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Public Administration**

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Antonio Sandu, published at Lumen Publishing House, Iasi
Romania**

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An Ethical and Anthropological View on Public Administration.

Review of volume *O etica centrata pe valori in sfera publica*, by Antonio Sandu, published at Lumen Publishing House, Iasi Romania

Elena UNGURU¹

Abstract: In the volume *A Value-centered Ethics in the Public Sphere*, published at Lumen Publishing House, Iasi Romania, the author argues the importance of building a value-based set of ethics related to public administration. The ethical values considered by the constituent author for public administration are public good, justice, integrity, while operational values are openness and transparency, respect for citizens' dignity and informed consent.

Keywords: Ethical values, constitutive values, Sandu Antonio, *O etica centrata pe valori in sfera publica*.

Introduction

In this review of the volume published by Antonio Sandu under the title *A Value-centered Ethics in the Public Sphere*, published by Lumen Publishing House, Iasi, Romania, we will refer to a series of values among which the public good, justice, integrity, the distinction between ethical constitutive values and operational ethical values, openness and transparency, respect for citizens' dignity and informed consent. The author develops, with applicability in the ethics of the administrative systems, a distinction made in several papers in collaboration with Ana Frunză (Sandu & Caras (Frunză), 2014; Frunza, 2016; Sandu & Frunză, 2017; Frunză & Sandu, 2017).

The constitutive values are those values which impact on the appearance and operation of a system as it affects social institutions. Operational ethical values are the values that are associated with the management of the operation of an institutional system and sets its limits (Sandu 2015, Sandu, 2017).

The author argues the importance of constructing a values-based set of ethics relating to the public administration. He considers the public good and justice as constitutive values, while fairness, equity, justice and

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transparency are operational responsibilities associated with the ethical values of any system of public services (Sandu, 2017).

Public Good as Ethical Constitutive Values in Public Administration

In Antonio Sandu's opinion, public good represents a constitutive central value for any administrative practice. Doing public good depends on the meanings this concept takes in different social and temporary contexts. Public good is generally defined as the state of wellbeing of as many citizens as possible, in accordance with their own aspirations and interests. Aggregating the individual's interest in a concept of public good proves to be difficult; theories of public decision propose in general the rule of the majority, both for democratic reasons and as a result of the consequent results. In administrative practice, the concept of public good becomes operational as public interest being regulated in normative terms (Sandu, 2017).

The idea of public good is usually correlated with happiness, often with its sociological correlative, quality of life (Sandu 2016b, Sandu, 2017). The socio-political approaches referring to public good as quality of life are used in the construction of public policies; namely, in doing public good. Public policies that could be generated by introducing the value of personal development and updating the individual could be correlated to the affirmative action of supporting the individual in the process of self-actualization (Sandu, 2015). The principle of the primacy of public interest existing in the code of conduct of public servants in Romania (Codul de conduita a functionarilor publici, 2016), but also from other similar codes in Europe, and is not only asked to transpose into a normative plan, at the level of the professional deontology, the constitutive value of the public good. Implementing the principle of public interest is undertaken taking account of other operational values, among which are equity, integrity and transparency. In turn, these values become principles of practice, such as the principle of administrative transparency, the principle of equal opportunities and of equal treatment, etc (Sandu, 2017).

Justice as an constitutive ethical value for contemporary administrative systems

Justice as an ethical value can also be considered constitutive for contemporary administrative systems. They are asked to transpose into practice the ideal of justice in the community. The functioning of a modern state cannot be conceived without a series of institutions that would guarantee the achievement of justice. The legal system was established

specifically to administer justice. Modern democratic systems felt the need for certain courts and extrajudicial procedures to create justice (Sandu, 2017). The institutions required to implement the extrajudicial distribution of justice are part of the public administration, representing a central element of it. The model of a political system based on justice is a minimalist one; the role of the state is limited to making it possible for individuals to follow their own ideal of welfare. Opposed to justice, the ideal of welfare requests the state, and implicitly the administration, to ensure the individual has the minimum conditions to live in that community. The minimal state centred on justice is the result of a modern paradigm with post-Kantian reverberations, that emphasize the rationality of human action. If the individual is rational, he only needs fair conditions in order to pursue his own welfare. The role of the administration is to ensure those conditions and to oversee the distribution of goods and services, as well as the distribution and redistribution of added value (Sandu, 2017).

Integrity as constitutive and operational ethical values of Public Administration

Integrity manages the process of implementing any ethical values. In practice, integrity takes the form of systems of policies and procedures that would prohibit any form of discrimination, corruption or assertion of one's own interest to the detriment of the public interest, as well as any other abusive practices. From this perspective, integrity could be considered a constitutive value of any institutional practice, both in the public and private spheres. The authors consider that integrity is at the same time a constitutive value for the organizational social action and an operational one for the public administration, since it establishes for the latter the limits of functioning. Correlative to integrity – at the same axiological level – and sometimes semantically interchangeable, there are the values of equity and impartiality. Integrity, like impartiality and fairness, is seen in correlation with equity and, in general, with justice, both in its distributive and in its procedural aspect. Integrity is convergent with honesty and fairness, being an opposite behaviour to hypocrisy, falsehood, and inconsistency. This aims to express personal virtues in the current practice, especially respecting normative standards, which regulate a certain area of social practice (Sandu, 2017).

Openness and transparency in Public Administration

Transparency as ethical value becomes a principle of good administrative practice, which promotes a series of constitutive values such

as equality of chances and opportunities and respect for the dignity and autonomy of the individual in the process of administrative decision. Transparency as the defining value of each communicative action derives from the postulation of value centred on Alterity. If the traditional public servant is subordinate to the sovereign as the legitimate holder of power, the postmodern public servant acquires the role of interpreter of power and the politician is mandated to exercise it. Transparency mainly concerns access to public interest information and the decisional transparency in elaborating public policies (Sandu, 2016a, Sandu, 2017). Transparency becomes a background value with a constitutive role for a series of institutions particular to public administration, whose mission is to implement ethics policies established at different levels of the administration

Instead of conclusions

The present volume can be of great help in reconstructing the ethics of civil servants, based on the analysis of the social values that generate the need for an administrative system or the other, and those that subsequently guide their functioning. We recommend this book to ethicists interested in the sphere of public administration, as well as the public officials, who have the opportunity to better understand the axiological and ethical dimensions of the profession.

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