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The identity and legitimacy of the PhD in administrative sciences

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Abstract

The research in public administration within the PHD programmes contributes to the satisfying of the need for scientific knowledge in the field. The present study is an approach to the nature of research within the PHD programmes in Administrative Sciences. We synthesize data and information obtained out of the analysis of the activity of the doctoral programmes in Administrative Sciences and we relate it to the criteria that confer the identity and legitimacy of the PHD. We consider three essential elements: major research subjects, research methodologies, and the results disseminated that we relate to the field of study in Administrative Sciences and to the context. We realise a first diagnosis of the stage of the PHD in Administrative Sciences in Romania and the measure that it is relevant to the new economy of knowledge. The conclusion of the study is that the legitimacy of the PHD in Administrative Sciences is mainly ensured by the need to bring the academic studies in accordance to the Bologna system and the criteria imposed in order to follow an academic career. The major subjects of research consider the tendencies of evolution in Administrative Science as a totalizing science.

Keywords: *doctoral studies, PHD, research, scientific result, administrative science.*

JEL Classification: H70, H83

1. The logic and philosophy of the PHD within the society of knowledge

The ministers reunited in Berghen in May 2005 admitted that the relationships between the academic field and other fields can be ensured by making use of an approach based on results. According to the logic of the Bologna process, universities were encouraged to structure their programmes of study in three cycles: bachelor's degree, master's degree, and PhD, and to make sure that a component of research is included and developed in all the three cycles, and in such a way as to allow the students to gain experience in doing research and to stimulate their interest in research as their possible future career. In 2007, the EUA TRENDS Report revealed the growing tendency in the developing of structural and doctoral programmes². By examining the declarations for research and the

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² *** *Doctoral Programmes in Europe's Universities: achievements and challenges*. Report prepared for the European universities and the Ministers of Higher education. European University Association, Brussels, 2007, p. 6-9.

European policies, also from The US and Canada, three common aspects to be expected from the doctoral programmes can be shown:

1. There is a clear international agreement over the fact that the PHD should contribute to knowledge through original research;
2. It is expected that the PHD graduates should have substantial knowledge in their fields of study.
3. There is an increasive agreement that the doctoral studies should involve the development of the transferable abilities and competences³.

All of the three aspects respond to the essential features of the knowledge society, a stage in the evolution of society that makes out of knowledge: 1. A fundamental resource; 2. The main source of power, prestige, and wellbeing; 3. The main space for the existence and the regeneration of the jobs; 4. The instrument of acting for the new main social actors; 5. The main area for the new social conflicts; 6. The fundament of the types of decision (governance and innovative management); 7. The way of existence of competition (knowledge means innovation); 8. The criterion of the national richness⁴.

As well as any type of society is supported by key-actors, capable and interested in making changes and breaking the resistance of other groups, as they doubt them⁵, and the purpose of the doctoral studies becomes even bigger. Apart from satisfying the need for academic knowledge and increasing knowledge for those who have jobs in public administration, the doctoral programmes contribute to the education of these key-actors: professors, researchers, inventors in technology, managers, and new governors, all of them seen as carrying the new perspective on society and having a role in ensuring the pass towards the new society and economy of knowledge. A report of The World Bank addresses the issue in a concise manner: "The contribution to the economy based on knowledge requires a new set of human competences. People need higher qualifications and the capacity to obtain a higher intellectual independence... Without increasing the quality of the human capital, the countries will inevitably rest behind and will be marginalized and isolated intellectually and economically"⁶.

³ Bernstein, B. L., Evans, B., Fyffe, J., Halai, N., Hall, F. L., Marsh, H., & Jensen, H. S. *The continuing evolution of the research doctorate*. In: M. Nerad & B. Evans (Eds.), *Globalization and its impacts on the quality of PhD education: Forces and forms in doctoral education worldwide*, Rotterdam: Sense Publishers., 2014, p. 6.

