

A constructionist analysis of the current public administration: the role of the myths

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Abstract: *This article aims, based on a constructionist analysis, to identify if at the public administration level there is a subjective dimension of the realities of the public space.*

This article identifies the subjective dimension of the administration' with the perception of individuals involved in decision-making process, by operationalizing the four myths of modernity: the myth of the savior, the myth of the golden age, the myth of the conspiracy and the unity myth – at the administrative level and aims to identify if there is a dynamics of them in the administrative institutions, at the groups of institutions.

Keywords: *public administration, constructionism, myth, subjective reconstruction of the reality.*

From objective to subjective in public administration: constructionism

The constructionism is a new trend appeared in sociology, but not only, based mainly on the works of Kenneth J. Gergen¹ and designates the various approaches of how reality can be known and especially "how to build the significant realities"² of the individual to individual. There are different definitions of the social constructionism which focuses on the process of recognizing multiple realities generated by the

different interactions of various individuals who build these realities.

"Constructionism is a semiotic paradigm that is based on 'interpretive axiom' according to which the map through which the reality is read is not anything but a continuous negotiation of interpretation. Any type of speech is interpreted as a "social reconstruction of reality" starting from a cultural consensus"³.

At the public administration level, the constructionism is the paradigm that can explain the subjective interactions between individuals – a part of the administrative system,

employed in public institutions - that have subjective perceptions of the reality, of the processes and of the mechanisms developed to this level.

Beyond the objective line identified in the administrative institutions, which requires the compliance with the legislation, the mechanisms and with the decision-making processes, with the technical characteristics of the goods and of the services, we can identify a subjective line of the administrative realities which is built by each individual, by reference to their surroundings space and in relation to them perceptions, knowledge, values, symbols and myths that they can turn.

From this point of view, the myth becomes an important part of the subjective construction of the reality of the institutionalized individuals involved in decision-making process in administrative space.

Georges Sorel described the myths mechanism as a “system of images”⁴, sets of topics “able to evoke in block and through the intuition, before any reflected analysis, the mass of the feelings”⁵, that are identified to the belief rooted in a group or a community, beyond all which means technical, legal mechanisms, at the administrative level.

Thus, through their activation, we can rebuild to a point the reality at the institutional-administrative level, which may involve the perception of the entire administrative system, both from inside (by the employees in the system), and

externally (by the members of the community that are the beneficiaries of the public services), on the one hand and on the other, by influencing from the inside of the decisions and of the decision-making process, by the subjective perception of individuals involved.

The reconstruction of the administrative space: the myths and their reinter-pretation

The presence of the myths in nowadays public administration involves the reinterpretation of their own which generates the reconstruction of the administrative space, beyond the objective analysis of the decision, of the mechanisms and of the decision-making process.

This analysis starts from the distinction made by Raul Girardet which identifies four myths of modern political world that are named as “the high mythological assemblies”⁶ which are:

- the myth of the savior
- the myth of the golden age,
- the myth of the conspiracy
- the unity myth, but in this analysis they are reinterpreted in the light of modern public administration⁷.

The myth of the savior assumes an identification at the institutional-administrative level of the individuals – seen as parts of the institution – with its leadership. The savior occurs at an administrative institution level when the people

transfer their desire for change, of regeneration and – ultimately – of salvation from a mythical person, usually its head. The essence of this myth actually refers to a mental restructuring that involves a revival of the lost hope, a situation likely to occur in times of crisis, but also a certain type of relationship of addiction or of centralization from the executive forum to the deciding / management forum.

The myth of the golden age is structured in relation to two essential values: on one hand, the innocence and purity, on the other hand, those of social solidarity, both these values being found only superficially in the present perceived as being dark. Thus, the nostalgia of the golden past will be double directed against a modernity that corrupts at the institutional and administrative level, hastening the destruction of the customs and of the moral attitudes about whom speaks the rational administrative model, objectively depersonalized, classically. In response to such social situations where the old balances are threatened the manifestations of this myth can outline forms of some subcultures at the administrative level with their own organizational logic, with their own values that flow even from the activation of the myths and of the symbols, leading to the decision and to the decision making process.

The myth of the conspiracy may be a modern expression of the idea of abscons organization, invol-

ving activities that create a distance between the citizens and the institutional environment, that may involve manipulative activities, of disinformation that deliver their immediately reaction of mobilization in this situation. The mythology of the conspiracy appears to Girardet as “a negative perception of some tacit aspirations, as an inverted expression of the wishes more or less conscious, but always unsatisfied”⁸.

