

# "CROSS-SECTORAL PARTNERSHIP" AND "CIRCLES OF SUSTAINABILITY" AS A THEORETICAL BASIS FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

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## Abstract

*The article considers new perspectives of scientific approach to problems of choosing the research methodology for the sphere of public administration. The main types of research considered are: qualitative research, quantitative research, applied research, descriptive and analytical research. A basic scheme for describing the scientific research process is proposed. As a theoretical basis for the development of public administration research methodology is suggested to use a) the concept of cross-sectoral partnership; b) the concept of a development model based on sustainability circles. The properties of "domains of influence" are defined: economics, ecology, politics and culture. The results obtained made it possible to prepare recommendations for researchers and public authorities.*

**Keywords:** *research methodology, public administration, qualitative research, quantitative research, applied research, descriptive and analytical research*

**JEL Classification:** H83, R58, R58, C12, C90, C60

## 1. Introduction

The use of research methodology is mandatory for any process of scientific knowledge. However, in each specific case, the selection and application of the relevant research methodology require a separate review.

Such a methodology, reflecting the focus of research on obtaining concrete results, determines not only the design, but the process itself, including the necessary resources for this purpose.

In any case, the description of the methodology should include:

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1. consideration of the factors that led to the appearance of the phenomenon under study;
2. theoretical justification and description of the methods used;
3. requirements for qualitative and quantitative analysis;
4. restrictions on the setting of the experiment, and on their basis to form prerequisites for a discussion on the discussion of the results obtained<sup>1</sup>.

The choice and application of the relevant research methodology in the field of public administration requires special attention, since the research in this field, in addition to the interdisciplinary approach, has three other distinctive features. First of all, this refers to the definition of the limitations characteristic of the subject of research. Thus, conducting research in the field of public administration, in addition to the possibility of using an interdisciplinary approach, has such distinctive features as broad subject nature, applied orientation and limited theoretical basis<sup>2</sup>. Of particular importance here is the limited theoretical substantiation of research in the field of public administration, (for example Public service motivation<sup>3</sup>, Network theory<sup>4</sup>, New Public Governance<sup>5</sup>) which obviously leads to a decrease in the practical value of the results obtained.

Defining the characteristics of research processes in the field of public administration, Adams & White note that the field is a theoretical wasteland, subject to mindless empiricism and parochialism and believe that research in the field of public administration is “strongly positivistic”<sup>6</sup>. In his turn, Jos C. N. Raadschelders believes that the priority should be the use of empirical, evidence-based studies, as their justification and the reliability of the results are rarely questioned. Many public administration researchers are looking for “scientific” based on the use of interdisciplinary research methodologies. However, the use of an interdisciplinary approach, which is often based on the presentation of complex problems of

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<sup>1</sup> Jemna, Ligia M. *Qualitative and mixed research methods in economics: the added value when using qualitative research methods*. Journal of Public Administration, Finance and Law, Alexandru Ioan Cuza University of Iasi, Issue 9/2016, pp. 154-167

<sup>2</sup> Thiel, S. *Research Methods in Public Administration and Public Management An introduction*. New York: Routledge, 2014, pp. 1-5.

<sup>3</sup> Perry, James L., Lois Recascino Wise. *The Motivational Bases of Public Service*. Public Administration Review, 50(3),1990, pp. 367-373.

<sup>4</sup> Kickert, Walter J. M., Klijn, E-H., Koppenjan, Joop F.M *Managing Complex Networks: Strategies for the Public Sector*, SAGES Publications, London, Thousand Oaks, New Delhi, 1997, 206 p.

<sup>5</sup> Osborne, Stephen P. *The new public governance? : emerging perspectives on the theory and practice of public governance*. Routledge, 2010, 431 p.

<sup>6</sup> See: Samiere, E. *Toward Public Administration as a Humanities Discipline: A Humanistic Manifesto*. Halduskultuur, vol 6, 2005, p. 13.

social interaction and the state management of the system of empirical data, does not allow the solution of a number of problems related to the practice of the public administration.<sup>1</sup>

Summarizing well-known publications on the choice of research methodology in the field of public administration, they could be classified according to the method of forming a sample array and estimating the initial data:

- a. the qualitative research that allows to penetrate into the essence of social processes, using a general overview, description and generalization of possible options for the public administration process;
- b. the quantitative research that is based on the analysis of data, using statistical analysis for this purpose in order to obtain the causal-comparative, correlation and experimental characteristics of processes related to the field of public administration;
- c. the applied research focused on conducting practical studies of public administration processes, using such methods as observation, comparison, modeling, and experimentation;
- d. descriptive, to which such methods as description, classification, analysis, measurement and comparison of individual variants are updated. Their common drawback is that the researcher receives only the current assessment of the state of the public administration process;
- e. analytical research, the results of which allow us to identify the cause of the appearance of the phenomenon and the observed effect, to evaluate the relationships between the variables. Such an analysis of the situation is critical and enters as an element in other types of research.