⁴ Hoffman, O., Glodeanu I., *Societatea/Economia Bazată pe Cunoaștere*, „Revista Română de Sociologie”, new series, year XVI, no. 5–6, 2005, p. 427.

⁵ Hoffman, O., Glodeanu, I., *op.cit.*, p. 428.

⁶ Bernstein, B. *et al, op.cit.*, p. 8.

2. Considerations regarding the doctoral research in the field of public administration

On a global scale, the doctoral experience in the field of public administration is very different. The doctoral grades differ when it comes to entrance, the content of the doctoral programmes, their duration, the process of teaching and evaluation⁷. The European doctoral programmes are shorter (between 3 and 4 years) than those in the USA (between 6 and 8 years). The majority of the European doctoral programmes do not require that students should have exams in order to get their grades. There are several important exceptions such as Sweden, where PHD students take two exams, an oral and a written one, at the middle of their doctoral program. Taking into consideration the fact that the countries assumed that they put into practice the Salzburg principles and recommendations, there are plenty of external similarities. But there are also differences of conception and procedure that are related to the cultures and traditions of the respective countries. In this way, we may notice different models of doctoral educations in Europe. In some countries, PHD education presupposes firstly an individual research paper, getting a limited support for this kind of education, in others the PHD means a stage of the permanent education and contains, apart from the final thesis, a series of intensive courses. The first model can be found in Austria, Germany, France, and Italy. The second model is dominant in the North countries, in The Netherlands, and in Great Britain. According to the fundamental models that we described, there are two types of PHD: A type: the thesis as a result of substantial research, mainly individual; B type: the thesis as the final result of substantial research based on the courses of the program that not only covers methodological aspects, but also multiple subjects relevant for their content. According to the post-Bologna reforms in the European higher education, the second type becomes more and more relevant⁸. In most European countries, a strong fragmentation in different secondary subjects of the Administrative Sciences. A more thorough and collaborative education can be a measure to surpass this weakness⁹. An important role in preparing the interdisciplinary research in public administration by the European professors and politicians is played by the EGPA. The European Group of Public Administration (EGPA) has been constituted since 1974 as a regional group of the International Institute of Administrative Sciences. It played a modest part in the beginning, but in time it became a serious professional organisation whose objectives include: • to organise and encourage the ex-

⁷ Matas, C. Poyatos, *Doctoral Education and Skills Development: An International Perspective*, „Revista de Docencia Universitaria” Vol.10 (2), Mayo-Agosto 2012, p. 168.

⁸ Reichard, C. & Kickert W., *PhD Education in Public Administration and Management in Europe*, in: Jenei G. & Mike K., *Public Administration and Public Policy Degree Programmes in Europe: The Road from Bologna*, NISPAcee, 2008, p. 70.

⁹ *Idem*, p. 74.

change of information on developments in the theory and practice of public administration; • to foster comparative studies and the development of public administrative theory within a European perspective; to facilitate the application of innovative ideas, methods, and techniques in public administration; and • to include young teachers, researchers, as also civil servants in its activities¹⁰.

Even if the Administrative Science does not belong to the Americans, as its parents are in Europe¹¹, an increased interest towards the issue of research through doctoral programmes in the field of public administration can be found in the USA. In the 70's, the Ford Foundation supported a series of studies in order to explore the issue of the PHD. The objective was to offer the universities the necessary information in order to adjust the PHD production so that it corresponded to the requests of the "market"¹². A report of the National Council for Research in the USA officially admitted the PHD in "Public Policies, Public Administration and Public Affairs" as a distinct diploma of research and as a distinct field of study¹³.

