BOOK REVIEW
KEY ELEMENTS FOR PUBLIC MANAGEMENT, POLICES AND LEARNING IN PANDEMIC

Mariñez, F. y Calzada, T. (2021) (coords). *Gestión pública y políticas públicas en tiempos de emergencia. Lecciones aprendidas de la pandemia COVID-19.* Ciudad de México, Tirant lo Blanch

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This book addresses in its 15 chapters the existing gap between public policy designers who lack the discussion, creativity, charm and seduction to pierce together external and internal entities, and the operators who strive to put theory into practice. The COVID-19 pandemic provides the analytical lens, with a geopolitical perspective and an holistic overview; this offers us to reconsider and rethink the governability-governance binomial.

Synergy between design and implementation is required to find and generate the contact points between the cores that contain the ideas of governance and the operators who execute them. This is essential for leveling ideologists and pragmatists so that the latter do not get lost in the former's theoretical elucubrations.

Even though New Public Management (NPM) provides the background necessary to focus on user satisfaction through efficiency and the achievement

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of results, but it is also useful to adhere to a proactive approach on the projection capacity regarding the organizational entelechy to consolidate institutional legitimacy in the eyes of society. This scenario places us on the creation of effective and transparent social communication models, flexible and constantly updated, and thus an issue at the dialogue tables regarding the generation of public policies. Institutional decentralization at the local level plays a key role in achieving objectives designed to accomplish the necessary social coverage, and the geopolitical vision returns to decision making at the highest level.

When talking about open governments and the inclusion of more stakeholders it is important to define the limits of this conceptualization, since a poorly defined concept brings inefficient actions. Inclusion can foster a perspective of consolidation in democratic processes and modernization in the execution of public policy; however, the need for certain discretion (especially regarding sensitive information) for the management and control of crises must be present in the discussion. Discretion refers to the correct communication of highly sensitive information to all social stakeholders. It seems to be a never ending dilemma to conceive public policy and government management as technical tools and actions aimed to deliver results, especially when public servants do not meet the basic requirement of honesty and spirit of service. This gap reflects in the opaque management of health services in Latin America, the region that is the focus of this work's analysis. With this consideration, and the need to accept that the current institutional models, along with the lack of ethics-conduct within public officials, deepens the limited ability to respond and, above all, to protect populations.

In the context of government management, troubled by the globalization wave, some techniques used in the private sector permeated since the eighties public institutions (neoliberal turn) to such an extent that many of them fell into an internal loop of suppression of information even within public officials, denying them a sense of identity and institutional belonging, putting in doubt the duty of an official, which is to provide solutions to the population. Given the stance of the post-NGP –the need to return to centralized organization– in order to increase control over public officials, and the execution of programs and public policies, including the dynamism and relationship with diverse social stakeholders, it is important to ask ourselves if this is a viable proposal in the face of the pandemic and its global reach (total geographical coverage), that does not distinguish status, life styles and, obviously, no border limits. Or must we return to an Orthodox Public Administration, linear, bureaucratic, that even though it takes into account diverse stakeholders, the centralized voice of

command ends up dictating what best suits (effectiveness, order and economic power) and not the interests and social needs of the population.

The book addresses the issue of Open Government. Which is gaining strength due to: the democratic quality of each nation-state, governmental flexibility to cooperate with other social actors, citizen participation derived from connectivity and digital-age, and relating through networks. This has grown stronger with the measures that several countries have taken trying to mitigate and damper COVID-19's, like social distancing, confining, monitoring (not only in the health area) for the prevention and identification of infected people, but also monitoring the population's profiles in social networks, a constant search for information to help reduce the sense of uncertainty that can be felt in the lack of capacity to respond by the government´s institutions. It is worth asking: Is citizen participation in government issues through social networks equivalent to their participation and interest in everyday life? Is there an equivalence between electronic interaction and real interaction? This may be an important point to ponder to measure the viability of open government (openness) in the medium and long term future.

The objective of public policy must not only be based on the containment of harm; its main importance must be its ability to prevent. The book *Gestión pública y políticas públicas en tiempos de emergencia. Lecciones aprendidas de la pandemia COVID-19* visualizes the expertise of some governments (Mexico, Brazil and Venezuela) to contain the fissure of each entelechy in their very particular way to face the current situation, and omits to a great extent, the capacity of foresight and pre-prospective of possible catastrophic scenarios such as Sars Cov 2. The work takes into account the multifactorial and sui generis perspective of each State-Nation.

