

THE IMPORTANCE OF AUTONOMY AND RESOURCES FOR SUPPORTING THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT EFFICIENCY

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Abstract:

In the public sector the running of administration process at the level of administrative-territorial units has always sought and today too aims to ensure the management efficiency of public affairs in the service of the local community. From such a direction, in the space of this article we intend to analyze the significance of the local autonomy and its manifestation in local public resources plan to highlight their importance for the efficiency of public administration in territorial-administrative units. The approach carried out in the pages of this paper showed that the local autonomy, understood as democracy at local level, on the one hand, and the financial, human, material and information resources, on the other hand, are of paramount importance for the good functioning of the local administrative mechanism. Without these resources the autonomy can not fully manifest, the local public administrative authorities being unable to fulfill their responsibilities, situation that endangers the functioning of local administrative system as a whole and that, finally, generates the inefficiency of the administration process from administrative-territorial units.

Key words: public administration, local autonomy, local public resources, efficiency, administrative-territorial units, local communities

JEL classification: H83

1. INTRODUCTION

„*One can govern from afar, but one can administer only closely*”, statement made long ago by Louis-Napoléon Bonaparte and remained famous opens the way to the start of this approach. The merit of this statement is that it manages to distribute the powers within the public administration, separating the central decision-making level ("*afar*") of the local one ("*closely*"). If we ask what is the purpose of this demarcation, the answer is simple: the increase of public administration efficiency by recognition of local decisional power to adapt the decisions and the actions to specific local conditions. On this support, by the content of this paper we propose to analyze the importance of the local autonomy and of the local public resources, essential components in ensuring the efficiency of public administration in administrative-territorial units.

In this registry, by the approach that we are taking we want to find an answer to the question: *What role have the autonomy and the public resources for supporting the efficiency of administration process at the local government institutions and authorities level?*

From such a direction, this paper aims at achieving the following purpose: *analysis of local autonomy and its manifestation in local public resources plan to highlight their importance for the efficiency of public administration in territorial-administrative units.*

The objectives that support the achievement of the proposed purpose and that we aim to achieve in the following pages concern:

- highlighting the position of components *local autonomy* and *local public resources* in the center of the reformative concerns
- explaining the significance of local autonomy and of its fields of manifestation in the local public resources plan
- highlighting the importance of local autonomy and of local public resources for the efficiency of administration process in administrative-territorial units.

The achievement of the goal formulated and of the proposed objectives requires the use, from a methodological perspective, of the *qualitative dominant* approach. Through this approach

we will analyze in depth the components local autonomy and local public resources to highlight their importance in effective management of public affairs in administrative-territorial units.

2. THE COMPONENTS LOCAL AUTONOMY AND LOCAL PUBLIC RESOURCES - REFORMATIVE CONCERNS

The approach of theme of autonomy and resources importance to improve the efficiency of public administration in territorial-administrative units is also sustained because the public administration reform, about which it is spoken so much and lasts for several years, does not avoid the subject. In the context of changes that public administration faces with, the purpose of any process of reform and modernization is and must be the efficiency of management of public affairs.

The development of an efficient administration, oriented towards the needs of society, is not a superficial goal and can not be achieved in any moment. Therefore, starting on the premise that local government is closest to the citizen and to meet his interests it needs all the necessary levers to solve local issues, one of the priorities of the government that finished *is to improve the efficiency of public administration, in the service of the citizen*. [1] In addition, by the assumed Plan of Measures one of the objectives on which the former government focused its activity aims *to continue the process of administrative decentralization and strengthening of local autonomy, by reducing the role of central government at the one of strategy, policies and control, while increasing financial resources at the local level*. [2] A strong argument for continuing the process of decentralization and bringing a broader autonomy is that local government authorities are best placed to meet the needs of the local community members, whereas they know more closely the problems of the latter and, as such, they can search for and identify the most appropriate solutions to resolve them.

