

INSTITUTIONAL AND CONJUNCTURAL FACTORS ACTION ON AUTONOMY IN LOCAL PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION MANAGEMENT

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Abstract

Component without which the function of local public administration management would be compromised, administrative autonomy manifests under the action of various factors. From such an angle, the space of this article is dedicated to identifying the factors affecting the autonomy in management of local public administration in order to show their actions on its manifestation. By developing the present approach, beyond the incompleteness of the existing explanations relative to this sphere of interest, we have identified and highlighted the action of two sets of factors - institutional and conjunctural.

Ensign turned out to be the action that institutional factors exert on autonomy, the latter being the greater, as the local administrative structure is higher, as the number of local public services is higher, when there are legal regulations that warrant it, and vice versa.

Then analyzing conjunctural factors, we found that the influence of the economic crisis is, as expected, adverse to autonomy manifestation. Regarding the local development factor, we showed that a local community with a high degree of development functions without the intervention of center, a situation that favors autonomy, as opposed to a less developed community that requires the support of the center, intervention which mitigates the autonomy. By examining the action of political factor, we noticed that, although politicians define public strategies and policies that will be implemented, which gives it a positive connotation, most often autonomy suffers under the politics influence. Finally, the social organization in local collectivities provides favorable ground to the manifestation and functioning of autonomy in the management of local public administration.

Key words: local autonomy, local administrative structure, local public services, local administration regulations, economic crisis, local development, politics, social organization

JEL Classification: H83

1. Introduction

Approaching in the space of this article the problems of action of various factors on autonomy in the management of local public administration urges us to investigate the specialty doctrine in the field. Reliance on a brief examination of the relevant theory showed that about the factors that put their mark on autonomy in the management of local public administration was not written much.

In this lacunar field, some marks on the factors determining the autonomy of local governments are offered by S. Yilmaz, Y. Beris and R. Serrano-Berthet, who point out that in order to respond to local needs, local governments must be equipped with administrative autonomy. A local government that can adopt and enforce regulatory decisions, that can establish a procurement system (based on national standards), as well as control and manage its workforce is autonomous administratively [Yilmaz et al., 2008, p. 16]. Therefore, the authors identify three factors that they consider decisive for qualification the local governments as being autonomous (see Figure no. 1):

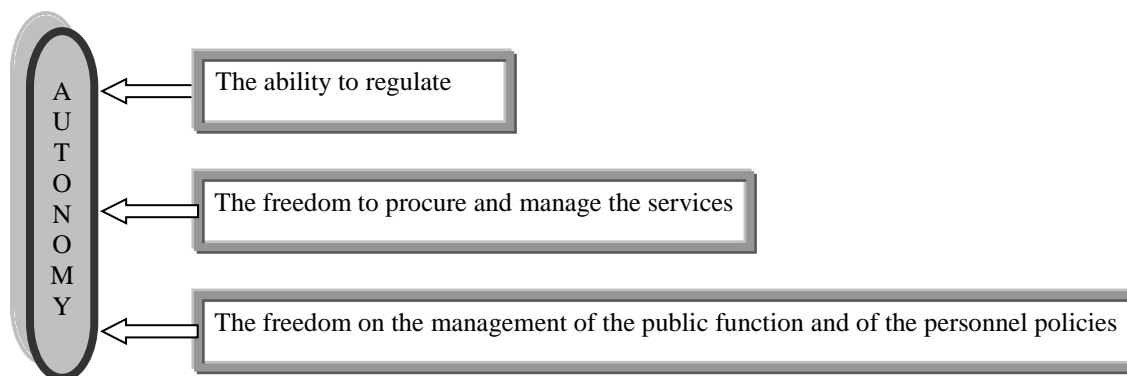


Figure no. 1. **Factors determining the autonomy of local governments**

Source: Yilmaz et al., op. cit., pp. 16-18

So, are autonomous the local governments that have the power and the capacity to initiate legislation on matters falling within their jurisdiction. In this registry, our emphasis is that autonomy depends on the situation if the local government has or has not the power to issue regulations aimed at solving and managing the current problems of local community.