Before being able to work on their thesis, the students in the USA usually have consistent exams that test their knowledge in the major fields of the domain of Public Administration¹⁴. Speaking of public administration, it is necessary to make an observation: the expression 'public administration' is susceptible to be understood in at least two different ways: as a science and as an academic subject of study. It is important to note this having in mind that all the academic disciplines can lead to theses, without the pre-eminence of any of them over the others. As a result, any discipline, other than the one we call Public Administration can contribute to the development of public administration as a science. Political science, economy, juridical sciences, and sociology are the disciplines that contribute to the shaping of the character of a synthetic discipline of Public Administration to a large extent. The recent researched show that the science of Public Administration has a distinct identity that accommodates the majority of social sciences, and a lot of researchers no longer see it as a field belonging to Political science. Many American authors consider that the doctoral research is a source

¹⁰ Reichard C., Schröter, E., *Doctoral Education in European Public Administration: The Contribution of EGPA's PhD Symposium*, in: Edouardo Ongaro, *Public Administration in Europe, The contribution of EGPA*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2019, pp.47-48.

¹¹ See: Wilson, W., *The Study of Public Administration*, „Political Science Quarterly”, Vol. 2, No. 2, Jun., 1887, pp. 197-222. Available at: http://www.iupui.edu/~spea1/V502/Orosz/Units/Sections/u1s/Woodrow_Wilson_Study_of_Administration_1887_jstor.pdf, consulted on 15.04. 2019.

¹² Rahm, D., Brittain,V., Brown, C., Garofalo, C., Rangarajan, N., Shields, P. and Jung Y.H., *Exploring the Demand for PhDs in Public Affairs and Administration*, „Journal of Public Affairs Education”, no.21 (1), 2015, p. 116.

¹³ Slagle, D., & Williams, A., *Redefining the boundaries of Public Administration*, „Teaching Public Administration”, Vol. 36 (3), 2018, p. 261.

¹⁴ Doing a PhD in Europe vs. the US Available at: <https://academicpositions.com/career-advice/phd-in-europe-or-the-us>, consulted on 15.04. 2019.

of new information in the field, and they underline the value of a highly qualitative research for practice. On the other hand, the conclusions of other authors show that there is no “invisible hand” to guide the researchers towards those fields that necessitate their efforts the most and the lack of concordance between the academic research and practice in the field of public administration¹⁵. By analysing the doctoral research in the field of public administration of the last several decades led to a perception full of contempt of the doctoral programmes and the corresponding scientific research – the detractors thought that “the issues of research in the field of the doctoral domain” were to blame¹⁶. The authors that studied the implications of the PHD for the public administration claimed that it contributed very little to knowing the field better¹⁷.

The methodology of research in public administration remains weak and fragmented. There is considerable incertitude regarding the criteria that the research in public administration should meet and this incertitude is also undertaken by the doctoral students. The data obtained as a result of the doctoral research show that the lack of methodological progress is due to inadequate standards within the doctoral programmes, as well as to the nature of the field as such¹⁸.

Also in China the quality of the PHD in Administrative Sciences is considered unsatisfactory. The conclusion belongs to Yijia Jing who analysed 132 doctoral theses between 2002 and 2006. In order to evaluate them he used a strategy of evaluation, initially elaborated by McCurdy and Cleary that envisages criteria such as: effectiveness, relevance of the theory, causality, importance, and innovation. The author maintains that the doctoral theses elaborated in China are similar to those elaborated in the USA in 1981. The prevalent consensus in China to build the PA research on contemporary social scientific standards is considered an important element to develop institutional changes in the field.¹⁹

In Africa doctoral research in public administration is dominated by Stellenbosch University and by the University of Western Cape that are both responsible for the 38,3% of the total of the research production. The most part of research is concentrated in three categories of research subjects, and two of them highly correspond to the needs for knowledge expressed by the Government

¹⁵ Streib, G., Slotkin, B., & Rivera, M., *Public administration research from a practitioner perspective*, „Public Administration Review”, 61(5), 2001, pp. 515–525. doi:10.1111/puar.2001.61.issue-5.

¹⁶ See Slagle, D., & Williams, A., *op.cit.*, p. 262.

¹⁷ Slagle D. R. & Williams A.M., *Changes in public affairs and administration doctoral research, 2000 and 2015*, „Journal of Public Affairs Education”, 2018, DOI: 10.1080/15236803.2018.1477370.

