

Emerging Administrations and Sustainable Development in South-Eastern Europe. Case study: Romania and Bulgaria

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Abstract: Fifteen years ago, Agenda 21, the United Nations' call to action for sustainable development, envisaged that the necessary harmonization and extension of existing policies and plans would occur through the adoption of an identifiable strategy for sustainable development. Since then, sustainable development is a widely used phrase and idea and it has many different meanings and therefore provokes many different responses. The aim of the article is to explore the role of the emerging South-Eastern administrations in the sustainable development under the changes and rules imposed by the European Union pressure. We will analyze both concepts, emerging administrations and sustainable development from the perspective of system theory and we will make the link with the concept of *emergence*, which is utilized to research and to analyze the nature of the changes in the public administration starting from the approach of the systemic theory. The research will be focused on the states from the south-eastern Europe, thus in the case study we will make a comparison between Romania and Bulgaria, as new member states of the European Union.

Keywords: emergence; sustainability; change; reforms; public administration

“Every revolution evaporates and leaves behind only the slime of a new bureaucracy.” (Franz Kafka)

1. Introduction

In a changing and moving world with interconnected actions that create interdependence, institutions and administrative systems must respond to external environmental stimuli and to resonate, to adapt them and create the best conditions

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for the development in all aspects of social life. Sustainable development has been defined in many ways. All definitions of sustainable development require that we see the world as a system.

The public administration system, as a part of the social-global system, had to adapt permanently to this in order to respond to the new necessities of individuals and societies. These characteristics were concretized in the role that public administration system has under the pressure of the external environment in the sustainable development in the Southeastern European area.

The meanings of public administration, inclusive governance and sustainable development in a globalized context, are reviewed in order to explore how public administration can ensure sustainable development in the contexts of limited resources. Regarding this issue, the concept of *emergence* is used to research and to analyze the nature of these changes from the approach of the systemic theory and the dimension of sustainable development in South Eastern Europe. Taking into consideration the above exposed relation between the concept of “emergence” of public administration and the sustainable development, in this paper, we attempt to provide some answers to the following related issues:

- A. Is the European Union, through the processes of accession and integration and through its policies a catalyst of sustainable development for the states from South Eastern Europe?
- B. Which is the relation between sustainable development and emerging administrations?
- C. Which is the role of the emerging administrations in the creation and consolidation of sustainable development and which are the characteristics of this kind of development in South-Eastern Europe?

We will analyze in the case study of the paper the following countries from this geographic area: Bulgaria and Romania as recent European Union member states.

2. The Systemic Approach of Public Administration and Sustainable Development

Systems theory provides an internally consistent framework for classifying and evaluating the world. In many situations it provides a scholarly method of evaluating a situation. An even more important characteristic, however, is that it provides a universal approach to all sciences. As von Bertalanffy points out, “there

are many instances where identical principles were discovered several times because the workers in one field were unaware that the theoretical structure required was already well developed in some other field. General systems theory will go a long way towards avoiding such unnecessary duplication of labor” (von Bertalanffy, 1968, p. 33).

In the vision of David Easton (1974, p. 9), the systemic approach distinguished the systems environment into two parts: inside and outside society, environment intra societal including economic systems, cultural, social, of the same companies as the political system and extra societal environment, including all systems located in considered outside of society. Today, the research on the administration essentially refers to medium and analyzes their intra social part, especially the interventions of the administrative system and political system, economic system, social system.

With regard to clarifying the concept, Lugan gives a definition: “A system is a set of some elements existing in different states. If status changes are measurable we consider these elements as variables, and system status at some point will be variable list these basic values” (Lugan, 1993, p. 34).

The definition is similar to that offered by Ludwig von Bertalanffy, who is considered to be the system theory founder. He defined in his *General system theory* very simple the system as “a complex of interacting elements” (Matei, 2000, p. 8).

The systemic approach of public administration provides a consistent and rigorous basis for an ideal model of public administration to sum up all the benefits - goals for any administration, like: nationality, efficacy, optimal serving people etc (Alexandru, 2001, p. 140). As was stated by scholars (see Alexandru, 2000, p. 21), to clarify the role of government under the rule of law is necessary a more comprehensive systemic analyze, which - beyond the structural and functional analysis - aims to investigate the relationships between system elements, and of these and other elements of the whole social system.

