

Local public management as guarantor of efficiency in the Cuban public administration

La gestión pública local como garante de la eficacia en la administración pública cubana



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ABSTRACT

The Public Administration has as maximum aspiration to be increasingly effective and efficient in the responses it offers to the State, citizens and other actors of society, this implies. The implementation of a wide range of actions at the administrative level, including the simplification of procedures, the use of technologies to improve the provision of public services, the management of processes and the strengthening of the capacities of civil servants, require a process of cultural transformation in the management subjects of the Public Administration in order to fulfill the assigned functions. Even when the results achieved by municipal governments, with an emphasis on local development are recognized, the project of changes the country is facing requires the improvement of their management

RESUMEN

La Administración Pública tiene como máxima aspiración ser cada vez más eficaz y eficiente en las respuestas que ofrecen al Estado, ciudadanos y otros actores de la sociedad. La realización de una amplia gama de acciones, a nivel administrativo, entre las que se encuentran la simplificación de trámites, el uso de las tecnologías para mejorar la provisión de servicios públicos, la gestión de los procesos y el fortalecimiento de capacidades de los funcionarios, exigen un proceso de transformación cultural en los sujetos de dirección de la Administración Pública con el fin de que pueda cumplir con las funciones asignadas. Aun cuando se reconocen los resultados que alcanzan los gobiernos municipales con énfasis en el desarrollo local, el proyecto de cambios que enfrenta el país exige el perfeccionamiento de sus sistemas de

systems and the reformulation of work goals and objectives, which constitute elements of take into account when proposing general guidelines to drive the management of municipal governments and some alternatives to achieve it in correspondence with the approved governing documents, which serve as a platform for the development of the country, that is the objective of this work.

Keywords: public management; municipal governments; effectiveness; public services

gestión y la reformulación de metas y objetivos de trabajo, lo cual constituyen elementos a tener en cuenta a la hora de proponer las directrices generales para orientar la gestión de los gobiernos municipales y algunas alternativas para lograrlo en correspondencia con los documentos rectores aprobados, que sirven de plataforma para el desarrollo del país, lo cual constituye objetivo del presente trabajo.

Palabras claves: gestión pública; gobiernos municipales; eficacia; servicios públicos

INTRODUCTION

Today, immersed in an increasingly globalized world, it seems clear that ensuring that scarce resources are applied towards the generation of goods and services to meet the needs of citizens, is a fundamental premise.

The modernization of public administration is one of the factors on which the foundations are laid for the progress of people, enterprises and society in general, and the levels of efficiency and effectiveness in management must be improved in order to offer satisfactory responses to citizens' demands through more and better services, a task that is closely related to the municipalities due to their proximity to citizens.

The approach to this purpose has been, in recent years, reason for reflection, which brings with it the emergence of a new scenario at the local level.

It is true that progress has been made in perfecting the economic model at the country level, but its success, according to

Tamayo (2016), focuses on the negotiation processes between the sector and the territory, taking into consideration the specificities of the territories, the way to implement the proposals and even to adapt them.

But this is a fundamental question, can the transformations that are being carried out in Cuba, endorsed in the governing documents of the Party and the Revolution, advance with the necessary quality and speed, if the public administration and its management are not perfected from the local level?

Given this situation, are institutions, civil servants, citizens and new economic actors prepared in relation to the meaning of public service, in terms of defending the value it possesses for citizens?

Such a line of thought demands that local governments be oriented to the interpretation of the demands of the environment; in short, it is about new scenarios where, at the same time that

new schemes of operation and recognition of management styles that lead to transparency, quality, excellence and participation are appreciated, it is also observed that local governments must direct their management towards the integration of systems, services and sources of information for the establishment of internal processes that offer greater effectiveness to the results.

On a daily basis, citizens exchange with public institutions, in order to receive a product or service, resort to procedures or other facilities. The personnel of these institutions are responsible for the satisfaction or dissatisfaction perceived by the citizen, whether due to undue attention or limited resources that need to be shared to provide attention to a high number of demands.

In this regard, the action of public servants is essential, who, from government or administrative functions, interact directly or indirectly for the benefit of society. In the same way, it is in charge of carrying out the fulfillment of the objectives of the public administration, its management goes beyond fulfilling certain functions of the position it carries out, because it puts in it, capacities, attitudes and practical abilities with the objective of satisfying the needs it serves.

As an irrefutable condition, it must prevail that, in the face of such commitment, efforts must be directed to the consolidation of an effective government in its performance, with citizen orientation, in order to improve the goods and services it provides, with rational optimization of the resources it possesses, with an adequate use of information and communication technologies to ensure transparency and accountability, promote participation and orient its management to results.

From this perspective and before the process of transformations that the country faces, in the activity or management in the public administration, the need for its strengthening is evident; the management of change has to be sustained on the basis of a strategic and innovative thought that fertilizes the implementation of new behaviors and actions in accordance with the challenges that the international, national and local context impose.

