

**PUBLIC GOVERNANCE AND STRATEGIC  
RESPONSIVENESS**

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**ABSTRACT.** *In the actual context, where globalization is moreover dynamic, the concept of solid state, well defined and territorialised is becoming diffuse while the traditional social connections (labour relations, community solidarity) are becoming weaker and more fragile. The economic individualisation, migration and cultural fragmentation hold a devastating impact upon the living environment, namely significant growth of anonymity, distrust and discontent. As an effect of those realities, the governments are searching responses to these processes of "social liquefaction". Taking into consideration the fact that the governance tools based on authority, hierarchy and bureaucracy are becoming useless due to the lack of effectiveness and legitimacy, we witness the emergence of new modes of public governance, in light of reconfigure solid ground, adequate for interventions. The design of a new type of governance should take into consideration its dual character. One component aims accountable community, as the traditional society has demonstrated that it is not able to generate spontaneously neither trust nor social capital. The second component is focused on identifying those strategies providing that accountability should be taken jointly by the public authorities and the other actors such as companies, third sector organisations and citizens. The accomplishment of such a model means to overcome several challenges. On the one hand, are the members of the community aware of the importance of their commitment? Are they truly motivated to participate in such a structure? On the other hand, how prepared are the political representatives and public authorities to accept cooperation with various categories of actors at community level? The space of strategic responsiveness introduced by the current research provides a possible scenario for responding to the above questions. Additionally, the research attempts to provide an answer to a special question, namely: how prepared is the Romanian actual society to adopt such a space in view to develop new perceptions on objectives, new modalities of analysis, innovative measures, aiming to provide an institutional response on liquefaction of modern social life. The research methodology will comprise bibliographic syntheses, comparative studies as well as social empirical researches.*

**KEY WORDS:** *globalization, strategic responsiveness, dynamic capabilities, networks as innovative forms, meta-organization.*

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The financial crises, the ideological changes towards the market, globalization, as well as the social changes, constitute the strong contextual landmarks for the current stage. (Pierr and Peters, 2000, John, 2001).

The financial crises through which states are going are the result of having run government policies by means of which was attempted the satisfying of the highest possible number of citizens' needs, on the basis of an absence of budgetary income increase (the increase of taxes and fees being considered, from the social point of view, unacceptable). The re-discussing of the role of the state has become more pressing, in the conditions of changing the ideology towards the market, but also of imposing certain simplifications, often associated with the contextual framework of governance (Stoker, 2000). The possibilities and conditions for selecting the domestic policies have radically changed, and the traditional instruments for their implementation and control have evolved towards new forms of government. For example, the putting into application of the public-private partnerships represents one way of controlling the state budget, but also a modality of demonstrating that the state's resources are not sufficient to answer satisfactorily to all development needs of society.

Certainly, these substantial changes create frustrations among certain categories of citizens, dissatisfied by the shift from traditional government to governance.

Governance can be interpreted as a political strategy whose attractiveness is based on: (1) the creation of a framework favourable to the involvement of citizens in supplying public services and the preservation thereof, even in the conditions of the existence of serious budgetary restrictions; (2) a better understanding of the *need to reduce expenses*, due to the new arrangements of participative nature, which lead not only to collaboration, but also to citizens' awareness; Governance presupposes that the interest and analysis of the aspects listed previously pass beyond the formal strategies of the elected institutions and authorities (Lowndes and Wilson, 2001).

(The) Pragmatic perspective to solve numerous complaints expressed by citizens highlights the need to rebuild confidence in key democratic institutions existing at national and European level. The answer to these turbulences involves formulating a new vision regarding the role and importance of officials in government process, which involve new paradigms of thought and behaviour. This new vision consists in the assumption of strategic approaches focused on increasing efforts towards abandoning traditional hierarchies generating corruption, in favour of innovative structures into a strategic responsiveness space, where citizens play an active role.

## 2. NETWORKS AS INNOVATIVE FORMS

The transformation of the traditional hierarchy into a network structure leads to the creation of some common places to express the problems and look for solutions and where a variety of ideas can be expressed. In these 'real battle fields' a sufficient number of actors are involved, each one representing different objectives, visions and interests. The degree of attendance and action methods of every actor participant in the network is different. Thus, compared to the unitary organizations or the classical hierarchies, these structures are characterized by flexibility.

