

REVIEW

by Prof. Dr. Anna Slavcheva Krasteva

of Vanya Antonova Ilieva's Ph.D

Horizontal policies in the Bulgarian context

with scientific supervisor Prof. Dr. Tatiana Tomova

for the awarding of the educational and scientific degree doctor in professional field 3.3.

Political Science (Public Administration)

" In management practice, there is a lack of a unified understanding of horizontal policies in Bulgaria, despite the increased use of the concept ." This diagnosis introduces the contrasting and contradictory nature of the subject of research, in which discourses and practices fly in different directions. The extent to which the dissertation was able to conceptualize, theorize and analyze the complex essence of horizontal policies and the uneven path of their application in our country is the subject of analysis of the present review.

Among the many *merits* of the dissertation, I would highlight the most important ones :

- The theoretical design of the study is convincingly articulated and structured with clearly formulated objectives, research questions, tasks, methods, expected results. The main objective of research on horizontal policies is specified in adequate and essential research questions, among which : How does the concept of "horizontal policies" enter the Bulgarian public administration system? ; What are the deficits in the Bulgarian management system regarding the planning and implementation of horizontal policies? ; What is the importance of the coordination of the participants in the process of formulating and implementing the policy and through what mechanisms is it implemented? The period is both ambitious and well argued - the two decades between 2001 and 2020. enable continuities and trends to emerge.
- A reflective approach to research, highlighting its inevitable limitations, lends academic density.
- The study follows a classic and convincing scheme - the first chapter defines horizontality in public administration, the second contextualizes it in Bulgarian conditions and the third specifies it using the example of demographic policy.

- The analysis of the new public management is interesting in a double perspective. The first is the logic of emergence and consolidation in Western countries, where in the 80s of the 20th century, new socio-economic relations began to develop in the public sphere, which had a direct impact on the ideological framework of management, where the new public management aims to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of public services, including through their provision by the private sector . The second perspective is the different logic of the introduction of horizontality in our country, which the dissertation unfolds in the next chapter. The key ideas of the new public management are clearly highlighted and analyzed, namely : decentralization of management, market logic, management based on results, customer orientation, flexibility and innovation in the public sector. These characteristics prepare the reader to look to what extent they are applied in public administration in our country. The analysis is balanced and also takes a deep look at the shortcomings and limitations of the new public management, among them the fragmentation of the administrative system and the over-focus on efficiency.
- The analysis of horizontality convincingly highlights the dual nature both as a feature of public administration and as a process within the executive system. The dual nature of horizontality is even more pronounced in terms of increased cooperation on the one hand and increased efficiency on the other " Horizontality replaces hierarchical management and centralization with cooperation, collaboration, coordination, shared responsibility for decisions and results, and willingness to work by consensus. " If this definition sounds utopian, others bring it down to earth by associating it with complex problems : " The horizontal approach is seen as an efficient, effective and economical approach to complex issues of public policy ". It is important to note that the utopian refrain of voluntary cooperation and exchange of resources still sounds quite persistent : " Horizontal management differs from the traditional approach because it considers "others" no longer as potential enemies, but as partners. "
- A balance was sought in the analysis between goals and implementation, between the high promises of the horizontal approach and the practice of its implementation. It is important to highlight institutional and non-institutional factors limiting the introduction of horizontality in management such as sectoral mentality, lack of trust,

perception of possible cooperation as competition and interference in the sphere of competence.

- The comparative analysis of horizontal and sectoral policies is persuasively deployed along multiple relevant axes: scope, coordination and cooperation, objectives and goal-setting, flexibility and adaptability. The complex and dynamic interrelationship between horizontal and sectoral policies is clearly analysed: " Horizontal policy is one that directly influences the development of individual sectors through impact within its defined sphere. The reverse effect is also valid. Horizontal and sectoral policies are linked through the outcome, which cannot be achieved by independent intervention in just one sector. "
- The zoom , the highlighting of individual concepts, approaches and trends illustrates that the thesis mobilizes the most modern concepts in public policies. Characteristic examples are the Whole-of-Government Approach as a comprehensive strategy that includes coordinating and harmonizing the efforts of multiple government institutions to address complex challenges and achieve comprehensive goals and the Network Governance Model. , also mobilizing actors from the public sector, the private sector, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) or other segments of society.
- One of the most interesting theoretical centers of the study is the application and development of the concept of the research supervisor Prof. Tomova on the relationship between politics and policies , between politics and public policies. It is developed in relation to two determining trends - democratization and Europeanization. Both put on a new ideological and political pedestal the requirement to innovate public policies in the direction of more democratic practices. Horizontality fits perfectly into the new ideological-political paradigm : " Thus, the topic of horizontal policies enters in view of the adoption of the European concept of public policies in the context of the democratization of the country . "
- Among the key strengths of the study is its critical approach, applied systematically both to the analysis of concepts and concepts and – with even greater application – to policy analysis. Coordination is a key mechanism of horizontal policies, but the research demonstrates that their organizational forms are influenced not by clearly defined requirements and measures for their work and activity, but by non-systemic

factors such as commitment of participants, motivation for cooperation, voluntary participation. The significant gaps in control over their activities, publicity and transparency, regulation of the regularity of their work, responsibility in the aftermath for the work done or not done are clearly outlined.

