

The Identity Crisis of Public Administration Education during the Covid-19 pandemic

Abstract

There are already more than eight decades since scholars in politics and economics, lawyers and philosophers in the US and Europe have ground the study of public administration and argued in favor of its enduring identity crisis (Gulick and Urwick 1937; Simon 1946; Dahl 1947; Waldo 1948 and 1968; Mosher 1975; Ostrom 1989 and 1991; Raadschelders 2008 and 2011; Rosenbloom 2013; Rhodes 2016). In late forties, R. Dahl raised questions about the difficulty of constructing a science of public administration that was plagued by problems of values, behavior, and culture (Dahl 1947; Wright 2015), while D. Waldo spoke of an academic “sub-discipline” not meeting the challenge of providing a base of ideas, education and skills “when government is called upon to perform prodigies of administration unparalleled in history” (Waldo 1948:443). In the seventies, V. Ostrom called for a new understanding of government to help public administration overcome its intellectual crisis (Ostrom 1974), while D. Waldo asked rhetorically, whether by becoming “everything in general”, public administration become “nothing in particular” (Waldo 1975:197). This effervescent debate could be summarized in four intellectual traditions to the study of and discourse about government (Raadschelders 2008:928-929). In a chronological sequence, these were: the study for the development of practical wisdom (D. Waldo, R.A.W. Rhodes), practical experience (L.H. Gulick), scientific knowledge (H. Simon), and (eventually), the study of relativist perspectives or the postmodernism (R.C. Box, D.J. Farmer) (Raadschelders, 2005: 608). Recently, Rhodes (2015) argues in favor of public administration returning to statecraft, and public administration education focusing on counselling, stewardship, practical wisdom, probity, judgement, diplomacy, and political nous.

This research critically assesses the public administration curriculum in Romania in light of the existent scholarship and analyses the impact COVID-19 has had on reshaping the expectations of business, governmental and regulatory agencies, as well as students and early-stage researchers pertaining to what public administration programs ought to achieve. Authors rely on data collected from a survey among public administration students and early-stage researchers in Romania, as well as from a set of elite-interviews conducted with representatives of business, governmental and regulatory agencies in Romania.