Providing public services requires local governments to be endowed with freedom on procedures of procurement of goods and services, including contracts of management or service, leasing, concessions. Such freedom implies that, in line with national standards, local governments can develop strategies for public procurement and sign contracts for goods and services, situation that reflect their autonomy.

Then, the freedom on the management of the public function and of the personnel policies has influence on autonomy. Local governments have greater autonomy when they are able to pay its staff from their own budget, when they have control over qualification levels of staff and can offer it sufficient incentives, flexibility and the opportunity to advance in the career and to achieve good results.

Each of these factors affects the autonomy of local public administration management and, ultimately, the responsibility of management representatives from this sector to meet the needs of the community in whose name they act. In such a context, there is less dependence from the central government and the leaders of local structures are conferred a unlimited jurisdiction in resolving and managing local issues that interest the members of the local community.

Although some explanations on the decisive factors for qualification of local governments as being autonomous were provided by the authors cited, we consider them insufficient. In order to overcome this shortcoming, by developing this approach we want to provide an answer to the following question: *What are the factors that affect the autonomy in the management of local public administration and how they influence it?*

To find the answer to the question formulated, the present investigation aims *to identify the factors affecting the autonomy in the management of local public administration in order to show their action on its manifestation.*

Achieving this goal requires the use of depth investigation of relevant literature in this scientific field, the analysis of various views provided by different specialists offering as support for the identification of influence factors and for outlining the action that they may have on autonomy in the management of public administration local. From a methodological perspective, in this study is dominant the qualitative approach, through which we will analyze in depth the subject assumed to find comprehensive explanations about how each of the factors identified acts on the manifestation of autonomy in the local administration process.

In this sense, being concerned to identify and highlight the influence of different factors that put their mark on the autonomy of local public administration management, one may prefer their structuring into the following two categories (see Figure no. 2):



Figure no. 2. **Institutional and conjunctural factors influencing the autonomy in the management of local public administration**

Source: author's elaboration

2. The action of institutional factors on autonomy

In order to study the autonomy in the management of local public administration it is necessary to analyze it in relation to the institutional factors that exert considerable influence on it (see Figure no. 3):

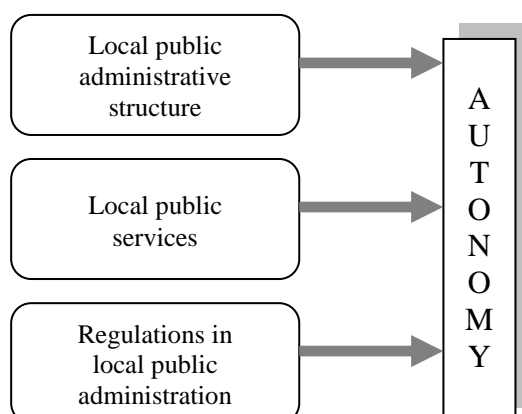


Figure no. 3. **Institutional factors of influence on autonomy in the management of local public administration**

Source: author's elaboration

Local public administration comprises *administrative structures* through which the local management is achieving and, also, the exercise of autonomy is ensuring.

The structure action on autonomy and how this factor influences is revealed by D. Barbieri, N. Bellè, P. Fedele and E. Ongaro, who studies the determinants of autonomy in agencies. The cited authors believe that large agencies (size assessed in terms of staff and budget) will have more autonomy than small agencies [Barbieri et al., 2010, p. 6].

Similarly, in the management of local government, large local administrative structures, seen as integrating a considerable number of civil servants and contract staff and which have many material goods, own high local budget have a high degree of autonomy compared to the small ones. The explanation could be: a large structure requires more resources (human, material, financial) that are liable to strengthen the power of local authorities and to enable them to fulfill the established objectives, without the intervention of central authorities in the local administration process, a situation that reflects a greater autonomy. On this support, it can be argued that a local administrative structure with a large dimension has a high autonomy, and vice versa.