¹⁸ McCurdy H. and Cleary, R. E., *Why Can't We Resolve the Research Issue in Public Administration?*, „Public Administration Review” Vol. 44, no. 1, 1984, pp. 49-55.

¹⁹ Jing, Y., *Dissertation Research in Public Administration in China*, „Chinese Public Administration Review”, Volume 5, Numbers 1/2, March/June 2008, pp. 27-38.

(PSD, The management of the offer of public services, and HRM, The management of human resources²⁰.

3. PHDs in administrative sciences in Romania

The development of doctoral programmes in the field of Administrative Science in Romania is relatively recent. According to the national provisions, the right to implement doctoral programmes is given to the doctoral schools. They are administrative and organizational structures appeared within the Organizational Institutions of Higher Education, namely Doctoral Studies (IOSUD). They offer the necessary support for the development of doctoral studies in a certain field or discipline, or even interdisciplinary. IOSUD can be built in one the following ways: A. out of an institution of higher education. B. out of an academic association. C. out of the partnership legally established between an institution of higher education and institutions for research and development. D. out of the legally established partnership between an academic association and institutions of development and research²¹.

A statistical exercise of classifying the institutions that organize PHD studies in this field shows that starting with 2001, for a period of time of 15 years, the only institution that could organize PHD studies in the field of Administrative Sciences Romania was the National School of Political and Administrative Studies. In 2015, this „class with only one element” enriches with another doctoral school, the School of Administration and Public Policies within the Institute of Doctoral Studies of the Babeş-Bolyai University, started on the 1st of May 2006 by the Decision of the Senate of the University.

The academic doctoral studies have two components: a) the program of academic education. b) the program of scientific research, developed under the guidance of the doctoral tutor.

Both doctoral schools shape/build their offer from the perspective of the strategic European and national documentation, the competence specific to level ICED 8 and depending on the scientific profile of the tutor. In this way, within the PHD in Administrative Sciences at the doctoral school of the SNSPA the program for advanced academic education as well as that of research regard the Administrative Sciences, the public management, the European administration, the human rights in the context of the European institutional practices, technical and economical-administrative aspects, the public sector and the public institutions, the elements of administrative right and of financial-administrative procedure²².

²⁰ Wessels, K., *South African trends in masters and doctoral research in Public Administration*, „Administratio Publica”, Volume 15, no. 2, 2008, p. 97-120.

²¹ The addenda to Government Decision no. 681 of 28 June 2011 regarding the code of the doctoral studies. Published in the Official Gazette 551 of 3 August 2011.

²² http://doctorat.snsa.ro/sites/default/files/doctorat/Brosura_analiza_strategii_si_prioritati.pdf, consulted on 15.04. 2019.

The academic doctoral studies within the Doctoral School of Administration and Public Policies (UBB) intend to educate the PHD students so that they may get a set of basic competencies and abilities in the field of the management of the public organizations and NGOs. These competencies and abilities are the result of a mixt approach regarding the process of teaching/ learning: theoretical lectures are accompanied by practical exercises. The methods of research are especially underlined because they represent the foundation for qualitative analyses and recommendations in the public sector and for the NGOs²³.

In order to speak of the identity of the PHD in Administrative Science, it should be looks upon from at least 5 perspectives: the scope of doctoral studies, their impact, written provisions for the award of the title, the process of examination, and finding the implicit and explicit criteria for the PHD²⁴. From all of these perspectives, the PHD in Administrative Sciences in Romania gained a certain identity, yet not sufficiently shaped. The sensible part remains the impact that is hard to measure in social sciences. A more general question is the way how the PHD can be legitimated. The academic literature analyses especially the legitimacy of the research methods. The effort to legitimate new methods is not small, such as participative research based on community or research as participative action, such as the efforts to defend the „old” methods, such as philosophical argumentation in political sciences. We shall consider several aspects that legitimate the PHD as a whole. The first aspect that refers to the legitimacy of the PHD in Administrative Sciences is the fact that in the society based on knowledge the desirable social roles are given to those who can produce knowledge (at least as official declarations!). Coming to meet the request of the society based on knowledge, the offer expressed by the advanced academic education is generating new types or fields of knowledge. The status of academic discipline of the public/distinct specialization within the social sciences awarding qualifications that correspond to the three cycles of higher education is the second aspect invoked in order to legitimate the PHD. For the accreditation of the master programmes in the field of the Administrative Sciences, the national standards claim the presence of at least one professor and a reader, both from the university that organizes the PHD both having their initial education, PHD or habilitation and/or recognized and relevant scientific research in Administrative Sciences²⁵.