In the last decade of the last century, the network structure was also promoted at the level of governing systems as an opportunity to involve 'the voice of community' but also other entities participants in the process of elaboration of the compartmental public policies, as F. Fukuyama stated (2004).

The model of the network structure is completely different from the one of the bureaucratic-democratic organization in which the power source is unique, the principles of the hierarchy of functions and different authority levels imply a methodical system of domination and subordination and in which there is a strict supervision from the superiors.

Hufen and Ringeling (1990) consider the network-structured systems as being social systems where characters develop interaction and communication models that present a certain continuance and are oriented towards political issues and programmes. Briefly, these systems represent real 'governing structures'.

Similar to organizations, the political systems in network can be seen as mixed structures of vertical and horizontal interdependence. The expansion of the role of other actors participants in the network does not imply the reduction of the role of the administration, but the development of some supplementary decision-making forms as a reply to the increase in complexity and interdependence. In this context, the meaning of the concept of political decision receives extremely complex dimensions. The decision-making process follows a model of communication, accession, coordination, negotiation, compromise, exchange, delegation and leaves the decision-making to the groups involved. As a result, these governmental processes are more vague, abstract and complicated; and somehow less efficient than in the case of the traditional hierarchical governance.

### 3 THE CONCEPT OF STRATEGIC RESPONSIVENESS

A key characteristic of democracy is the continuing *responsiveness* of the government to the preferences of its citizens, considered as political equals. (Robert A. Dahl., 1972, p. 1) Maximizing social welfare depends on improving distribution, as well as increasing the average level of responsiveness. A government or some other public authority *is responsive* if it makes some effort to identify and then meet the needs or wants of the people who will benefit from pro-poor growth. Yet administrators and scholars alike tend to treat responsiveness as at best a necessary evil that appears to compromise professional effectiveness, and at worst an indication of political expediency if not outright corruption. Rourke's recent assessment is illustrative: The growing demand for responsiveness in government policy-making puts the survival of a professional outlook characterized by independence of judgment and indifference to political pressures increasingly at risk in the corridors of American bureaucracy (Rourke, 1992, p. 545).

From the perspective of systemic studies, responsiveness can be defined as the outcome that can be achieved when institutions and institutional relationships are designed in such a way that they are cognizant and respond appropriately to the universally legitimate expectations of individuals responsiveness refers to a kind of *organization behaviour*; for example, whether the organization anticipates or reacts to discontinuities in the environment. The responsiveness approach is not only a technical measurement and implementation issue - it is also a political problem where changes are connected to government activity and, in the end, to society activity.

Responsiveness is a generic concept that applies to the relationship between a public service and the citizenry, and to the relationship between the state and civil society. The fundamental concern is the improvement of the quality of life in society, including within that broad concept the quality of citizen/state relations. The achievement of responsiveness in this sense is likely to re-establish the public's trust not only in the particular public services concerned but also more broadly in the state and system of governance. Thomas and Palfrey (1996) argue that citizens are clients and main beneficiaries of public sector operations and thereby should be involved in every process of performance evaluation. In their study, responsiveness of the public sector to citizen's demands is mentioned as an important part of performance control since it refers to the speed and accuracy with which a service provides replies to a request for action or for interactions<sup>1</sup>. In other words, the development of a new type of relationship between public service providers and their beneficiaries /users is necessary.

Responsiveness in higher education refers to the myriad expectations—some tangible other intangible—that are applied to university by stakeholders. Some students, for example, demand a strong institutional commitment to quality teaching. In addition, they want a safe and enjoyable campus environment and the prospect for gainful employment to other opportunities upon graduation. Some students want the institution to be respectful and responsive to broader social and political issues.

Politicians and oversight agencies want assurances that educational institutions are contributing to some definition of public good (e.g. economic development) as well as complying with law and procedural regulations. Alumni want assurance that the reputation of their alma mater is being advanced so that the value of their degree continues to grow. Special interest groups continuously demand institutional policies and practices that are responsive to their needs. (Kevin Kearns, 1998).