As the main function of local public administration is to provide public services for consumption of local community members, autonomy in the management of local government depends on *the number of public services* [Preda, 2006, p. 354] *under the jurisdiction of local administrative authorities*. The larger is the number of public services of local interest in subordination/finance of the local public administrative authorities are organized and operate at administrative-territorial units level, the more able will be the local authorities to meet the needs of local public services, situation in which the central authorities will not intervene, which provides local authorities greater autonomy in satisfying local interests. The concise way, our emphasis is that autonomy will be more pronounced, as the number of local public services is higher, and vice versa.

In relation to factor *local public administration regulations*, it should be noted that in this sector of management the application and the reporting to legal norms is undeniable. The orientation of managerial actions implemented at local public administration occurs after rigorous coordinates established by numerous regulations. When local public administration is governed by legal regulations, it experiences more autonomy, which makes possible the adaptation of local policies to local needs [Peeters et al., 2009, p. 8]. On this support, we believe that the existence of regulations in the sphere of local public administration guarantees and reflects a broad autonomy.

For an easier reception, in the figure below we highlight, in a clear way, the influence that institutional factors exert on autonomy in management of local public administration (see Figure no. 4):

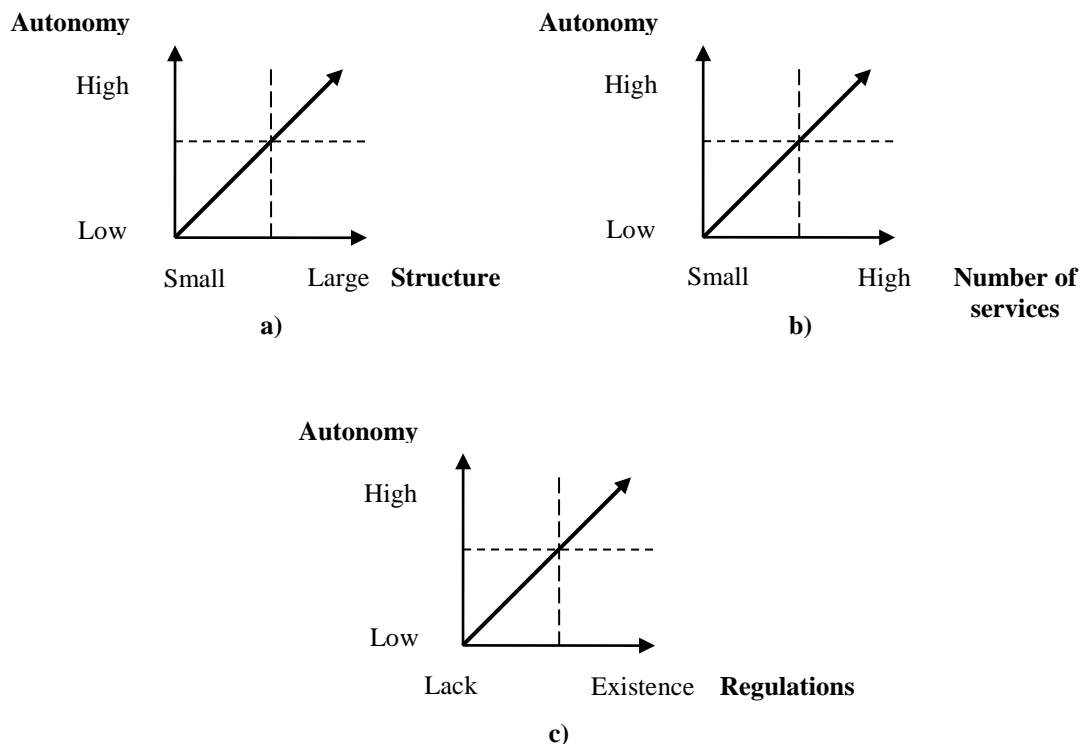


Figure no. 4. **The action of institutional factors on autonomy in the management of local public administration**

Source: author's adaptation by Yilmaz et al., op. cit., p. 5

As it can be seen, autonomy is higher, as the local administrative structure is larger (a), as the number of local public services is higher (b), when there are legal regulations that warrant it (c), and vice versa.