Sustainable development is an important new perspective on public policy and administration that has appeared and it is largely used in the components of the world system. This concept attempts to more explicitly consider the future consequences of current behavior.

Regarded from the system theory, Vionov and Smith (apud Leuenberger, 2006) define sustainable development as an “environment wherein the system does not

cause harm to other systems, both in space and time; the system maintains living standards at a level that does not cause physical discomfort or social discontent to the human component; within the system life-support ecological components are maintained at levels of current conditions or better”.

Rao (2000, apud Bartle & Leuenberger, 2006) stated that the relevance of system models to the goals of sustainable development can be identified as goals of the biological, economic, and social systems (see Figure 1).

Biological system goals include genetic diversity, resilience, and biological productivity. Economic system goals include efficiency, equity in distribution, and social welfare improvements. Social system goals include citizen participation and social justice (Bartle, 2006).



Figure 1. Goals of sustainable development from the system theory perspective

Source: (Bartle & Deniz, 2006, p. 193)

The systems approach in sustainable development is a close match to the ecology of public administration, the idea of interdependence of human life, equilibrium, organic systems, and stabilization (Stillman, 2000, p. 80).

The basic idea is that complex interactions between different elements can be understood in a systemic sense: through their interaction, elements within a system co-evolve with each-other and with their environment, new structures and novelties emerge and new configurations appear through self-organization. The basic mechanisms that underlie change in complex adaptive systems are co-evolution, emergence and self-organization (Holland, 2005, p. 53). Societal systems can be considered as complex adaptive systems.

As part of the category of social systems, the administrative system changes or transformations of a process or phenomenon has the interaction between external factors and internal ones. Correlation between causality and interaction should refer to the causality process. Regarding this issue, the concept of *emergence* is used to research and to analyze the nature of these changes in the public administration starting from the approach of the systemic theory.

3. Emergence and Sustainability of Public Administration in South Eastern Europe

The concept of sustainable development should be distinguished from that of sustainability. *Sustainability* is a property of a system, whereby it is maintained in a particular state through time. The concept of sustainable development refers to a process involving *change* or *development*¹.

Emergence is one of the concepts from the general study of complex systems (in which category we can include also the public administration system) that promises to reshape the way analysts think about change and development. It is the way in which new, unexpected, and qualitatively distinct configurations appear in complex systems (Galatzer-Lev, 2002). Emergence signifies *a kind of change* (see, Pepper, 1929).

We can underline that the states from South-Eastern Europe had in the last 20 years a revolution which changed the political system and the form of governance. So, we can say that the states from this European area are emerging states and by consequences we can identify that their structures or sub-systems (such as the economic system or the public administration system) that compose the state are characterized by these aspects of emergence (Berceanu, 2012 a).

The context for the states from South Eastern Europe was represented by the interactions which these states had with the international bodies after their dictatorial regimes ended (see Figure 2). These interactions were concretized by the aim to establish relations with the international community and the aim to build a stable democracy at the end of the transition period. When we write “international community” we have in mind: United Nations, NATO, International Monetary

¹ *Sustainable development in the European Union*, 2011 Monitoring report of the EU sustainable development strategy.

Fund, World Bank which we will name generally international organizations and the European Union. The international organizations have been instrumental in enforcing the dominant role of globalizing states and transnational corporations around the world.

The concept of sustainable development itself is the result of a balancing of differing, potentially conflicting interests – environment and economic development – which takes place directly on the international scene (Battini, 2002).

In this context we can include also the sustainable development as a process of interactions between the Southeast European States and the international bodies, especially the European Union. Sustainability is a key principle of all EU policies and actions. One of the underlying tenets of European Union policy, governing both its domestic and international affairs, is that of sustainable development.