Nowadays, there are over 80 doctors in Administrative Sciences in Romania. Most of them develop academic careers or academic careers and public roles. The elaboration of the ID of the PHD in Administrative Science encounters

²³ <https://doctorat.ubbcluj.ro/ro/scolile-doctorale/>, consulted on 15.04. 2019.

²⁴ Yazdani, S. & Shokooh, F., *Defining doctorateness: A concept analysis*. „International Journal of Doctoral Studies”, no.13, 2018 p. 35.

²⁵ Decision no. 915, din 14.12.2017 regarding the change of addenda to the Government Decision no. 1.418/2006 in order to approve the Methodology for external evaluation, the standards, the standards of reference, and the list of the performance indicators of the Romanian Agency for Ensuring the Quality of Higher Education.

certain difficulties. If from the perspective of the structure we can identify common/similar elements, the content is very distinct. The title is different within the same field (see the following table).

The content of the program of advanced academic education of the doctoral programmes

The Doctoral School in Administrative Sciences (SNSPA)	The Doctoral School of Administration and Public Policies (UBB CLUJ)
Advanced Studies in Administrative Law	Management and strategic planning in the public field and the NGOs
Evolution Processes of the Public Management	Policies and Public Policies Analyses
Research Methods in Administration in Europe (optional class J. Monnet department)	Research Methods in Administrative
Human Fundamental Rights and Freedoms	Finance and taxation
Institutional Law and European Material	

The common element of the programmes is their multidisciplinary, their juridical orientation, more evident for SNSPA. An analyse of the themes of interest shows that they are correlated to the economic sectors having a potential of growth in Romania.

4. Identity issues

As synthetical and interdisciplinary, the Administrative Science was unified by its subject of study – public administration. In terms of theories and methodology, it has always been pluralist that is a specific aspect for other social sciences, as well²⁶. It undertook excellent evolutions, but also identity crises. The identity issues of the PHD in Administrative Sciences are the result of two problems largely discussed by the academic literature, that are not agreed upon yet. The former regards the status of science of public administration, and the latter regards its methodological legitimacy.

²⁶ Pollitt, C. *The Changing Face of Academic Public Administration*, Address to SNSPA, Bucharest, April 2014, p. 2. Available at: http://snspa.ro/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Lectio_Prima_Christopher_Pollit.pdf, consulted on 15.04. 2019.

Once considered a field of the political science, public administration is now a new discipline with a distinct identity that contains most of the social sciences²⁷. As a science, it adopted a variety of theoretical and methodological approaches, and the majority of researchers consider that this diversity provoked, intentionally or not, large frictions in the epistemological and methodological positions²⁸. Under methodological aspect, a high degree of stability could be noticed, an excessive dependency to traditional methods (the most frequently used method being the research by survey), reticence towards learning and applying new approaches. The complexity of the subject of study determined positive evolutions under this aspect. If in the 80's a conservative approach could be noticed, regarding the methods of research, starting with the 2000's we may notice a considerable refreshment in terms of methods of research. A relevant synthesis regarding the evolution of research in public administration belongs to Christopher Pollitt. Pollitt considers that nowadays two strong and opposite theoretical approaches make shape. The former may be named scientific orthodoxy, and it is preferred in the USA, the former is preferred by the postmodern societies and the radical constructivists from the both shores of the Atlantic Ocean²⁹. The scientific orthodoxy operates with premises according to which the world can be represented by a system of dependent and independent variables. These variables can and have to be measured in such a way as the relations among them should be converted in statistical relations. The essential elements for this paradigm of variables are presupposed to be the same in a variety of different contexts as they simply undertake different numeric values depending on the circumstances³⁰. The scientific orthodoxy is criticised for not offering too many generalisations regarding the organization of the public services. In many situations, identifying the variables and testing the hypotheses is impossible. Moreover, Administrative Science has to also handle normative issues, and scientific orthodoxy has little to say here. Despite these limitations, the scientific orthodoxy is still very powerful within the academic communities, if not even more important than the other position, and it has a certain legitimacy of its own among practitioners.