Estimating the possibility of using these approaches for public administration research, two main methods should be noted that are most widely used and largely determine the choice and theoretical basis of public administration research methodology: quantitative and qualitative research.

Considering these approaches, their relationship should be noted:

- qualitative methods contribute to the emergence of a theory that can be verified using quantitative assessment methods. At the same time, the depth of the results obtained, which is characteristic of a qualitative approach, is preserved;

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<sup>1</sup> Raadschelders, J. C. N. *The Future of the Study of Public Administration: Embedding Research Object and Methodology in Epistemology and Ontology*. *Public Administration Review*, Volume 71(Issue 6), 2011, pp. 916-924.

- quantitative research is more focused on testing existing theories. The results obtained with the help of quantitative methods can be supplemented with the help of qualitative methods.

It is also necessary to note the differences in the practical application of these methods: a quantitative approach involves the use of structured methods (surveys, experiments), while the qualitative approach usually uses such unstructured or semi-structured methods as in-depth interviews, focus groups, case studies or documentary analysis options.

But reducing the problem only to the problem of choosing one of them will be fundamentally wrong. The problem is not which one should be chosen, but in determining how they can complement each other in view of their specific characteristics. Therefore, the development of these research methods is their combination, such as the synthesis of qualitative and quantitative research<sup>1</sup>. They must coexist and form an interactive continuum or a “mixed method”.<sup>2</sup>

The basis for the methodology of research in the field of PA mixed methods involves consideration of three possible options: successive mixed methods, parallel mixed methods and transformed mixed methods<sup>3</sup>. Such diversity is due to the fact that the approach to the research should be consistent with the nature of the problem being solved and the reality under study. To do this, he must find his representation in the hypothesis, the definition of the goal, the design of the methodology and the research role<sup>4</sup>. To fulfill such a condition is possible only on the basis of a mixed approach using both qualitative and quantitative methods, but taking into account a number of features of the PA sphere that must be taken into account when setting the task for carrying out the research<sup>5</sup>.

Summarizing the above review of the problem of determining the methodology of research in the field of public administration, one can make an unambiguous conclusion that this task has not yet received its final decision. A possible reason here may be that all the methods considered are not sufficiently focused on the specifics of the public administration process. First of all, consideration of this specificity should

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<sup>1</sup> Tashakkori, A., Creswell. John W. *The New Era of Mixed Methods*. Journal of Mixed Methods Research, Vol. 1, Issue 1, 2007. Online version: <http://mmr.sagepub.com/content/1/1/3>.

<sup>2</sup> Benz, Carolyn R., Newman, I. *Mixed Methods Research: Exploring the Interactive Continuum*. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 2008, p. 209

<sup>3</sup> Creswell, John W. *Research design: qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. 4th ed. SAGE Publications, Inc. 2014, 342 p.

<sup>4</sup> Firestone, William A. *Meaning in Method: The Rhetoric of Quantitative and Qualitative Research Educational Researcher*, Volume 16, Issue 7, 1987, page(s): 16-21

<https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X016007016>

<sup>5</sup> *Ibidem*

receive its presentation when determining the subject of research: what is to be investigated, what data and from what sources they can be obtained, and most importantly, what should be the expected result in view of the complex, interdisciplinary nature of the public administration process. Of course, such an analysis is already in itself a complex task that does not have a unique solution. But without determining the subject of research, it is impossible to justify the choice of research methodology in the field of public administration.

## 2. Using the Concept of Intersectoral Partnerships in the Research of Public Administration

The concept “intersectoral partnership” requires that all participants come from three sectors: public (power), commercial (private) and non-profit (public), whose representatives interact with each other.<sup>1</sup> Their representation is shown in Figure 1.

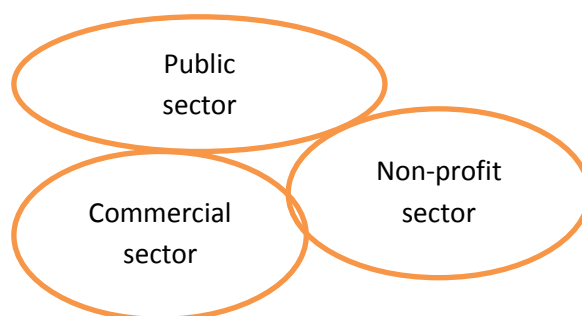


Figure 1. Main sectors of Intersectoral Partnership

The analysis of works in this sphere testifies to a considerable variety of interpretations of the concept itself intersectoral partnership. This is due to the difference in the disciplinary approaches from which it is considered, and by the depth of the scientific analysis of the phenomenon itself, which is of a complex nature, is multifunctional and multi-subject.

