perspective, this system of centralizing the data was almost not functional because only 5-6% of all public institutions submitted the training plans to NACS in the last years. The training plans for 2012 that were centralized at national level show that the main fields of interest for providing training to civil servants are (NACS, 2012, p. 7): management (19%), information and communication technology (14%), law and European Union legislation (13%) and personal development (13%).

The dynamics of financial allocations for civil servants training for the past three years show a general decrease; some of the variances can be explained by the access to European funds. An increase of the allocations at the national level, both from the budgets of authorities and institutions and from other sources, can be observed (Table 1).

Table 1: Budgetary allocation for 2010-2012

Types of budgetary allocations	2010 (RON)	2011 (RON)	2012 (RON)
Funds from the budgets of local authorities or public institutions	11,671,039	11,367,020	14,653,801.45
Funds from other sources at local level	1,648,107	2,026,754	6,105,557.25
Funds from the budgets of central authorities or public institutions	5,898,870	2,213,717	3,522,121
Funds from other sources at central level	249,921	13,838,602	211,600
Total	19,467,937	29,446,093	24,493,079.7

Source: NACS, 2010, 2011, 2012.

The data provided by the central authority in the field of civil servants training show just the training options and the proposed budgets. However, there are no reports indicating how many civil servants were actually trained and the funds spent for such trainings. Taking into consideration the low rate of response, these data are just informative. In addition, many local officials who benefited from training programs were not civil servants, and therefore they are not included in such statistics.

However, we can gain a general perspective of the size of the training market for the civil service in Romania by taking into consideration the training provided by the non-profit sector, as well as the situations when the civil servants pay by themselves the costs of training courses – 3.6% at the level of central administration and 5.7% at local level (Andrei, Profiroiu and Profiroiu, 2010, pp. 28, 73).

3. The beneficiaries of the training

As for the training consumers/beneficiaries we have to deal with a market of increasingly educated customers. Today, the proportion of civil servants from local public administration that obtained a bachelor degree is very high. Furthermore, the training programs conducted between 1990 and 2000 as well as the very wide and geographically spread undergraduate and postgraduate university programs led to an increased level of knowledge inside public administration.

Due to the technological, normative and procedural evolutions, as well as due to the assimilation of good practices and standards, public administration is approaching a new stage: the knowledge based administration. This is requiring important changes in the content of the work of civil servants, which is based on a high level of conception, the continuous increase of the use of IT and communication technology, the development of consultancy activities, outsourcing of certain public services and the professionalization of management.

On the other hand the training providers have to consider the negative aspects of the training demand:

1. Heterogeneous demands that have no connection with local development strategies;
2. Need assessments that are focusing only on the institutional perspective;
3. Civil servants with a lot of diplomas but with a low level of real knowledge;
4. Managers with modest intellectual ambitions which are not willing to take responsibility or which minimize the importance of civil servants training;
5. The high turnover at the managerial level;
6. The high level of demand for quality, especially for secondary aspects (hotel rooms), due to the abundance of money from various projects; and
7. Corruption, difficult access to contracts for training.

According to NACS (2011, p. 23), in 2011 the total number of jobs in the civil service was 160,798, out of which 17,009 were state public functions, 74,725 were jobs at the level of the central public administration (this number includes the jobs in the deconcentrated public institutions at county level) and 86,073 were jobs at the local level. Based on the level of responsibilities, there are 145,762 executive public functions, 14,763 management positions and 273 higher civil servants.

According to art. 8 of Law no. 188/1999 (regarding the statute of civil servants), based on the type of degree required for occupying a public function, out of the total number of 145,762 executive public functions, long term graduate studies (class I) are required in 77.67% of the cases, short term graduate studies (class II) are required for 1.53% of the cases, and undergraduate studies (class III) are required for 20.80% of the cases (meaning 30,312 civil servants) (NACS, 2011, p. 25).

The evolution of the number of civil servants (according to the level of their studies) shows an opposite proportional variation of civil servants with long term graduate studies and undergraduate studies (classes 1 and 3 from the graph below). This is a

consequence of the fact that civil servants with undergraduate studies completed their studies with graduate ones, and this happened after 2009 (see Figure 1).

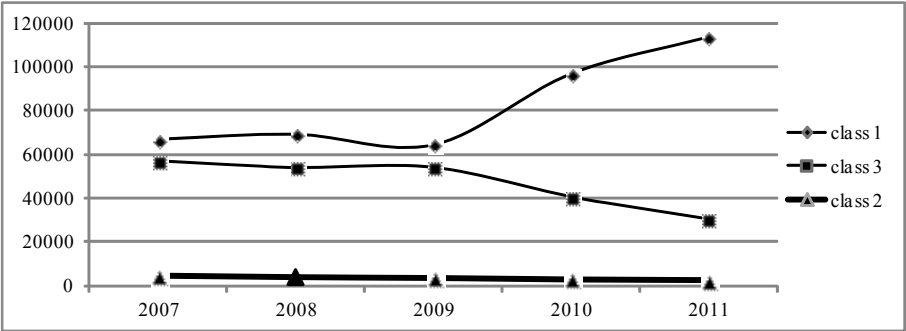


Figure 1: Evolution of public functions based on the level of studies between 2007 and 2011

Source: NACS, 2011, p. 26

4. Conclusion: the role of universities in civil servants lifelong learning

At Babeş-Bolyai University lifelong learning is organized through The Center for Lifelong and Distance Learning that offers 69 postgraduate programs. Beside these, it organizes various courses on different topics but very few of them are targeted toward civil servants. For example, the Faculty of History and Philosophy offers a post-high school course in the management of current archives, the Faculty of Economics offers a postgraduate course in project management, and the Faculty of Law offers a course for specializing in the new Civil Code.

The Faculty of Political, Administrative and Communication Sciences has organized a master program addressing civil servants in managing positions (980 persons attended this program). The faculty also organized postgraduate courses in the public service management, the management of local public administration and community police with an attendance of over 100 persons. Currently, this faculty offers a postgraduate program in the management of public administration, which is targeted toward local public officials. Recently the faculty involved the professional associations of the civil servants and of local elected officials from the North-West Region requesting advice related to the design of the training programs.

On a disorganized market of training programs for civil servants and elected officials, on which the competences of the actors involved are unclear and the standards for the training programs are decided by different providers, the capitalization of the universities' potential of providing training programs for the public sector is at a low level.

The relation of the university with local public administration via training process is of major importance. It is the expression of the relation between theory and practice, facilitating the changes between the two sides. Universities ought to abandon the approach based only on the current needs of the administrative domain and they have to anticipate and even to determine tendencies or directions of evolution and to offer appropriate programs to administrative institutions.

They have to move beyond the framework of traditional disciplines and adapt to permanent social changes through educational programs that have an interdisciplinary character in the fields that are imposed by the major issues of public administration, such as: sustainable development, risk management, new diseases and new technologies. On the other hand, beside the ordinary university programs, universities should offer flexible alternatives through lifelong learning, as learning is more and more necessary in the learning economy and society. In the context of the global recession, the governmental savings left the continuous training without one of the few means to motivate (Perry and Hondeghem, 2008) civil servants.

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