- Empirical research in the form of interviews and a non-representative survey validates and enriches the research with interesting results such as the lack of a unified understanding of the concept of "horizontal policies" and - even more significantly - the lack of a systematic approach to work on horizontal policies in the administrative system.
- The boldest theoretical choice of the doctoral student is to deal with demographic policy - one of the most dysfunctional policies with impressive negative results - Bulgaria is among the European "champions" in negative demographic trends: "All the main indicators to which the demographic goals are aimed policy in the period, continue to worsen their levels from 2001 to 2020. Through the implementation of the policy, not only major problems have not been positively influenced, but the level of the negative trend has not been retained. The author is more balanced and restrained, but based on her research, the reader could define the demographic policy as an anti-policy that achieves the opposite goals of the prioritized ones.
- The author's critical pen identifies and analyzes a number of negative trends such as a systematic increase in the number of state participants in key coordination mechanisms such as councils, reinforced by narrowing the number and type of non-state organizations involved.
- The multiple deficits and negative trends are innovatively conceptualized. The biggest conceptual finding is "bureaucratic network". It is an oxymoron, but it is perfectly protected by data from the research that the demographic networks in Bulgaria are dominated by state institutions in two key directions - quantitatively (a significant number of state actors and weak participation of non-state actors) and as a symbolic and administrative power (the representatives of state power dominates all participants in the network and have the main influence in determining the policy). The critical pathos of the study does not stop at the establishment of individual negative phenomena, but reinforces one negative tendency with another such as the conclusion that the state actors themselves

alienate themselves from the demographic policy and - contrary to the horizontal principles - let the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy reign supreme in the demographic policy. The general conclusion is drawn strongly and categorically : the process of formulating and implementing horizontal policies in Bulgaria is centralized, with limited participation of non-state actors, ineffective coordination between the main actors in the process and weak adaptation of the objectives of horizontal policies

There is no research without theoretical deficits. I would highlight a few in the theoretical design and justification of the methodology. There are inconclusive elements of a different nature in them :

- Some are structural in presenting the theoretical results before the methods.
- Others are related to the academic genre of doctoral research, which does not require or presume to specify basic online search techniques such as “ Structured online searching of websites and databases; • • Structured online search in Google's basic search engine (<https://www.google.com/>) ”
- The definition of functions is not convincing enough: a descriptive function (the dissertation describes the general theoretical framework for horizontal policies) and a functional-analytical function (information created through the research methodology is subjected to a systematic analysis.) The constitution of the general theoretical framework of horizontal policies also requires analysis.
- The thesis, on the other hand, is interestingly formulated, but not as a hypothesis to be validated or falsified in the research, but rather as results of research already conducted, which should not precede but follow the entire analysis.
- " benefits " sounds insufficiently convincing instead of advantages when the doctoral student compares the strengths and weaknesses of the phenomena she studies (" benefits and disadvantages ").
- Interviews with representatives of the public administration and other stakeholders rarely fully meet the profile and requirements of an “in-depth” interview, which does not diminish their value nor the information they generate, but other definitions of interview would probably be more adequate.

There is no research without inevitable deficits and imperfections. The important thing is that the results are more numerous.

I would like to ask the doctoral student *two questions*

Could you further reflect on the defense on the paradox that many Bulgarian institutional and political actors clearly prioritize and actively promote demographic policy in the public space, and it still continues to produce negative trends.

Demographic policy is a favorite of many nationalist and populist political actors. Does this political factor influence demographic policy as a horizontal policy?

Both questions are political, the doctoral student has the freedom to touch on them only in the sphere of her competencies in public administration.

Publications

The dissertation research is already in scientific circulation, having crystallized into 8 publications – a significant number for a doctorate.

The statement of contributions correctly indicates important aspects and stages of the research

The most significant, seriously defended in the study are contributions 5 and 6.

First and second contributions could be combined.

Some wording sounds descriptive and is more of a description of the research than a significant contribution, for example “ The practical dimensions of the problems in the demographic policy process were explored by examining the opinions, attitudes and assessments of experts and practitioners in horizontal policy areas. The capacity and factors influencing the process of horizontal policies are analyzed. ”

The essence is that the contributions are original, the result of independent research and well argued.

Conclusion

As a result of the high evaluation and the merits of the dissertation work, I strongly recommend the members of the respected scientific jury to vote unanimously in support of awarding the educational and scientific degree " doctor " in professional field 3.3. Political Science (Public Administration)

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