The postmodern and radical constructivist approaches focus mainly upon the analysis of the political and bureaucrat rhetoric. The radical claims of the postmodernists are criticised for their destructive effect on the meaning of existence of Administrative Science. An Administrative Science that is limited to interpreting texts, that denies or doubts the existence of some reality, that attack the

²⁷ Adams, K., *Divergences and convergences in public affairs education and research*. „International Journal of Public Policy” 1 (4), 2006, pp. 355–366.

²⁸ Ateş, H., Genç, E., *Rationalizing the Research Traditions in Public Administration Using the Phronetic Approach*, „The Journal of Knowledge Economy & Knowledge Management”, Volume: XI Fall, p.77.

²⁹ Pollitt, C., *op.cit.*

³⁰ Pollitt, C. and Bouckaert, G., *Continuity and change in public policy and management*, Cheltenham & Northampton MA, USA, Edward Elgar, 2009, pp. 173-175.

relations between cause and effect is no longer a science of administration in the sense that so many scientists conceived. The postmodern premise in Pollitt's interpretation is: the best way to do research is conceived as narrative³¹.

We agree to the fact that there are many ways of producing knowledge. The mediation between the two approaches that we already described can be realised by analysing the way how the details of some context help us analyse other contexts and by investigating the way in which particular issues relate to theory. The focus on identifying methods without any reference to ontology or epistemology obstructs making research that could come to logical and impartial conclusions. Metaphorically expressed, it is an issue that places the wagon in front of the horse³².

5. Conclusions

Independently of the institutional contexts where it is done, research is important for the economic and cultural development, and for social solidarity. The doctoral studies represent only one of the institutional contexts within which research is done. The structural aspects and semantic explanations are not enough in order to appreciate the nature of the PHD. The PHD gets identity and legitimacy when it responds to the criteria of sufficiency and necessity. Because of these reasons we shall consider that a PHD is legitimated when it has a defined objective that responds to a social desirable need (on this stage, to the necessity of the society of knowledge), when there is an institutional context that supports the development and transformation through a proves of advanced education; through original contributions, it becomes relevant at the social level and has impact; qualification is recognized because of written provisions, and the referring to epistemology, ontology, and methodology are essential criteria.

The science of public administration is, no doubt, interdisciplinary and/or multidisciplinary. This aspect presupposes that subjects such as finance, accountancy, history, management, economy, budget studies, planning etc., and the approach within a doctoral school should significantly differ from a strict approach of accountancy, history, sociology etc.

The present study intended mainly to offer a synthetic documentation regarding the evolution of the PHD in Administrative Sciences. The study of the social relevance/the impact of the doctoral studies is a subject that suits studies to follow. The studies regarding the impact of research serve as a fundament if information in order to shape the research, by focusing it on issues not sufficiently studied, by identifying the subjects of research, by improving methodologies of

³¹ Pollitt, C., *op.cit.*

³² Raadschelders, J., *The future of the study of public administration: embedding research object and methodology in epistemology and ontology*, „Public Administration Review”, 71:6,2011, pp. 916-924, *apud.* Christopher Pollitt, *op.cit.*, 2014.

research etc. An exercise of summarizing the results gathered in almost 20 years will offer a synthetical image on the present and the future of the PHD schools in this field.

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