In the current context, turbulent and discontinuous higher education institutions are forced to abandon the old paradigm for the adoption of strategic approaches able to offer them the opportunity to anticipate and respond to challenges. To meet the next challenge, the higher education institutions must prepare to respond to student's needs and expectations.

In a global economy, competitiveness and future job prospects will depend on what people can do with what they know. Young people are the future, so every country must do everything it can to improve its education system and the prospects of future generations..."- (Angel Gurría, OECD Secretary General, December 2013).

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<sup>1</sup>According to this definition, speed can refer to the waiting between citizens' requests for action and the reply of the public agency. Accuracy means the extent to which the provider's response is appropriate to the needs or wishes of the service user. Contrary to the private sector, public service accuracy must take into consideration social welfare, equity, equal opportunities and fair distribution of public goods to all citizens. (cited by Eran Vigoda, 2000, p.166).

#### 4. BUILDING THE STRATEGIC RESPONSIVENESS SPACE

From the beginning of the 90's, resource related strategies were elaborated through the concept of distinct capability or core competence. Both core competencies and distinct capability can be thought as advanced-creating resources based on the synergistic combination of knowledge and other resources which create barriers to both imitation and mobility. Igor Ansoff and E. McDonnell (1990, p.270) consider responsiveness can be described by three capability attributes: *climate*, *competence* and *capacity*. Each of the three is determined on the one hand by managers and on the other by the organization through which they work.

- *Climate* is the management propensity to respond in a particular way, for example to welcome, control or reject change;
- *Competence* is the management's ability to respond. For example, to anticipate change in a complex environment, the organization needs a sophisticated environmental surveillance system.
- *Capacity* is the volume of work that general management can handle. Its adequacy is related to the type of response used. For example, the number of general managers needed for change controlling management by exception is very much smaller than that for vigorous change generating strategic development.

Based on these considerations, we represented the space of operational responsiveness in Figure 1, and define responsiveness according to equation (1):

$$R_{operational} = f(\text{capability}) \quad (1)$$



Figure.1. The architecture of Operational Responsiveness space

Such as shown in Figure.1, the Responsiveness Operational Space separates improvements in responsiveness into three categories and improving each of these areas simultaneously presents a challenge. According to that, it “will provide an affordable capability to promptly, accurately, and decisively position and operate national assets in public space. Responsiveness space is a vision for transforming future public, integration, and acquisition, all at a lower cost.

As it is built, Responsiveness Space is the result of convergence of managerial and organizational capabilities. For example, major determinants of climate are the mentality/culture and power position/structure of the organization. The competence is determined by the abilities of the managers on the one hand, and the systemic abilities of the organization on the other hand. Organizational capacity can be measured by multiplying the work capacity of individual managers.

Managerial and organizational efforts focusing only on “*decrypting the present*” gives *operational feature* to the responsiveness space (Figure.1). In such an area, the organization mobilizes both managerial and organizational capabilities to meet short term targets and possibly medium term ones. This approach, although necessary, is insufficient and is not able to develop and maintain response capabilities required for sustainable public service offered to consumers, especially long-term ones.

The concept of capacity helps explain a part of resistance of planning problem which was encountered in introducing strategic planning into the organization.

The new strategic work was “*dumped*” on top of the operating workload, which already fully occupied the general manager’s time. This conflict is typically resolved in favour of the operations work. This low priority granted to the strategic work appeared as resistance.

The concept of competence helps explain another cause of resistance to planning. It has been common to introduce strategic planning by means of one-day seminars during which general managers were converted into instant strategic planners. Since a majority had no prior experience in strategic analysis, the quality of their plans was, at best, marginal. The poor quality of plans produced ineffective actions which again was perceived as resistance to planning.

The third source of resistance was the historical climate of the organization. Since at the time of introduction of strategic planning the climate was typically change controlling, both managers and organization reject the change –generating strategic management as irrelevant to way things ought to be done. (Igor Ansoff and E. McDonnell, 1990, pp.264-265.)