Further, by Strengthening strategy of the public administration for the period 2014-2020 it is established that *Romania will have an efficient public administration and responsive to the needs of society*. In this regard, among the priorities listed in this strategy one can find *the public administration reform in the achievement of which one of the main objectives is increasing of the autonomy of the local colectivities by the real triggering of decentralization process, respecting the principle of subsidiarity* [3]. Also, among the specific objectives one can find *strengthening the financial capacity of the local public administration authorities in the achievement of which the strategy proposes an integrated approach covering both the legal framework and the mechanism for allocating resources from the state budget and strengthening the capacity of the local public administration authorities to manage efficiently their own resources and to generate their own income* [4].

In addition, a current topic that is presented as an expression of local autonomy is the regional policy which is oriented towards reducing the existing regional disparities by focusing on stimulating a balanced development and on the revitalization of disadvantaged (underdeveloped) areas [5].

Consequently, that is why that the location of components *local autonomy* and *local public resources* in the center of current reformative concerns of the times which we are passing through imposes their approach and offers to the present paper a current character.

3. THE CONTENT OF LOCAL AUTONOMY AND ITS FIELDS OF MANIFESTATION IN THE LOCAL PUBLIC RESOURCES PLAN

There are a few studies and papers published in the science administration field that are concerned with the subject of autonomy. However, the term of autonomy of local government is not fully clear.

In an attempt to explain clearly the meaning of local autonomy we stop first at legal definition which expressly enshrines the principle of local autonomy. According to art. 3 paragraph 1 of the Local Public Administration Law no. 215/2001, *the local autonomy means the right and the*

effective capacity of local public administration authorities to resolve and manage, on behalf and in the interest of the local communities they represent, public affairs, under the law (see Figure no. 1):

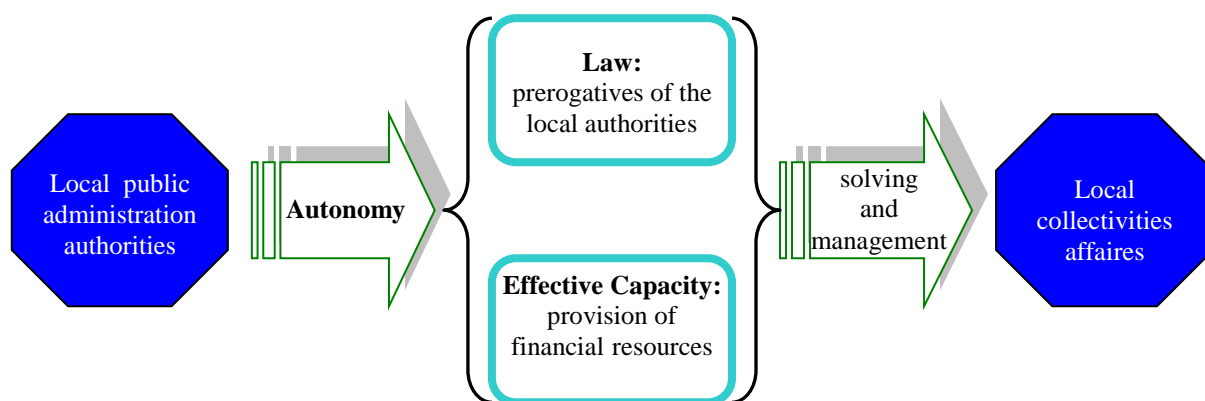


Figure no. 1. The legal explanation of local autonomy

From the analysis of this definition one can identify two syntagmas that give substance to the principle of local autonomy: *the right* and *the effective capacity*. Although the legal text does not specify what is meant by these two syntagmas, we consider that they circumscribe to the two dimensions of autonomy provided by local government Law, namely the *administrative* autonomy and *financial* autonomy [6]. On this support, we appreciate that the coverage of the prerogatives of the local public administration authorities can be expressed by the syntagma *the right*, while the syntagma *the effective capacity* means the ensuring of the indispensable resources for achieving the local administrative competences. Noteworthy is that, by its legal definition of local autonomy, *the resources* are crucial to its functioning.

In addition, on the stage of the specialty doctrine one can identify ideas, conceptions and judgments which can provide us useful explanations for understanding the meaning of local autonomy and its role in local government.