The unity myth occurs in modern public administrations as a formula by which administrative institutions can be defined to other structures that have the same characteristics of the system. Simultaneously, it appears the distinction between the individual autonomy and the capacity to decide alone on it, on one hand, and the will to unite and merge with the institution from which it belongs in an uniform and coherent image, on the other hand.

In the light of these two trends, it may occur two types of political and administrative discourse: one centered on the argumentation of the need for unity, in which the individual decision becomes a part of the collective/institutional decision in public space and another that emphasizes the disadvantages of joining to these bodies through the action at least of homogenization of the individual preferences.

From this point of view, this analysis aims to identify how the myths are valued at the local public administration, on one hand, and on

the other hand, to see whether if there is a dynamic of their own within the administrative institutions or if this dynamic traces the process identified at macro-level, of the institution.

Methodology and sample

The analysis aims to operationalize the four fundamental myths identified by Raul Girardet (the myth of the savior, the myth of the golden age, the myth of the

conspiracy and the unity myth (see Table 1: The operationalization of the myths) and applied at local public administration level, in terms of the similarities and of the differences that may occur at the administrative level, but also within the administrative institutions at the groups level (identified to the directions of the institutions), based on research from 2016⁹ at Iasi City Hall level.

The operationalization	The myth
Stephen the Great, Michael the Brave are saviour heroes of our nation.	The myth of the savior
On the time of our parents or grandparents, life was easier and better.	The myth of the golden age
There are people and institutions who conspire to rule the world.	The myth of the conspiracy
Only united, the romanian people will overcome the difficult moments	The unity myth

Table 1: *The operationalization of the myths*

This analysis aim to identify the dynamic of the myths at the administrative level, based on the similarities / differences that may occur at the macro level, of the institution, at the group level (seeing the departments of the institution like structures that can have their own organizational subcultures).

The research sample consists of 116 respondents, employees of Iasi City Hall, meaning about average about 15.76% of the total population of civil servants from this institution (736). The construction technique of the sample was the “snowball one”¹⁰ (see Table 2: General population and sample), and the instrument used was questionnaire.

1.City	2. Number of employees	3.Sample
Iasi 2016	736 ¹¹	116

Table 2: *General population and sample*

Results

At the administrative institution level, in relation to the item "totally agree", the four modern myths are present in the subjective, administrative construction of the realities. Most valued is the unity

myth - 55.7%, followed by the myth of the savior - 44.3%, then the myth of conspiracy - 29.5%, in the end the myth of the golden age to obtain a percentage of 9% (see Table 3: The institutional level).

	Stephen the Great, Michael the Brave are saviour heroes of our nation.	On the time of our parents or grandparents, life was easier and better.	There are people and institutions who conspire to rule the world.	Only united, the romanian people will overcome the difficult moments
Totally agree	The myth of the savior	The myth of the golden age	The myth of the conspiracy	The unity myth
Institutional level	44.3%	9.8%	29.5%	55.7%

Table 3: *The institutional level*

Regarding the perception of the administrative/institutional realities at the group level, in terms of the myths, the groups being identified with the departaments of the institution, Technical Department keeps the same hierarchy of the valuing of

the myths as the institution: the myth of unity - the myth of the savior – the conspiracy myth - the myth of the golden age (see Table 4: The Technical Department).

Totally agree	The myth of the savior	The myth of the golden age	The myth of the conspiracy	The unity myth
Institutional level	44.3%	9.8%	29.5%	55.7%
Technical Department	71.4%	14.3%	57.1%	100%

Table 4: *The Technical Department*

It should be noted, however, that for all items of this question, the percentages obtained are much higher, culminating in 100% – totally agree for the unity myth (see Table 4).

Regarding The Economics and Finance Department, compared to the institutional level, the hierarchy of the myths is kept somehow for

the unity myths and for the myth of the savior who obtained the highest percentages at the macro level (55.7% and 44.3% at the macro level, each 33.3% - at micro-level, group) (see Table 5: The Economics and Finance Department).

Totally agree	The myth of the savior	The myth of the golden age	The myth of the conspiracy	The unity myth
Institutional level	44.3%	9.8%	29.5%	55.7%
The Economics and Finance Department	33.3%	0%	0%	33.3%

Table 5: *The Economics and Finance Department*

If in the case of Technical Department the percentages at the group level were higher than at the institutional level, beyond the overall hierarchy of the myths, the The Economics and Finance Department, the percentages are lower than the institutional level, on one hand, and on the other hand, the conspiracy myth and the myth of the golden age are not valued at all (obtained by 0%) (see Table 5: The

Economics and Finance Department).