3. The action of conjunctural factors on autonomy

In the approach of the autonomy in the management of local public administration we must take into account also a range of conjunctural factors that affect it, as follows (see Figure no. 5):

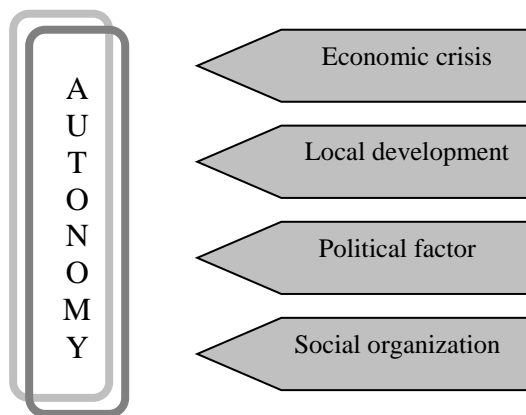


Figure no. 5. **Conjunctural factors influencing the autonomy in the management of local public administration**

Source: author's elaboration

Felt in all activity sectors, *the economic crisis* has not left untouched even local public administration. In the struggle with the crisis, local governments face a number of effects manifested in four levels [Paulais, 2009, p. 5]:

- revenue generated by the local public administration or obtained by state transfers, that are subject to a significant decrease;

- the costs, which are rising because of low economic activity and of corresponding increase of unemployment and of social needs;
- financing capacities, which are declining, because of the difficulty in obtaining loans;
- foreign investments, which fell, ongoing operations, which, in many cases, were put on hold, as well as projects that were either canceled or postponed.

Amid such constraints, local authorities will be less able to fulfill their responsibilities, a situation that has a negative impact on autonomy. In other words, the economic conjuncture caused by the crisis is not good in functioning of autonomy in local public administration management. Moreover, one argues that the central government may use the crisis to justify the instauration of the centralization [Martinez et al., 2009, p. 8].

However, we believe that although the crisis puts the local authorities in an awkward position, nearly the things can be seen otherwise and the solutions are easier found even in times of crisis. This is why we consider necessary that representatives of management in local public administration have autonomy and, equally, take responsibility for the management of problems caused by the crisis that fall under their jurisdiction.

About *the local development*, we state that every community is interested to develop in order to improve the quality of life of its members. The local development diversifies and enriches the activities on a given territory by mobilizing the existing resources and energies in the area. [Frege, 1991, p. 57] A community that is developing is a community that depends more and more of its own decisions and resources which it manages and that depends less and less of foreign aid. [Tudor, 2009, p. 341] Thus, we can state that a developed local community will be autonomous in solving the interests of its inhabitants, and vice versa.

The ones that must manage its own destiny and manage their resources are local communities, through the authorities which they have appointed to represent their interests and under the right of self-government which is awarded to them. On this support, we appreciate that the essential role in the local development process lies primarily with the representatives of management in local public administration which, based on autonomy, they will work towards improving the quality of life at local level.

It should also be pointed out that a local collectivity with a high degree of development, with great economic potential is capable of providing local prosperity without any intervention of center, situation favorable to functioning of autonomy. Conversely, those less developed communities that are unable to meet their members' needs from own sources need the support of center, the intervention of latter mitigating the manifestation of local autonomy.

In the light of the above, we emphasize that local development is presented as a factor influencing the autonomy, favoring or, conversely, limiting its functioning.