According to the opinion that comes to us from S.C. Agunyai, S.I. Ebirim and T.I. Odeyem, local government autonomy can be regarded as a genuine instrument for correction of the usurpation of powers of local governments. In their paper, the cited authors tell us that the utility of the local government autonomy lies in its capacity as a vehicle for correcting the tyrannical powers of the central authorities over the affairs of local governments. They also argue that the highest possible autonomy of the local administrative system will help to strengthen the powers of local governments and will allow them to focus on the local policies than to be servants for the state. [7]

Relevant to what we want to explain at this time of our approach is the formulation offered by D.O. Adeyemo who claims that, beyond the conflicting conceptual interpretations, the expression of autonomy of local government is perceived as local self-government or democracy at local level; this democracy at local level aims primarily the recognition for most people of a bigger opportunity to participate in determining their own destiny. But, further the same author believes that, obviously, we can not have complete autonomy or full local states; where the local governments were completely autonomous they would have been sovereign states. [8]

From another direction, W. Enejo and A. Isa, quoting G.M. Ukertor, describe the autonomy of local government with reference to two other expressions - paternalism and populism. The first term – the paternalism – refers to the fact that local governments must be regularly controlled, supervised, guided and, occasionally, punished to get to work. On the other hand, the populism advocates and entails full local democracy opposed to any form of central interference [9].

Concisely, one can point out the conception that comes to us from J.O. Fatile and G.L. Ejalonibu which opines that autonomy, from the conceptual perspective, seems simple in definition, but more technical in implementation [10].

Once we explained the autonomy of local government through the meanings coming from the specialists in the field, the attention turns towards the explanation of the fields where autonomy

works in order to highlight the role of resources in its manifestation. An approach that serves to this concern belongs to F.C. Okoli who believes that, in relation to other levels of government, the local government autonomy manifests in three critical fields, as follows [11] (see Figure no. 2):

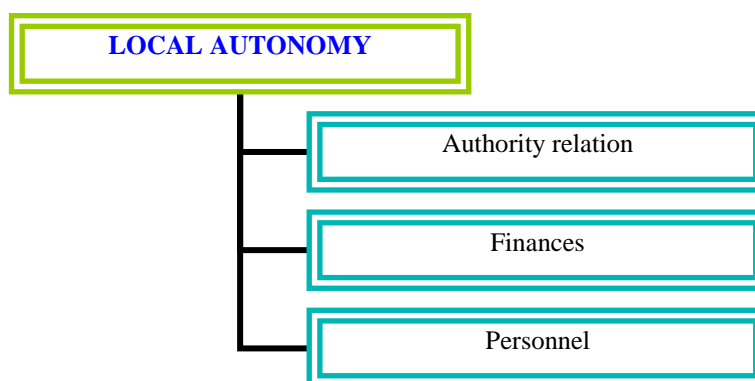


Figure no. 2. Critical fields of manifestation of the local autonomy

The authority relation between the central state government and the local one is crucial, tells us the evoked author. This relation will determine whether we are in the presence of a deconcentrated government or of a local government.

To rule out any possible confusions, we think that some further clarifications are required with respect to the authority relations among different levels of government. The point is that relations among the administrative levels can qualify an administration being as either deconcentrated, either decentralized or autonomous.

There is deconcentration when from the central government are delegated tasks to their own specialized structures from territory [12]. These territorial structures are under and are responsible to the central public administration authorities, in which context one can not speak of autonomy.

On the other side, there is decentralization when to the local government are transferred powers from the central government. In other words, by the transfer of new responsibilities to local government authorities there is an increase of autonomy at the local communities level. It is noticeable here that the authority relations in a decentralized administrative system emphasize the local autonomy.

Returning to the theory of F.C. Okoli, another crucial element of autonomy are *the finances*. We agree with the evoked author's assertion when he says that if the local unit has adequate and independent sources of revenue for the initiation and execution of its functions and tasks, then the local government works. Otherwise, when the local unit is not independent financially, then it can not operate independently, the circumstance that affects the autonomy.

In other words, to bring out its responsibilities the local government must have own and sufficient financial resources. Without the availability of such resources the functioning of the local administrative system would be compromised and the intervention of central public administration authorities would be required. In this registry, local autonomy would suffer.