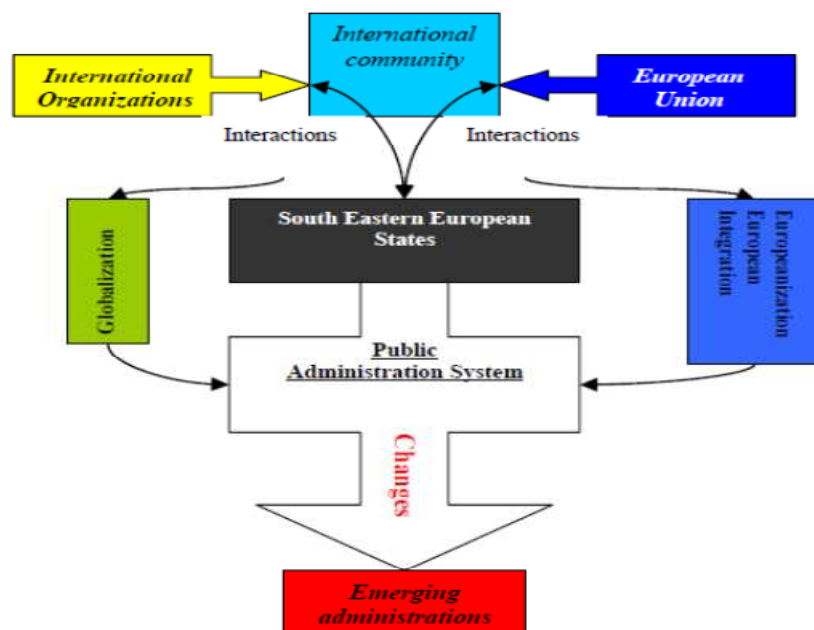


Figure 2. The context of emergence in public administration

Source: Berceanu, 2012 a, p. 5

Sustainability can be achieved at different levels. Sustainable development is therefore a normative orientation that provides a frame of reference to discuss and

direct differences in perception, ambition and understanding between actors in light of desired changes in society (Loorbach et al., 2011, p. 76). The result is the emergence of hybrid institutions featuring collaborative arrangements between a host of government, business and community entities creating a “complex web of institutional reconfigurations” in which the state continues to play an important role in the provision of resources (Lawrence, 2006).

As institutions, “public administration is part of the social order, it transcribing not only essential characteristics, but also contributing to the creation of these characteristics” (Berceanu, 2012 b).

The social values and institution are highly influenced by external stimuli which resonate with the public administration system. In our case, the external stimuli is represented by the European Union, which by its values and rules is causing some transformations in the structures of the member states (March, 1958, p. 43).

In this case, the European Union has a significant role in influencing the transformations which are happening in the government and public administration. This is because both emergence and sustainability is product of interactions among diverse entities.

Documents such as the *White Paper on Governance*, the *Environmental Action Program* and the *EU Sustainable Development Strategy* embrace the need for various tiers of government to interface in a manner that promotes opportunities for integrated approaches to decision-making at the regional level and for citizen empowerment via capacity building (Lawrence, 2006). For Southeastern Europe, the sustainability of public administration is related with a complex cycle of change in which the governments system had to adapt and modernize themselves permanently under the norms and interactions of the international community.

4. The Dimension of Sustainable Development in South Eastern Europe

4.1. Sustainable Development in the Light of the Regional Context

For the countries from South Eastern European region the context of change was created by the retreat from one party rule, bureaucratic centralism and central planning towards a new system characterized by market economy, democratic institutions and developed civil society.

The countries in transition faced the task of establishing the basics of a democratic society: in particular adopting new constitutions, transferring power to elected representatives, creating a multi-party system, establishing a favorable and competitive environment for free market operators, encouraging development of civil society organizations and promoting independence of mass media (Kotchegura, 2008).

The task of such enormity necessitated a profound transformation of the state administration and the overall system of governance. This transformation was and it still being influenced by the EU and the preparation for accession. It has been a separate and quite significant factor that affected the political, economic and institutional development of many Southeastern European countries. This factor has served as a stimulus in the process of emerging public administration, process that cannot be conceived beyond the process of Europeanization and European integration.

These two processes are those who are creating the premises for sustainable development in the Southeastern Europe.

The *Europeanization* process includes the infusion of norms and practices into the national arena at the level of domestic policymaking and political discourse, while the *European integration* process is focused more narrowly on institution-building and assuring compatibility with similar institutions and policy coherence in the European arena, at both member-state and supranational level (Ioniță, 2008).