Regarding The Department of Project Management, as in the case of The Technical Department, it respects the overall hierarchy of the myths from the institutional level: the unity myth - the myth of the savior – the myth of the conspiracy - the myth of the golden age (see Table 6: The Department of Project Management).

Totally agree	The myth of the savior	The myth of the golden age	The myth of the conspiracy	The unity myth
Institutional level	44.3%	9.8%	29.5%	55.7%
Department of Project Management	45.5%	9.1%	36.4%	72.7%

Table 6: *The Department of Project Management*

Moreover, in this case, the values of the percentage at group level are higher at this direction than at the institutional level, the only exception to this is in the case of the myth of the golden age, where the percentage obtained by the group is less than that of institutional level (the myth of the golden age: 9.8% - at macro/institutional level compared to 9.1% - at the group level) (see Table 6: The Department of Project Management).

Conclusions

Following the results obtained at the institutional level, we can say that the administrative space is marked subjectively by the myths seen as the subjective perceptions of the individuals involves at this level, beyond the objectivity of the laws, of the mechanisms or of the processes. The local public administration seems to value most the unity myth - followed by the myth of the savior - the myth of the conspiracy then - finally, ranging in descending order, the myth of the golden age.

Regarding the subjective perception of the realities of the administration, by enabling the myths of the group, it should be noted that from the three institutionalized groups, all of them meet the overall hierarchy of the myths, only one of them (from The Economics and Financial Department) changing the percentages of the last two positions from the overall hierarchy of myths, for the myth of the conspiracy and

the myth of the golden age, not only the percentages are lower, but they have null values (0%). It could therefore indicate that there are some variations at the micro level to the institutional level, only in terms of the percentages obtained for each myth in part, otherwise the institutional line is preserved.

From this point of view, the public administration at the macro/institutional (in this case the local level) can be subjected to a constructionist analysis, its dimensions being both objective and subjective, through the reconstruction of the administrative *ethos*, depending on the meaning given by the actors involved to the myths. This type of analysis can be also applied to the micro/groups level, but it seems that the group level keeps the lines of the institutional level, the differences occurring only in the case of the intensity of the percentages obtained.

In conclusion, the local public administration reconfigures subjectively the public space, especially through the unity myth - seeing the administrative institutions as homogenous, unitary blocks that seem to smooth over the capacities of decisions and individual action - but also to the myth of the savior - that is linking the administrative institutions to the center of the decision/to the leadership.

If at the objective level, the previous studies at the same institutional level realized by Țicu¹² in 2014¹³ showed that the rational actor model is dominant at the decision

making processes, it seems that the subjective reconstruction of the administrative realities approaches the administrative institutions to the classical paradigm of the bureaucracy that may be analyzed in the local, local socio-political context of

states from Eastern Europe, countries that have the legacy from the past of the social-political, including administrative systems, characterized by a greater degree of centralization.

Note

- ¹ Keneth J. Gergen, "The Social Constructionist Movement In Modern Psychology", în *American Psychologist*, Volume 40, Issue 3, 1985, pp. 266-275.
- ² Ștefan Cojocaru, *Metode apreciative în asistența socială. Ancheta apreciativă, supervizarea, managementul de caz*, Editura Polirom, Iași, 2005, p. 25.
- ³ Antonio Sandu, *Social Constructivism as a semiotical paradigm*, The volume of the 14-th International Conference "INVENTICA 2010", Iasi, 2010, p. 3.
- ⁴ George Sorel, *Reflecții asupra violenței*, Editura Humanitas, București, 2012, p. 127.
- ⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 148.
- ⁶ Raoul Girardet, R, *Mituri și mitologii politice*, Editura Institutul European, Iași, 1997, p. 19.
- ⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 24.
- ⁸ Raoul Girardet, *op. cit.* p. 32.
- ⁹ The study from 2016 was supported by the Sector Operational Programme Human Resources Development (SOP HRD), financed from the European Social Fund and by the Romanian Government under the contract number POSDRU/159/1.5/133675.
- ¹⁰ Vasile Miftode, *Tratat de metodologie sociologică*, Editura Lumen, Iași, 2003, p. 256.
- ¹¹ Online at: <http://curierul-iasi.ro/a-fost-finalizata-organigrama-primariei-municipiului-iasi-813>, accesat la 2 februarie 2, 2018.
- ¹² Dorina Țicu, *Politicile publice. Raționalitate și decizie în spațiul administrativ*, Editura Adenium, Iași, 2014.
- ¹³ The study from 2013-2014 was supported by 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/CPP 107/DMI 1.5/S/78342].

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Electronical resources:

<http://curierul-iasi.ro/a-fost-finalizata-organigrama-primariei-municipiului-iasi-813>.