When solving the problem of defining the methodology for research in the field of public administration, as a theoretical basis, it is recommended to use the definition of the mechanisms of intersectoral partnership:

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<sup>1</sup> Якимец В.Н., *Оценка эффективности межсекторальных взаимодействий: инструменты, результаты и пути решения* // Политико-административные отношения: концепты, практика и качество управления. / авт. книги Л. Сморгунов. СПбГУ, Санкт-Петербург, 2010, 230 с.

*“Mechanism intersectoral partnership - representatives of two or all three (power, business, society) of sectors, a set of rules, methods, technologies and documentation for (a) the organization, (b) providing resources and (c) implementing joint work (projects, shares), which is built in the scheme of functioning of the social sphere in a given territory, is aimed at solving a socially significant problem taking into account existing regulatory and legal acts and is reproduced in the future without the participation of creators<sup>1</sup>”.*

Thus, according to the authors, in addressing the problems associated with its development, society should rely on the resources of various sectors and through their interaction to obtain the expected effect. Thus, intersectoral partnership is considered as a model of public administration, the main focus is on cooperation between sectors. At the same time, intersectoral partnership is viewed as a process in which various subjects of society jointly seek a definite solution to the stated goal that they cannot achieve alone.

An alternative definition of intersectoral partnership is the concept of cross-sector partnership or multi-stakeholder partnership of social partnership. Such a partnership can be defined, for example, as *“...an alliance between the parties representing the government, business, civil society in which the resources and capabilities of each of the parties contributing to sustainable development are strategically combined and which is based on the principles of sharing risks, costs and overall benefits<sup>2</sup>”.*

In addition, one of the approaches to the consideration of the meaning and content of the concept of "intersectoral social partnership" may be its correlation with the term public policy". Thus, Thomas A Birkland identifies common approaches that are characteristic of modern interpretations of the content of the "public policy" - a "public" rather than a purely "state" policy<sup>3</sup>:

- policy appears as a response to a particular problem requiring attention;
- policy is ultimately made by governments, even if the ideas come from outside the government or through the interaction between government and non-governmental actors;

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<sup>1</sup> Бондарчук, Е.А., Якимец, В.Н. *Межсекторное социальное партнерство: объединение ресурсов бизнеса, власти и общества*. Фонд „Устойчивое развитие“, Москва, 2010, с.16 [www.fsdejournal.ru/pdf-files/2010/bondarchuk\\_yakimets\\_03-2010.pdf](http://www.fsdejournal.ru/pdf-files/2010/bondarchuk_yakimets_03-2010.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Selsky J., Parker B. *Cross-sector partnerships to address social Issues: Challenges to theory and practice*. Journal of Management, Vol. 31 (6), 2005, pp. 849-873.

<sup>3</sup> Birkland, Thomas A. *An Introduction to the Policy Process: Theories, Concepts, and Models of Public Policy Making*. 3th Edition, M.E Sharpe, Inc. 2011, pp. 8-9.

- policy is interpreted and implemented by public and private institutions, who have different interpretations of problems, solutions and their own motivation;
- policy is what the government chooses to do or *not* to do.

Thus, the difference between the discussed approach and the traditional notions of public policy is the involvement of several civil societies and civil society actors, not just the state, in the process of designing and implementing a public policy.

Summarizing the analysis of the main approaches and views to the definition of intersectoral partnership concepts or cross-sectoral partnership in terms of their use as a theoretical basis for the development of public administration research methodology, the following conclusions can be drawn:

- interpretation of the given formulations are reduced to the representation of society as a system of interaction between various social actors, the leading role in which the public administration plays, which ensures the coordination and definition of a common goal for the realization of the interests of these subjects;
- representing society in the form of separate social groups or sectors, creates conceptual prerequisites for understanding a number of fundamental problems of public administration, allow us to specify the subject and, as a result, substantiate the choice of the public administration research method.

But it should be noted that the reduction of the public administration process only to the interaction of the three social groups obviously limits the possibilities of research, since it does not allow to take into account many other factors of influence and to evaluate them by qualitative or quantitative indicators.