Finally, according to the opinion of F.C. Okoli, the third field of manifestation of local autonomy is *the personnel*. How the value of a organizational structure is given not so by the material means, but especially by the human means, this field of manifestation of autonomy has a vital importance. The mission of local government to serve the general interest is accomplished with and through the human resources. An organization that depends on another organization for its personnel can not be described as being an autonomous organization, but mostly as an extension of the other organization, explains the cited author. In other words, the ability of a local government to recruit, to train and to support its staff is likely to grant its autonomy.

In fact, according to the quoted author, there can be no autonomy without the consideration of these three sectors of manifestation. Only in a decentralized administrative system where the authority relations are not of subordination, only when local administrative authorities have

financial resources adequate to local community needs and when the local administrative apparatus has a human potential able to manage the public affairs from administrative-territorial units, the local autonomy works.

In summary, by the interpretation of the explanations provided by F.C. Okoli, we retain as fields of manifestation, from the perspective of public resources, *the financial* and *the human* ones. In addition, we believe that beside the financial and human resources, the local governments must have also *material* and *informational* resources. The capitalization of the material goods from the public or private property of the administrative-territorial units for solving the local public affairs and the existence of an adequate informational system for the management of the activities from the local government level ensure the functioning of local government, guaranteeing its autonomy.

In the background of the above, to note is the fact that the manifestation of local autonomy may not be complete and the local administration process is not going to work without the availability of these types of resources - financial, human, material and informational, which the local government authorities to manage in the interest of the local community.

4. THE IMPORTANCE OF AUTONOMY AND OF RESOURCES IN THE LOCAL ADMINISTRATION PROCESS

At this time of the approach to note is that an appropriate level of the resources - financial, human, material, informational - available to local government institutions, as well as their autonomy to manage them on behalf and in the interest of the local community is likely to strengthen the capacity of local government system to achieve its proposed objectives in solving the problems from the territorial-administrative units.

The significant role of the components *local autonomy* and *local public resources* in ensuring the efficiency of the public administration from territorial units can be seen in the representation of local management process in terms of inputs-outputs [13] shown in the following figure (see Figure no. 3):