We were stating in the anterior paragraphs the fact that the Central and Eastern Europe countries have some certain common features: they all have passed from totalitarian political systems to some democratic ones, they all have passed from a centralized economy to a market one and they all have the aspiration to become part of the European Union. These characteristics that generate the transition and characterize the states as being emergent do not exclude the institutions and the public administration.

The nature of changes necessary in society's political and economic structures and human –environment relation to achieve sustainable development are overlaid in the Figure 3.

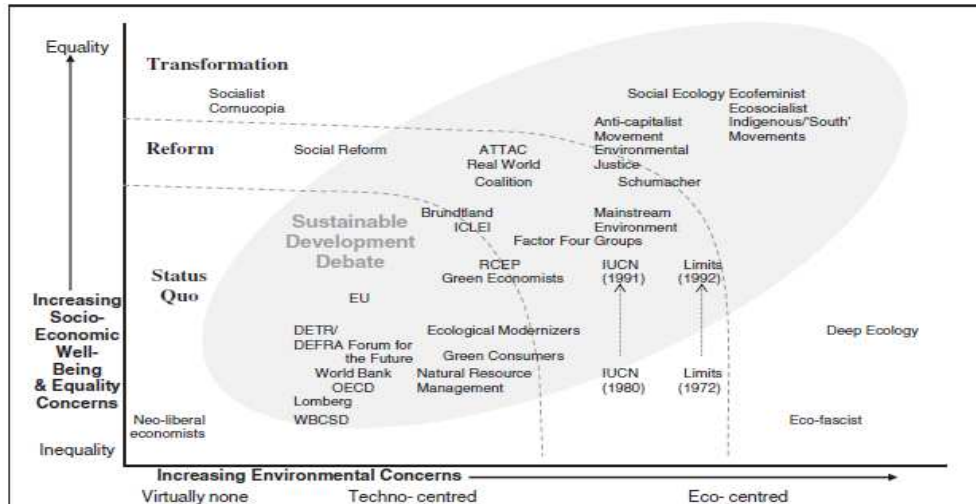


Figure 3. The dimension of sustainable development

Source: Hopwood B., Mellor M., O'Brien G., 2005, p. 41

Thus, sustainable development (Rees, 1995):

- can be achieved within the present structures – *status quo*. It recognizes the need for change but see neither the environment nor society as facing insuperable problems. Adjustments can be made without any fundamental changes to society, means of decision making or power relations;
- can be achieved through a fundamental *reform* necessary but without a full rupture with the existing arrangements. The reform approach argues that there are mounting problems, being critical of current policies of most businesses and governments and trends within society;
- and can be achieved through *transformation* when the roots of the problems are the economic and power structures of society.

For the states from South-East Europe we will refer in the analyses at reform seen as a dimension of sustainable development and as a pattern of emergent change.

Generally, we can say that *reform* means significant process changes by which implementation as well as policy development contribute to efficient and effective national development (Farazmand, 2002).

The agenda of the public administration reform in post-communist Southeastern European countries incorporate measures aimed at streamlining their institutional

role; enhancing accountability and efficiency, transparency and responsiveness; enforcing political neutrality and strict adherence to the rule of law; introducing modern management techniques and effective anti corruption strategy; and strengthening performance and client orientation.

4.2. Case Study: Comparison between Romania and Bulgaria

The public administrations in the South-Eastern Europe area is subjected to a reform process according to the requirements of the integration process in the EU structures (Andrei, Matei & Rosca, 2008, p. 21). The process is defined as an ensemble of reform measures at the level of civil service, local government and achievement of decentralization.

Building an administrative infrastructure capable of managing the task of sustainable development for Bulgaria and Romania was represented by the reform of the administration and its optimization at central and local level through modernization and organizational development. But, the exact coordinates of this process are hard to establish, especially since in the area of public administration, there is no *acquis communautaire*, so there is no law to transpose in the legal systems of the EU member states (there are few exceptions in the field of the management of European funds and of public procurement).