We believe that one way to reduce and eliminate these resistances is building a strategic responsiveness space. What became clear is that successful organizations of public services invest heavily *dynamic capabilities* to enhance their operations. Not all enterprise-level responses to opportunities and threats are manifestation of dynamic capabilities. As Sidney Winter (2003, p. 991) notes “ad-hoc problem solving” isn’t necessarily a capability. Nor is the adoption of a well-understood and replicable best practice likely to constitute a dynamic capability. Implementing best practices may help an enterprise become or remain viable, but best practices that are already widely adopted cannot by themselves enable an enterprise to earn more than its cost of capital, or to outperform its competitors in a competitive market situation. If an enterprise possesses resources/competences, but lacks dynamic capabilities, it has a chance to make a

competitive return for a short period, but superior returns cannot be sustained. (Teece, 2009, p.88).

Market dynamics have created challenges for public organizations, with the emergence of the global economy, advances in technology, increased societal demands, and the need to provide more social services with fewer resources. (K. Kernaghan and D. Siegel, 1999, p. 3). As well, a widespread desire for increased organizational scrutiny has increased the pressure for change; given more accessible globalized information systems and heightened media attention critical of government inefficiencies in service delivery. Response mechanisms have emerged within the private market to meet these recent challenges, but government organizations have been slower to respond. However, a new approach, which incorporates modern strategic management tools, is necessary for the public sector to achieve improved performance and overall service quality. In this context, development of dynamic capabilities building Strategic responsiveness space and institutionalizing the strategic responsiveness is absolutely mandatory.

Dynamic capabilities refer to the particular capacity business enterprises possess to shape, reshape, configure, and reconfigure assets so as to respond to changing technologies and markets. Dynamic capabilities relate to the enterprise's ability to sense size and adopt in order to generate and exploit internal and external enterprise specific competences and address the enterprise's changing environment. (Teece, 2009, p.89), As with previous considerations on the operational dimension of the responsiveness, we can imagine a *strategic responsiveness space* defined by dynamic capabilities, and we will define the strategic responsiveness according to equation (2):

$$R_{strategic} = f(\text{dynamic capabilities}) \quad (2)$$

Continuing this logic, *organizational responsiveness space* will be configured for two areas: operational and strategic, as shown in Fig. 2.



Fig.2. Organizational Responsiveness Space

In the normal resources constrained world, decisions regarding the appropriate combination of capability components are critical to maintain strategic responsiveness. These decisions are especially crucial given the long lead times and considerable expenses involved in making significant changes or establishing new capabilities in these components. Trying to find out the correct mix to maintain strategic responsiveness, the HEI must determine requirements based on national education strategy, national interests, challenges and threats in the mid-term and long term time frames.

Responsiveness of the higher education sector to student's demands is mentioned as an important part of academic performance since it refers to the speed and accuracy with which a service provides replies to a request for action or for interactions<sup>2</sup>.

The situation in the Romanian system is different as reflected in the Quality Barometer: "when they are considered aims of the system, the resulting image is largely a system centred itself. It is rather the perception of a system whose links with the environment are insufficiently explored and analyzed, the system follows its own logic, coherent but is less involved in society and this rather disconnected reveals" ( Quality Barometer-2010 ). To recover this reality, the development of a new type of relationship between university and their stakeholders is necessary.

<sup>2</sup> According to this definition, speed can refer to the waiting between students' requests and the reply of the university. Accuracy means the extent to which the university's response is appropriate to the needs or wishes of the student. Accuracy in higher education system must take into consideration social welfare, equity, equal opportunities

In the Romanian higher education system, unfortunately, we notice a relative disposition of the university by their students. Consequently, the general view of students is that the university is not an institution to generate senses or provide directions. Thus, “students appear to be alone and insecure in the face of uncertainty in relation to the type of training they receive in the university” (Quality Barometere-2010, p.22) The importance towards the actors in the network gives this type of approach.

It is a point of view completely different from the traditional strategic approach similar to the push system in (on) which only the managerial efforts of pushing the processes are intended to lead to goal achievement.

Achievement means giving up old paradigms and acceptance of some innovative approaches in which costumers are, at the same time, co-participants in the innovation of the higher education system they benefit from. Moreover, the new managerial approaches related to strategic responsiveness impose closer attention paid to results. Guskin calls this overall process “outcomes” thinking. Our need is twofold: “to reduce student costs and increase student learning” (1994, p. 25)

Focusing on results expresses the need for the creation of a strategic vision of the expected finality, vision which exceeds the orders of the organization and which takes into consideration, on one hand the fruition of the positive influences from external factors, and on the other hand reduction (elimination) of threats coming from them. Such an approach would lead to ease tensions that currently exist in the Romanian system.” Employers shall adopt a relatively neutral position, there also an important gap between the current level of skills necessary for graduates in the minds of employers. In contrast, a substantial majority credited university lecturers or university system with much more confidence in its ability to provide labour market quality graduates.