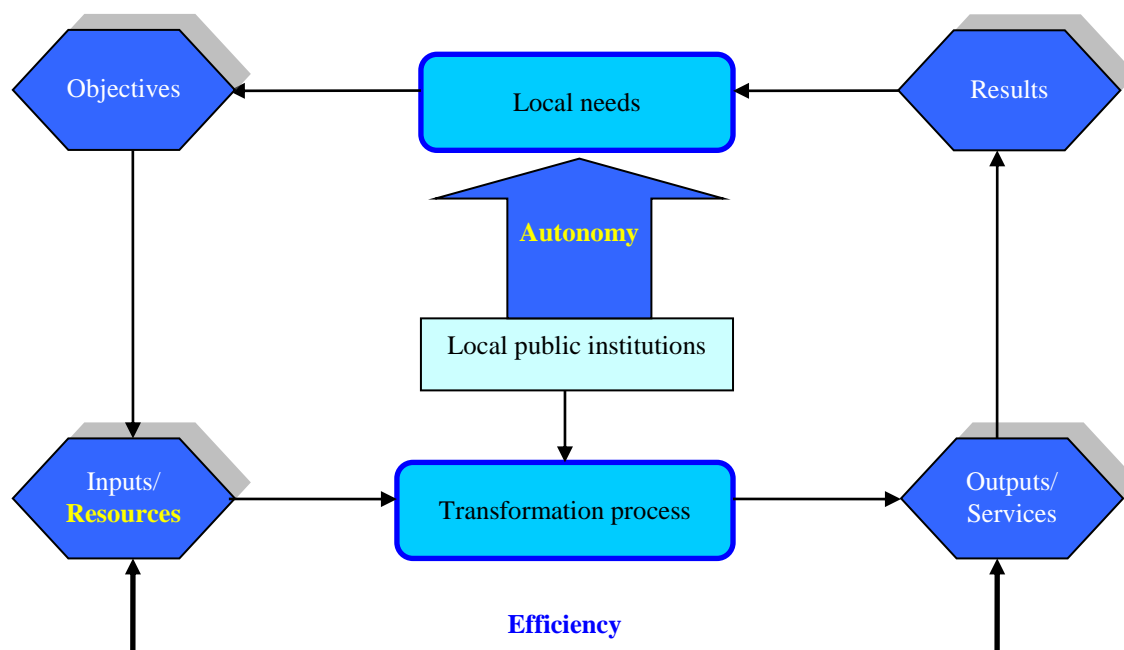


Figure no. 3. The importance of autonomy and of resources in the local administrative mechanism

From viewing the figure, it is clear the essential role of the autonomy and of the public resources for the good running of the affairs from the administrative-territorial units. To know closely the real needs of the community, the local governments must have autonomy in their

actions. Since the concrete needs of the community are known, the local governments set objectives to meet these needs. In order to achieve the set objectives, the local public administration institutions and authorities use resources - money, civil servants, buildings, lands, equipments, information (inputs). With the help and through these resources, at the level of local public institutions there is a process of transforming inputs. This transformation process generates outputs in the form of provided public services. These outputs lead to results that are presented as positive implications for the local community. The results show whether the outputs (the local public services) respond and correspond to the needs and the issues of the local community and ensure the achieving of the objectives which were generated by solving those issues.

When among outputs, as local public services, and resources/inputs used to produce them there is the best ratio, we have to do with the efficiency of local government, reflecting its ability to produce local social welfare [14].

5. CONCLUSIONS

From a retrospective direction, amid those contained in the ranks of this paper, we bring into attention a number of conclusive ideas that finalize our approach.

First, as a result of browsing the government program that finished we concluded that the local autonomy and the local public resources are placed in the center of the reformative concerns. We noted that one objective of the plan of measures assumed by the former government is, *inter alia*, strengthening local autonomy concomitant with increasing resources at the administrative-territorial units level. The achieving of this objective is intended to help improve the efficiency of public administration, in service of the citizen, as priority stated on the agenda of the reformation process. We also found that further by Strengthening strategy of the public administration for the period 2014-2020 it is aimed, among other things, increasing of the autonomy of the local collectivities, strengthening the financial capacity of local public administration authorities. Achieving of these objectives will help build an efficient public administration oriented towards the needs of society.

Then, the highlighting of the importance of autonomy and of resources for supporting the efficiency of local government was completed by explaining the significance of local autonomy and its fields of manifestation in local public resources plan. As a result of the investigation of various thesis formulated by different specialists of science administration field, we find that the assignment of a comprehensive definition for local autonomy is not so easy. Beyond the multiple conceptual interpretations that autonomy receives, the idea that emerges is its identification with the democracy at the local level that allows the institutions and authorities of local public administration to self-manage and to focus on local public issues without the intervention of the central government.

In the same registry, the examination of the manifestation fields of autonomy revealed that the authority relations, the financial resources, the human potential are crucial to this. In addition, we completed the list of critical sectors of manifestation of local autonomy with two other categories of resources, respectively material and informational ones. Without these resources the autonomy is not going to manifest completely, the local public administrative authorities being unable to fulfill their duties, situation that endangers the functioning of local administrative system as a whole and, finally, generates the inefficiency of management process.

In fact, the importance of components local autonomy and local public resources in ensuring the efficiency of government from the administrative-territorial units was showed clearly by the interpretation of process of local administration in terms of inputs-outputs. The local government can conduct an efficient activity only if it benefits of autonomy and if it has and uses concomitant, by the virtue of this autonomy, inputs as financial, human, material and informational resources. All these categories of resources are transformed into outputs consisting of public services to serve the local community members. We are in presence of the efficiency of public administration when the services provided are commensurate with the resources used in their production.

Overall, the conclusion that emerges from the conducted study shows that the authorities and the institutions of the local public administration must have autonomy in their actions and must also have public resources adequate to carry out efficiently the administrative activity at the level of administrativ-territorial units.

ENDNOTES

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