

When the Public Administration "Goes to the Client"

The Impact of the Neo-Weberian Type of Public Administration Reform on Hungarian Territorial Public Administration, with a Special Focus on the Renewal of Customer Service Solutions

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Abstract

I. Key research questions and methodology

For a successful overview of this topic, it is important to point out that a few years after Hungary's accession to the European Union, a significant process of reform of the state and public administration began. Among other things, its objectives included the creation of an efficient public administration, the enhancement of uniformity, the strengthening of customer-oriented operations, and significant organisational integration. In close connection with the above, the legislator abolished the institutional functions of territorial self-government and transformed them into purely special-purpose municipalities, whose tasks are territorial development, rural development, spatial planning and related coordination tasks.

In line with the above, my presentation will primarily seek to answer the question: under the pressure of polycrisis, what major administrative reforms have been implemented in Hungary in the last 10-15 years at the territorial level? In the context of this presentation, I would like to take a closer look at the role of the territorial representative of the central state and of local governments in the new system of relations that has been established as a result of these reforms. In the course of the overview, I will pay particular attention to the introduction of the new customer service facilities, including the so-called government windows (one-stop shops), mobile government windows and municipal assistants. I base my findings on legal analysis and empirical and comparative methods.

II. Expected outcomes

To date, a wealth of experience has been gathered on the reform process and the functioning of these institutions, which could be of interest to the other participants of the conference. It is already clear that, while public administration is part of state sovereignty, there are also a number of influences in the Central and Eastern European countries which have a strong impact on the development of national administrations (see, for example, EU legislation). It would be useful to discuss these with the conference participants.

It is also certain that in the last decade and a half, the development of the Hungarian state and public administration has followed/carried certain elements of the so-called "Neo-Weberian line", which coincide with the views advocating the strengthening of the state. As a result, a comprehensive reorganisation of tasks and competences took place at the territorial level, with a clear trend away from county government, more towards territorial state administration and less towards municipalities, and also transformed the previous public policy decision-making processes. As a result of the reforms, government offices have become the dominant actors in territorial administration in Hungary

Alongside the post-NPM transformations, which at the same time broadly favoured technocratic values, at least as much emphasis was placed on strengthening the citizen- and business-friendly nature of public administration and on expanding the use of life-situation based administration. There has been a marked change in the spatial structure and ways of contacting and dealing with clients. The government office has become one of the most direct manifestations of the state in action, with which almost everyone in Hungary comes into contact sooner or later. I would like to present these modern customer contact solutions in my presentation.

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