The images contrast the two types of actors, the academics are much more positive than employers. Solving this tension is crucial for social engagement system higher education, which otherwise risks losing contact with the labor market and cause a significant deterioration of its image in the future” (Quality Barometer-2010, p.15). “To address the relationship between the academy and employment is to risk, at least in some quarters of academia, being seen as an apologist for anti-intellectualism, for the erosion of academic freedom and as proposing that higher education should be about training graduates for jobs rather than improving their minds. However, the ‘New Realities’ facing higher education are about responsiveness – not ‘downgrading’ higher education to training. On the contrary, in a rapidly changing world, graduates need to be lifelong learners. The primary role of higher education is increasingly to transform students by enhancing their knowledge, skills, attitudes and abilities while simultaneously empowering them as lifelong critical, reflective learners (Harvey L., p.1)

Achievement means giving up old paradigms and acceptance of some innovative approaches in which services beneficiaries/users are, at the same time, co-participants in the innovation of the educational service they benefit from. In other words, the development of a new type of relationship between universities- educational services providers and their stakeholders is necessary. “The employer-higher education interface is a complex nexus that needs to address organizational structures and missions on the one hand and graduate attributes on the other” (L.Harvey ,2000, p.10)

Moreover, the new managerial approaches related to strategic responsiveness impose closer attention paid to results. Focusing on results expresses the need for the creation of a strategic vision of the expected finality, vision which exceeds the orders of the organization and which takes into consideration, on the one hand the fruition of the positive influences from external factors, and on the other hand reduction (elimination) of threats coming from them.

Consequently, the responsiveness space of higher education institution according to these coordinates becomes possible only when a *meta-organization* which the university – provider of educational services, beneficiaries/users of educational service interested in outputs and other categories of stakeholders interested especially in results are part of, can be achieved.

*The meta-university*, a flexible network-type structure, is built in such a way that it ...”goes beyond a single focus on an educated work force for economic competitiveness. It sees a well-educated and trained population as necessary for future economic prosperity, promotion of innovation, productivity and economic growth, cultivation of community life, social and political cohesion and the achievement of genuinely democratic societies with full participation” (L. Harvey, 2000, p.12). Higher education institutions have many stakeholders and target groups; these have multiple actions and intentions and sometimes clarity when expressing their own information needs. Moreover, “Not all nations or systems share the same values and beliefs about what constitutes ‘quality’ in tertiary institutions, and ranking systems should not be devised to force such comparisons”(International Ranking Expert Group, 2006, principal number 5).

This construction represents a potential *solution based on co-operation between all the actors that the metaorganization consists in to the building of the responsiveness space.*”Cooperative solutions are required, not only in the form of co-operation between governments but also through co-operation between governments (centrally, regionally, locally), civil society associations and other stakeholders such as media and business.”(C. Pollitt, G. Bouckaert, E. Löffler, 2006, p. 3.) One of the main characteristic of the strategic responsiveness space is transparency. Transparency in this context relates to the need to provide information on higher education institutions’ efforts and performance in their various fields of activity. It is also related to the concept of quality assurance. If the latter is perceived as a set of activities intended to provide proof of quality to higher education institutions’ external stakeholders, then creating transparency entails providing the information which these stakeholders need in order to form judgements and take decisions.

Such decisions can range from students choosing between specific educational programmes to public or private agencies awarding research contracts and governments deciding on accountability issues relating to funding. Therefore, transparency instruments are information tools designed to communicate information on higher education institutions’ efforts and performance to external stakeholders (Vught, F.A and Westerheijden F.D, pp.3-4).