In *Romania*, in order to support the fundamental change of the administrative system, in agreement with the requirements of the reform process, in 2004 was adopted the Updated Strategy for Accelerating Public Administration Reform by the Government Decision no. 699/2004. One of the most important components of this strategy was the continuation of the decentralization and deconcentration processes. These principles were also stipulated in article 130, paragraph 1 of the revised Constitution from 2003.

The newly adopted strategies stated that the Ministry of Administration and Interior had to monitor the application of the provisions comprised in the reform and to restructure strategies and programs of the central and local public administration according to the European Union. A more formal institutional driven approach to the reform process was also implemented. Specialized governmental structures such as the Central Unit for the Reform of Public Administration (within the Ministry of Administration and Interior), the Superior Council for the Reform of Public Administration, Coordination of Public Policies, and Structural Adjustment) and a Unit for Public Policy were created.

Another aspect of the reform for building an administrative infrastructure for sustainable development was that of civil service. According to the Strategy for administration reform, the institutions responsible for civil service reform were: the National Agency of Civil Servants for the management of the civil service and the National Institute of Administration for continual training of civil servants.

As European Union Member State, Romania had also to align to the European standards and to perform its activity in the field of immigration in full accordance with the position of the other states. If in the past Romania had, mainly, a role of transit country for the migratory flows coming from the Eastern states in their way towards the Western states with high economic development level, at present, Romania is also becoming a destination country (Cocoşatu, 2011).

Bulgaria, like Romania and any other candidate country, had to meet the three criteria established in Copenhagen in 1993¹, and the fourth one, the administrative capacity, established by Council in Madrid in 1995.

The reform of the public administration in Bulgaria started de facto in 1998 and the EU played an important role in establishing the direction of the reform. In 1998 the Strategy for Building a Modern Administrative System was adopted. At that time the reform was targeted especially the institutional and legislative arrangements for the modernization of the administration. The most important laws were the Law regarding civil servants which represents the basic standard of the civil service, and the Law of the Administration which delimits the structure of the political and administrative bodies of the state and the local administration and its authorities (Katsamunska, 2010).

In 2006 important amendments were made to the two basic acts in this sphere. The Law on Administration amendments was related to the implementation of the administrative reform: distinguishing the political from the administrative level in the state administration, regulating the policymaking process and creating effective internal control. The Law on Civil Servants amendments continues the process of modernization of the Bulgarian state administration in the area of human resources.

¹ Permanent institutions which should guarantee the democracy, the rule of law, the human rights, the respect to minorities and their protection; a functional market economy; the ability to face the obligations that come from the quality of member in the European Union, as well as the joining to the Euro area.

After the Romania and Bulgaria accession to the EU, their administrations faced other challenges such as development and successful implementation of projects within the operational programs.

A key role in strengthening administrative capacity had even from the outset, the Ministry of State Administration and Administrative Reform – for Bulgaria and The Ministry of Administration and Interior – for Romania. Both were focused through the Operational program “Administrative capacity” for Bulgaria, respectively the Operational program “Developing administrative capacity” for Romania to establish a more modern, efficient and transparent administration. Particular attention was given to the principles of integrity and transparency appliance.

In this regard Bulgaria took part at the European Initiative for Transparency and approved the *Green Paper on Transparency* which aims to increase civil participation in decision making. Therefore, it was adopted a strategy for transparent governance, for preventing and combating corruption and a program for transparency in central government and high ranked officials activity (Matei et al., 2011, p. 80).

Regarding the efficiency of public services and the transparency of public sector, Romania adopted the Law 544/2004 2001 on free access to public interest information and the Law no. 52/2003 on decisional transparency in public administration.

They represent important steps in the establishment of a responsible and solid administration in the patterns of sustainable development. Another important measure taken by the analyzed states in their way to create a solid administration for sustainable development was the creation of regions as subsystems of government.

In administrative reforms anywhere, the search for an optimum vertical territorial structure of government and for optimum government areas has always been highly relevant issue. As a rule, institutions of government are designed to act on more than just one geographical level – they are organized into several territorial defined tiers. Besides the national administrative institutions, there exist institutions operating at subnational level as well – typically a regional (intermediary) level and local level (Cărăușan, 2012).