In continuation of our approach, we will consider and explain the *politics* influence over the autonomy in management of local public administration. Studying politics influence and bureaucratic autonomy in public organizations, K. Yesilkagit and S. Van Thiel argue that less autonomous organizations report high levels of political influence [Yesilkagit and Van Thiel, 2008, p. 137].

Since according to article 102 paragraph 1 of the Constitution of Romania, the Government "exerts the general leadership of public administration", it is obvious the subjecting of the latter to the political sphere. Moreover, the local public administration is regarded as "subordinate authority in order to disperse or decentralize political power" [Adeyemo, 2005, p. 77].

The influence of politics has two connotations: one positive and the other negative. On the one hand, politicians are those who define the strategic objectives of the administration, the public policies to be implemented. On the other hand, the influence of politics is disastrous and lead to effects such as "politicizing", the occupation of public posts after every election process on the basis of political affiliation rather than competence, corruption, nepotism, favoritism, promotion of the interests of obscure groups in the detriment of citizen etc. [Hința et al., pp. 9-10]

We believe that political influence over the autonomy in the management of local public administration is visible especially in case that the management representatives are not interested in serving community members, but they are especially interested to meet the superiors' requests. How not infrequently in public management functions of local government are appointed representatives of political power, the latter is able to exercise its control. The representatives of the management shall be guided in their actions and decisions according to the political conjuncture and to the political support they receive. In such a registry, we can point out that, under the influence of political factor, autonomy suffers.

From another direction, it is also to be emphasized the influence that political factor has over the allocation of resources for the local community. Not infrequently the process of allocating amounts from the state budget to local budgets is disputed due to political interference, which can cause preferential transfers based on political power. Such a situation only limits the local autonomy.

On this support, we can emphasize that political factor exerts a unfavorable influence on functioning of autonomy management in local public administration.

Regarding *social organization*, it needs to be approached in the context of studying the conjunctural factors influencing the autonomy of local public administration management.

Referring to the system of relations that exists among the constituent groups of a society [Brown and Barnett, 2009, p. 31], the social organization presupposes the existence of some formations within which individuals coexist and operate and coordinate the actions in order to achieve the common objectives.

In the management of local public administration, the social groups are designated by the term *local collectivity* which, according to article 3 paragraph 4 of Law no. 215/2001 on local public administration, includes the entire population of an administrative-territorial unit. To meet the needs of its component members, this local collectivity must have the freedom of self-government, through local administrative authorities (local councils, county councils, mayors, presidents of county councils), which manage public affairs that directly concern the locals, by virtue of autonomy.

As such, we consider that social organization in local communities provide favorable ground to the manifestation and functioning of autonomy in the management of local public administration.

4. Conclusions

Amid the ideas expressed above, we conclude that the factors identified by developing this approach transmit their significant influence over the autonomy in management of local public administration.

The institutional factors – local public administrative structure, local public services and local administration regulations – do their best to functioning of autonomy. The achieved study shows that if local administrative structure is larger, if the number of public services under the jurisdiction of local authorities is higher and if the local public administration sphere is governed by its own rules, then will be a stronger autonomy.

Along with institutional factors, the conjunctural ones – economic crisis, local development, politics, social organization – also exert their action on autonomy. Thus, although the economic crisis may have a negative effect on autonomy, local authorities being constrained in carrying out their duties, yet in times of recession it is vital that these authorities have autonomy to find solutions to overcome, being the closer to the local community members. Then, autonomy manifests differently also under the influence of local development factor, meaning that a developed local collectivity will be able to meet the needs of its members without the support come from the center, situation that shows a high autonomy, as opposed to a community with a low degree of development requiring the intervention of the central authorities, center participation limiting autonomy. About the political factor, the analysis conducted shows that when in local public administration there is a high level of political influence, the degree of autonomy is low, and vice versa. Finally, autonomy is supported by social organization in local collectivities established in the frame of the administrative-territorial units of the state, indispensable to its manifestation.

Overall, to point is the fact that considering all these factors and their actions is important for understanding the functioning of autonomy in management local public administration.

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