In addition, strategic responsiveness space represents a good opportunity for the concept of university ranking. This concept is rapidly becoming one of the most important tools used by both students and academic professionals across the world. Universities use them to define their performance, professional reputation and status, whilst students use them to choose their future place of study and research. With the higher education

sector widely acknowledged as one of the essential drivers of economic growth, this places an ever greater importance on the systems for assessing and comparing the higher education options available. More than a consumer product, these international rankings have become both a manifestation and a driver of global competition for excellence, therefore placing an ever greater importance on the system for assessing and comparing the higher education options available. Recognising the need for greater clarity, last year the European Commission implemented its initiatives *U-Multirank* and *U-Map* - independent from public authorities and universities. Seeking to offer a multidimensional, user-driven approach to international rankings of higher education institutions, *U-Multirank* is due to publish its first results imminently. It is hoped that a comprehensive ranking system will assist policy makers in developing longer term strategies as part of the broader higher education modernisation agenda.

Whilst universities and policy makers play an important role in establishing a vision for university ranking systems, students should also contribute to the process.

Strategic responsiveness expresses a differentiation and adaptation driven by demand from environment, and from this perspective we are able to examine a variety of strategic organization behaviours for example, whether a higher education institution anticipates or reacts to discontinuities in the environment. By contrast, in the freeze universities, there are positioned managers who "just look carefully where they go, but never at the sky." They are only interested in the present, but completely ignore the future. Such managerial behaviour demonstrates lack of strategic vision, and, obviously, the lack of performance. In this new context a high degree of flexibility and adaptability of higher education systems gives the opportunity to meet societal demands in real time, demands which are in constant change. To outline of a new entrepreneurial management context based on results first means the necessity to create new models of inter-relations development between and within institutions. Secondly, there is an imperative demand for structural changes within the universities, in order to maximize efficiency (so that they become compatible with flexible structures – network type) and increase the capability in decision-making through involvement of students/customers and representative interest groups for communities.

## 6. CONCLUSION

Conclusively, firstly the configuration of the responsiveness space implies the need for a new strategic and innovative thinking in the relationship between the central administration and the half-administrative organizations (regional, local), between administrations and citizens of local, regional communities, between administrations and different groups of stakeholders. Secondly, there is a great urgent demand to make the central and local administration structures more efficient (for them to become compatible with the flexible structure of the metaorganization) and to restrict the decision-making capacity of the administrations by involving citizens and interest groups representative for the community in the decision-making process.

Pragmatically, the achievement of such a structure implies overcoming a variety of challenges. On the one hand, are the members of the community aware of the importance of commitment? Are they truly motivated to take part in such a structure? On the other

hand, how prepared are political representatives and public authorities to accept co-operation with different categories of stakeholders?

First of all, lack of a *strategic responsiveness culture* with all the actors of the meta-organization (specifically the culture of the members of the community) is one of the major difficulties to overcome in reaching the success of this construction. The responsibility of both political and public authorities to enable this structure to become functional must be focused on the development of this type of community culture. Only when community members become aware of the benefits of the innovation of public services through quality and are willing to commit themselves in different forms will the meta-organization be substantial.

Achieving the responsiveness space in public services as this paper sees it is impossible without an informed and active community truly involved in the 're-innovation' of public services'.

Mutually, the members of the community cannot reach the level of responsiveness culture that implies commitment and attendance if the responsible agents at the central, regional or local level do not focus their efforts towards both stimulating the members of the community to commit themselves to innovating public services and revealing the advantages of '*listening to the customer's voice*' rather than '*listening to the hierarchy voice*'. In these circumstances, the traditional purely judicial relationship between consumer and provider is replaced by a creative co-operational and collaborative one between the actors of the meta-organization. Moreover, the contradictions between the concepts of consumer and provider; and the cooperation and creative dialogue relationships between actors within the meta-organization must be revealed. The strategy of consulting traditional stakeholder organizations should be complemented by an open and inclusive system that allows citizens to engage one another in an on-going discussion of the impact and relevance of their membership in a variety of social and cultural networks. Citizens need a forum in which they can debate, discuss, define and develop their collective and individual understanding of diversity. They must be free to explore, one-on-one, one-to-many and many-to-many, their common history.

New institutions and practices are needed to build and support the changing patterns of social and cultural organization. A key task is to create the kind of public space that will encourage and facilitate their efforts to engage one another in on-going debate and cooperation.

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