The regions are an experiment in the promotion, and governing, of sustainability. Regional development refers also to sustainable development and all plans for development must treat the economy, society and environment on an equal footing (Lawrence, 2006).

Government agencies must come behind community initiatives to provide technical support for sustainable development: this will mean a re-organization of government activities so that holistic approaches are adopted over single departmental priorities.

Table 1. Administrative territorial division in Romania

No.	Developing regions	Territory	Counties	Population
1	North – West	34,159 km ²	6	2,737,400
2	Center	34,100 km ²	6	2,638,809
3	North – East	30,949 km ²	6	3,836,875
4	South – East	35,770 km ²	6	2,932,124
5	South	34,450 km ²	7	3,458,759
6	Bucharest - Ilfov	1,821 km ²	1 county and Bucharest	2,198,285
7	South - West	31,211 km ²	5	2,394,895
8	West	32,028 km ²	4	1,958,648

Source: The author, upon the data provided by the Ministry of Regional Development and Tourism

For the Romanian case, there were created eight development regions¹ without administrative power by adding up existing sub-national governments (counties in Romania) into regions. The development regions fall under the NUTS II (Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics) system and do not have executive or legislative powers or separate budgets (see Table 1). They, rather provide units of observation for collecting statistical data according to EU regional rules and

¹ Regional decentralization was carried out according to the existence existing structure of local administrative authorities by amending the Law 151/1998 with the Law 315/2004

policies. The actors involved in the regional programming are the regional development agencies and councils, local and national government, NGOs and businesses.

In the case of Romania, the choice to establish regions with no administrative or fiscal responsibilities, while it accommodated requests from Brussels, was a top-down compromise solution that contained potential secessionist impulses in the country, while complying with EU requests (Bischoff, Giosan, 2008).

Regarding Bulgaria, in accordance with the aspiration of the State to join the European Union, the central authorities adjusted the administrative territorial structure to the requirements of the Union. A Regulation adopted by the Government in 2002 settled six planning regions (Table 2).

Table 2. Administrative territorial division in Bulgaria

No.	Planning regions	Territory	Districts	Population
1	North Western	10288.2 km ²	3	512593
2	North Central	18344.0 km ²	5	1165806
3	North Eastern	19899.4 km ²	6	1285803
4	South Eastern	14647.6 km ²	3	782653
5	South Central	27516.2 km ²	6	1944382
6	South Weastern	20306.5 km ²	5	2110036

Source: Adaptation after National Development Regional Strategy, 2005, www.espon-interstrat.eu

Similar with the case of Romania, the creation of the six planning regions are not administrative-territorial units in the sense of the Law on Administrative-territorial Division of the Republic of Bulgaria. The creation of the regions was predetermined by the requirements of regional planning and more specifically of the requirements related to Bulgaria's accession to the European Union, where the regions of the second level of the NUTS are the main subject of planning, programming, implementation and monitoring under of the Structural Funds.

5. Conclusions

From the systemic approach on public administration and on sustainable development that we used in the paper, we had the possibility to better understand the process of change that is happening at the level of the states from South Eastern Europe and in their component systems.

Sustainable development works for public administration practice because it offers an opportunity to consider systems that respect tenets already considered valuable in its normative orientation, simultaneously.

We also understood from the research on sustainable development that society needs to change, though there are major debates as to the nature of sustainable development, the changes necessary and the tools and actors for these changes. One of the most important actors in generating these changes in South East Europe is the European Union through its process of accession and integration.

The analyses made in the case study demonstrated that the accession to the EU and the European integration process have determined profound reforms in the European countries. These reforms gravitate around the objective nucleus represented by observing the fundamental principles of democracy, separation of powers and respect for the rule of law, which in turn represents the characteristics of sustainable development in the analyzed area. Thus, the emerging administration is a dimension of sustainable development through the way in which is adapting its own system and is promoting the values of citizen participation, efficiency, equity, and sustainability

After the end of the communist regimes, when the revolution of change started for South-Eastern European states, the implementation of sustainable development principles in the emerging administrations lead not only to a modernization of the governmental system, but also to the homogenization of structures, institutions and procedure.

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