To this end, we proposed to move from the concept of cross-sectoral partnership to the use of the model of sustainable development based on the interaction of four regions or "domains of influence": economy, ecology, politics and culture within the system of stability circles<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> James, P. with Magee L., Scerri, A., Steger, M. *Urban sustainability in theory and practice: circles of sustainability*. Routledge, London, 2015.

### **3. "Circles of Sustainability" as a Theoretical basis for the Development of Public Administration Research Methodology**

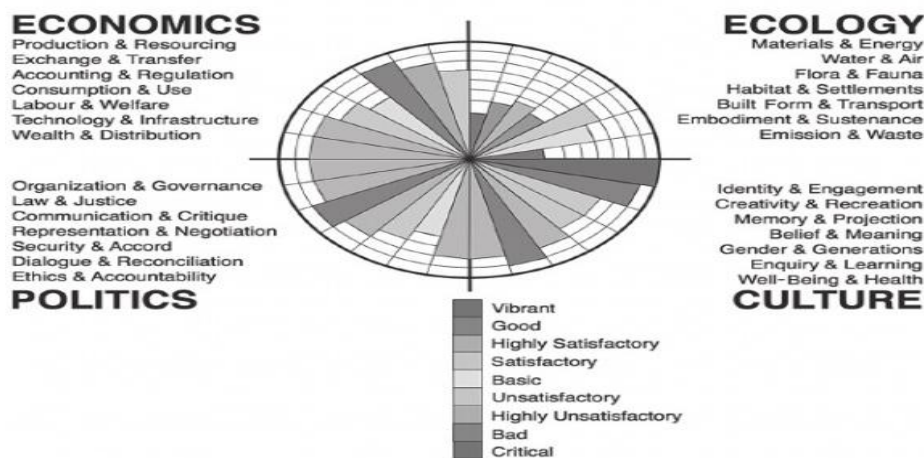
The key element in the model of stability circles is the "influence domains", which can be defined as follows<sup>1</sup>:

- The domain of "ecology" represents human interaction with the natural environment, including an artificial environment that can be integrated into it. It is characterized by such indicators: mineral and energy resources; water and air; Flora and fauna; artificial environment, processing of natural resources; emissions and waste.
- The domain of "economy" describes the practical activities and material resources associated with production, turnover and financial flows. It is characterized by such indicators: production and provision of resources; industrial production and exchange of goods; accounting and regulation of financial flows; consumption and use; labor and social protection; infrastructure (construction, transport and infrastructure); technologies; wealth and wealth distribution.
- the "policy" domain is a practical activity related to public administration, institutional environment, organization and regulation of social life. It is characterized by such indicators: organization and management; law and justice; communication and criticism; Representation of interests; security and harmony; dialogue and reconciliation; ethics and accountability. The proposed indicators of the domain "politics" go beyond the traditional concepts of politics and include the consideration of social relations in general. They exclude a clear distinction between public and private interests from the point of view of organizing a local society.
- The domain of "culture" represents a practical activity that has continuity in the social aspects of life of the local population. It is characterized by such indicators as: the possibility of identification and interaction between people; creativity and recreation; memory and tradition; beliefs and ideas; gender and education; the ability to receive information and training; well-being and health.

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibidem*, p. x-xx





## Circles of Sustainability

Figure 2. Domains of influence in the system of stability circles

Source: James, P. (et all) *Urban sustainability in theory and practice: circles of sustainability*, Routledge, London, 2015, p. xi

The use of the theory of sustainable development makes it possible to study the interaction between "domains of influence" both taking into account the priorities in their activities and the factors that affect the public administration process. To this end, each of the four "domains of influence" can be represented by its unique set of indicators, characterized by qualitative and quantitative indicators<sup>1</sup>. Their evaluation and analysis will allow us to formalize applied, descriptive and analytical research in the field of public administration, to obtain a documentary description, to classify and analyze, measure and compare selected versions of the public administration system.

The representation of "influence domains" by a system of indicators allows us to define a scientific method that is based on three universal principles for all social sciences, namely:

- The use of empirical data to assess indicators. Empirical evidence confirms our impressions of the manifestation of the factors of the surrounding world. From the feature is the possibility of repeating the experiment and verifying the findings by other researchers. In the system of stability circles, qualitative indicators of "influence domains" can be used to determine empirical data;

<sup>1</sup> Scerri, A., James, P. *Accounting for Sustainability: Combining Qualitative and Quantitative Research in Developing "Indicators" of Sustainability*. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, vol. 13, no. 1, 2010, pp. 41-53.