For Brazil we address the existing problems between the quasi-perpetual Federalism through a militarized system and its evolution and transition to current scenarios of greater social participation until the country's democratic life is restored. Regarding Venezuela, where in the last six years its crisis in all areas from the economic to the social has increased, has paradoxically shown a much lower rate of lethality and contagion than was predicted, often fatalistically by various media. We do not make an absolutist apology of this government or shift responsibilities for factors that do not fall within the scope of the analysis of this work, but rather that against all odds, Venezuela has fared better than other governments, even with greater decline in various areas. For the analysis of Mexico, we are faced with a critical observation regarding the aforementioned centralization of the current government headed by President Andrés Manuel López Obrador and the power of communication

and operability granted to the Undersecretary of Health, Hugo López-Gatell, as well as the notorious institutional insufficiency to provide effective responses to the problems generated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

In the case of the three countries mentioned, the perspective of greater responsibility undoubtedly falls on the federal government and its presidents. The issue here, as the book addresses in chapters seven, eight, ten, eleven, twelve, thirteen and fourteen, specifically in the case of Mexico, although I presume as an example in another country, is whether the problem has not been addressed from the wrong pyramidal level. What we mean by this is, that if the major responsibility with full knowledge of the lack of intergovernmental coordination should not fall on the local government? Starting from the micro to the macro and not vice-versa. The implementation, design and proposal of the public policy from the municipalities, reviewed by the state level and if needed and feasible, for replication at the Federal level with their respective particularities (analysis of local conditions). This is most certainly a topic for debate. Study centers, academics, researchers, designers and executors of public policies that promote open government and transparency as resilient ways to rethink the post-pandemic Public Administration, should focus their proposals to solve problems at the local level, before wanting to ascend to the national level.

With the use of technologies, artificial intelligence models, foresight exercises, open digital documents, databases and inter-institutional cooperation at certain levels, could be more feasible and result in greater benefit to society if efforts are deployed at the local level. The lobbying of those who design public policy with the Political Coordination Boards of each of the states, who are the ones who decide and manage the programs, are essential to generate tangible coverage responses and not wait for a federal (presidential) ruling. Regardless of the status of a democratic country, the responsibility cannot fall on a single government level when fostering about openness and the participation of diverse social and private stakeholders, considering the future and horizon for which we will have to constantly fight.

When focusing in Mexico we can highlight the cases of the state governments of Nuevo Leon, Sonora, Yucatan, Jalisco and Sinaloa with their respective methods, strategies and programs to face the pandemic and its crisis. We find the constant complaint regarding the lack of inter-institutional coordination within the three government levels in the public health administration. These complaints do not respond to the constant disengagement of state governments with municipalities, which, do not commit themselves to make transparency a priority in their governments. Comparing the budgets between the different

states analyzed in this work, it is clear that the governors, rather than proposing and engaging in constructive dialogue, focus on demanding a larger budget from the federation and, additionally demand for freedom and autonomy to spend the money on their programs and strategies that do not admit any type of audit or supervision under the discourse of autonomy.

This is why it is necessary to rethink where the true public management is born, at what government level. We must leave aside the individualistic aspirational ideas and desires of public officials, who often confuse what they believe should be with what the circumstances and scenarios reveal as reality. One reality is that as long as there are no more severe filters for public officials, public policies gradually fade into the background and only the interests of a few prevail. This will only continue to be platforms for the opulence and bureaucratic corruption that still permeates institutions at all levels.

The proactivity demonstrated by social external actors to the government that will force to make a 180 degrees turn to change the perspective. Doing 360 degrees just makes us end where we started, 'changing everything' to keep it the same, empty speeches, mismanaged programs, misunderstood, creation and suppression of new institutions that beyond seeking social progress and the resolution of known problems, continue to be incubators of bureaucratic parasitism.

From every crisis an opportunity is born. This work examines the opportunity to rethink the paths, form and substance of government institutions, their relationship with various social actors. From a technical perspective, it encourages –the academic– to use the most powerful weapons that exist, which are the proactive ideas that emanate from a genuine interest in providing real and tangible answers and solutions to the communities and populations deprived by the ineffectiveness and inefficiency of forms of governance or the ones that pretend to be.