

Modern Interactions Between the Society and the State: In Search of Clients within Public Administration

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Romans Putans, Sylff fellow and Ph.D. candidate at the University of Latvia, with the support of SRA in winter 2015/2016 conducted a feasibility study of innovative methodology for public policies` client-accordance index that he developed during his doctoral studies. The aim of this article is to share the general context in a reader friendly manner about modern interactions between the society and the state as well as to present the major findings of the research discussing the changing concept of the client and its various roles within public administration.

This feasibility study was made with the support of Tokyo Foundation Sylff Research Abroad Award. The award and this support were crucial for conduct of the study that led me also to finishing my doctoral thesis. I am therefore deeply grateful to Tokyo Foundation and its team for this support and always kind, pleasant and forthcoming communication from the moment of announcement of the award as well as during and after the research period.

My professional, then personal and for the last 10 years also academic love for the topic of state`s clients, their important yet heavily undervalued and sometimes even unrecognized role, and the need of their satisfaction started in early 2000`s shortly after I started working at the State Revenue Service in Latvia. Being a civil servant and at the same time also a full-fledged member of generation Y (sometimes referred to as the Millennials or Generation Next), overwhelmed by very much client-centered approach in private sector, I had personally no question about the existence and importance also of state clients to whom public administration institutions are providing services. This, of course, included also State Revenue Service, an institution which seemingly might not be highly supported by clients` satisfaction due to one of its main tasks – to ensure income in state budget through collection of taxes. Even more, I believed then and still do now that state clients must be given the same level of satisfaction what they receive in most part of the private sector, including, the opportunity of choice, system of complain and feedback, and where possible also the option of changing the service provider. Despite the realization of bureaucracy-service rather than customer-service in public administration, the abovementioned beliefs led me to my doctoral dissertation titled “Role of a Client in the Development of Public Administration: Case Study of Youth”. Since scope of state clients are very wide I chose to focus the topic on youth as state clients, which in addition to state clients as such are also an important sociodemographic group of the society that in any case will be the future of the state.

The paradigm of post-industrial civil society is increasingly strengthening in modern democratic states. Among other features it is also characterized by principles of social equality and participation. As a result of having more opportunities of participation democratic societies today are having an increasing impact on the public administration, including public policy planning, design and implementation. The role of the societies and their interaction with public administration is changing toward ever closer cooperation and even more – in many cases also the co-production of public services. The concept of co-production, introduced by John Alford, professor of Public Sector Management at the Australian and New Zealand School of Government, emphasizes the cooperation between producers (state and public institutions) and receivers or beneficiaries of public services where the latter is taking an increasing role participating in the creation of the public good. The road from the state clients as a part of the society that is at the end of public administration bureaucracy functions as it was and for a large part in many countries still is practiced by Max Weber classical bureaucratic public administration model to the state client as a co-producer of public services as it is developing in the new public governance model has taken the last almost 100 years (M.Weber's "Bureaucracy" was published in 1922). During this time many different but interchangeable roles of a state client have been explored including such as citizen, individual, society, customer, client, beneficiary, service receiver, and obligatee. The mix of client roles in public administration is often confusing for clients themselves and also for public service employees, too. However, despite the role there is growing awareness in public administration about the existence of their clients and the need to satisfy their needs for common public good. In order to do so the public policies must be designed in line with the intentions of respective policy's client target group.

During my doctoral studies I developed a methodology model based on youth policy for evaluating the relevance of public administrations' policy to the intentions of the policy's clients' group. For the purposes of further feasibility explorations I have named this relevance as the policy-client-accordance (PCA) index. In the case of youth policy, first I identified the policy makers' expectations contained in youth policy documents and second – I surveyed the very youth intentions in respect to policy makers' expectations. In terms of active participation and involvement in state development which was one of the main policy makers' expectations, the result of my research led me to conclude that youth policy PCA index is 40% meaning that there is a lot of space for improvement.

During my SRA project I conducted feasibility study to identify the applicable and challenging aspects of the application of youth policy case-based methodology model for evaluating the relevance of any public administrations' policy to the intentions of the policy's clients' group. The research methods included for the most part content analyses of the scientific literature and legislative acts, feasibility

modeling as well as experts' interviews. The major findings which were peer verified using all of the abovementioned research methods led me to conclude that from the perspective of the state the policy makers' expectations towards youth are rather clear and structured while the youth's perspective is still developing through interacting, reasoning, adjusting ambitions to expectations etc. Given the limitless needs of the society which is one of the economic development pillars, the same pattern of structured policy versus undefined needs of its clients can be applied also in other fields of public policies. Another consequent conclusion was that the state and its governing institutions as well as the society places and treats the youth as a separate group of state clients and society members. The attitudes alter from socially marginalized citizens-in-waiting to the youth as a crucial asset of state development. Youth as a separate state clients' group can be identified in various policy areas e.g. in education system, justice system, socio-economic area. This pattern in its turn cannot be placed upon policy in its clients relationships in most of other public policies due to the uniqueness of youth as sociodemographic group and generality of other sociodemographic groups. The summarizing conclusion of my feasibility study shows that the youth policy based PCA evaluation model is feasible in wider public administration area however it requires specific adjustments. The methodological approach is directly applicable to other policy areas, i.e., it is possible to identify the clients' groups for each of public policy areas once they are defined. Thus it is possible to identify the respective policy's client orientation aspects and expectations towards its clients' group. Accordingly, it is possible to research the intentions and perceptions of the policy's clients subsequently providing the PCA index. However, the challenging aspects of the feasibility of the case-based PCA evaluation model in wider public administration area relate to different features of the public policies and their clients' groups. It means that the factors used for PCA index in different policy areas shall differ considerably and thus the PCA indexes shall not be compared among different policies. Nevertheless, the compilation of all PCA indexes can be used for the overall public administration system itself.

Overall, this methodology and PCA index would improve the mutual understanding of between policy makers and their clients, which is crucial for sustainable and all-sides' supported development of the state, its society and its communities.

As an essential personal, academic and professional long-term vision and impact of doctoral dissertation and its researches the author would like to see the growing importance of the client in public administration, including, better customer service and client-oriented public policy design positioning these as important strategic development elements in public administration. The very essence of the public administration is the efficient management of joint resources and the cooperation between the society and elected or selected public servants, where the latter are mediators and coordinators for ensuring efficient use of state recourses according to public (which they are part of) needs. Thus they are serving the society. With his

researches the author would also like to assume that he is participating and contributing to the strengthening of cooperation between science and practical public administration.