- practice of the logical substantiation of the principles of interaction of "domains of influence". The process of scientific research is always based on its rationale. This allows us to establish the cause-effect relationships between the individual manifestations of the public administration process. Due to the fact that there are a large number of factors of influence that cannot always be taken into account, the PA process is inherently multi-alternative. In such a situation, only the preliminary establishment of a cause-effect relationship between subjects and objects of the public administration, taking into account the assessment of the level of influence of individual "influence domains" according to the values of their indicators, will adequately determine the problem and formulate a hypothesis on its solution;

- a critical evaluation of the obtained results, including self-analysis, the possibility of correcting the conclusions reached and even willingness to change their statements. Research in the field of public administration is always based on the preliminary collection and analysis of information characterizing the problem being solved. And only after sufficient accumulation, analysis and generalization of the collected data, it is possible to propose a variant of the solution of the "research question". However, there is a possibility that, despite its reasoning, it will not be accepted by public administration practitioners. This situation is due to the fact that initially when making managerial decisions there is always considerable subjectivity. The way out of this situation can be the use of the principle of "critical thinking", when the basis for evaluating the obtained results will be the practical experience of the public administration.

Given the complexity of conducting research in the field of administration, where it is impossible to apply objective evaluation criteria, there is a need to expand the scientific theory from applied to basic research. The term "fundamental research", in its classical definition, is perceived as a search for truth, which should be free from interference with specific economic, political, ideological and religious interests. The difference between fundamental and applied research in the field of public administration is due to the difference between science and politics as social institutions. Scientific methodology, using the tools of basic research, allows to expand the level of knowledge about the general importance of the problem. In this regard, the application of the concept of "domains of influence" makes it possible not only to obtain quantitative data for the evaluation of social processes, but also to correlate them with a qualitative assessment, thus departing from the subjectivism of politics.

In terms of supporting fundamental scientific research in the public administration field, an experimental quantitative and qualitative

assessment of the indicators representing the "influence domains" should be conducted with a view to determining:

- which are the observed differences between the public administration process model (its forecast) and the obtained indicator values which are so significant that they require discussion;
- limitations that influenced the reliability and level of generalization of the obtained results.

Thus, the definition of the scientific added value of the proposal on the basis of the public administration research methodology of the concept of "domains of influence" can be based on the possibility of contextualizing the existing theories of public administration or their research methods, their presentation in a new context, indicating the possibility of applying the developed models to new situations.

It should be noted that the results obtained as a qualitative result or quantitative assessment of indicators of "influence domains" do not always fall under general provisions. Sometimes it is simply impossible to give the necessary justification and propose a hypothesis of research based on the existing data. Therefore, when determining the methodology of research in the field of administration, it is possible to use the forecast of the very possibility of obtaining context-dependent knowledge. And only the results of the conducted research will be able to show what needs to be done in order to contribute to the solution of the problem under consideration.

#### **4. Conclusions**

Innovations that are based on research in the field of PA are aimed not only at increasing the effectiveness of this process, but also at contributing to profound changes in the society in which we live. However, the results of research in a specific field such as the PA do not always find their application in practice. Implementing reforms in the field of administration can be a much more complicated process than its scientific research.

A possible solution to this problem should begin with a simple question: what should be the implementation of the results of scientific research in the field of public administration? Typically, the following standard answers are possible: the results of the study lead to a change in knowledge of decision-making, improve the management of the change process, local development policies, or lead to changes in the administration process itself.

But for this, an obligatory condition must be fulfilled that determines the possibility of using research in the field of public administration: ensuring their potential effectiveness.

The very concept of the effectiveness of scientific research by various researchers can be considered in a different context, which is primarily determined by the scope of application of the results obtained. Thus, the possible criteria for ensuring effectiveness in the public administration field can be:

- the share of participation of the target audience, potential users and representatives of individual "domains of influence", their representativeness;
- the impact of key results on the effectiveness of the administration process;
- the sequence of impact on subgroups;
- the cost of implementing the results obtained in the public administration process in relation to alternative measures.

But for this, already at the planning stage of research, it is necessary to pay more attention to the context and external realities, to ensure cooperation with the relevant persons and audiences that make decisions at the beginning. In fact, to fulfill this condition, it is necessary to ensure the representativeness of "influence domains".

Summarizing the above, one can come to the conclusion that the proposal to use the concept of "domains of influence" in the construction of the public administration research methodology will allow ensuring the effectiveness of the implementation of the results obtained in the administration practice by taking into account the majority of factors of influence.

The paper presents one of the possible strategies that can be used to improve the effectiveness of research in the field of public administration. The proposal to build a research methodology based on the concept of "domains of influence" in a system of balanced circles allowed not only to bring science closer to the actual practice of the public administration, but also to obtain an objective evaluation tool.

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