An approach to these issues constitutes a reason for reflection to contribute to the achievement of governance at the local level, which is precisely our intention in this section.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

As part of the research process, different scientific methods were used, among which the dialectical-materialist method stands out, which made it possible to highlight the contradictions present in the components of the research object, leading to the search for new regularities in the functions and structures of the public management process.

The historical-logical method is also used to determine the tendencies of local public management as a guarantor of efficiency in Cuban public administration.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Reflections on governance

Towards the interior of the States and together with the processes of decentralization, governance emerges,

distinguished by the implementation of public programs by the various actors of society through cooperation in decision making.

When analyzing governance issues, in order to achieve greater levels of effectiveness in government decisions, the relationship with other disciplines such as Law, Economics, Sociology, among others, must be taken into account in order to achieve the appropriate balance between objectives and results as fundamental pillars for management in public administration (Longo, 2010).

The opinion of international organizations on the issue of governance is associated with good governance based on principles that allow high levels of government effectiveness in its management (UN, 2012) while the United Nations Development Programme (2000) outlines the Governance Strategy for Human Development, which comprises the mechanisms and processes by which citizens and groups articulate their interests, resolve their differences and exercise their legal rights and obligations.

In general terms, Mayntz (2000) distinguishes it as a new style of government, distinct from the hierarchical control model and characterized by a greater degree of cooperation and interaction between the state and non-state actors within decisive mixed networks between the public and the private. Similarly, Rhodes (2012, p. 33) expresses that they are the "new processes of government or the new methods by which society is governed".

This forces us to think that governance in its approaches has a systemic-integral function, which is defended by Flores (2010). The author asserts that the capacities, to facilitate links and

integration between the public administrations with the citizens, organizations, institutions and the diverse actors that intervene in the socioeconomic development, will allow to obtain the necessary balance in the application of instruments, methods, devices, information systems that allow the modification of the social environment.

It is important to appreciate in the previous definitions the importance they attribute to the strengthening of public administration from the local level, so that the consensus generated facilitates decentralization-deconcentration from the central level to the local level.

Decentralizing processes have taken off in recent years in many countries of the world, some with favorable experiences and others not very significant. Precisely, Manrique (2010, p. 79) asserts that "the only character that can be pointed out as fundamental of the decentralization regime is that the civil servants and employees that integrate it enjoy an organic autonomy and are not subject to hierarchical powers". In this way, it highlights the difference between decentralization and centralization, marked by the autonomy acquired by decentralized bodies as they decongest functions that were previously governed by central levels and the scope for a rapid and timely approach of government to citizens and their needs.

Taking advantage of the decentralization processes, through the articulation State-Society and the strengthening of the local in the institutional, leads to the promotion of important conditioning factors for the improvement of the quality of life of citizens, the management of innovation, the generation of new knowledge, among other issues, that allow the approach and

solution of problems with an integral vision (Calves & Machín, 2016).

However, despite some positive results, decentralization is still an unfinished business. If it is not well conceived, it could cause a disproportionate territorial development and the conformation of local elites with particular interests that could attempt against the society's welfare (Méndez Delgado, 2004). In that direction, to conceive the decentralization with a multidimensional approach, integrator, enabler of the innovation and generator of new knowledge, where the incorporation of the citizens, in the management, will contribute to a greater effectiveness in the decision making.

Consequently, it is necessary to resize the management of local governments towards policies that contribute to the satisfaction of citizens' needs, which will allow to establish and strengthen the links that are established between both. If we have as a basis proposals by the citizens for the solution of daily and relevant issues, it increases the confidence of the citizens in their governors, since proximity, knowledge and institutional relations explain and justify the degree of commitment of the local governments in this challenge.

There are, however, many common arguments that the local, territorial or municipal level, as it is indistinctly called, is the propitious framework for improving the services provided, it is the scale in which people meet face to face, the possibility of creating associations, finding synergies and articulating actors for mutual support in the design of strategies that become a tailored suit for the locality.

Government and local administration have proved to be a fertile field for the implementation of innovative experiences

in public management, regardless of the fact that processes aimed at improving the provision of services to citizens require new areas of analysis, where collective management prevails in order to offer responses adapted to particular problems.

Thus, according to the criteria of Farto and Virizuela (1988), there is an urgent need for local governments to abandon the passive, dependent and subordinate role of other eras, where they limited themselves to creating the infrastructures and services required by exogenous decisions in order to acquire a role of proposal, of autonomous initiative, of impulse to the factors capable of promoting endogenous development.

However, it is necessary to argue that the greater autonomy and powers of municipalities, in terms of organization, management and financing to stimulate and maintain local economic development, does not imply that it can replace other higher government interventions in favor of local agents, rather is a way to help communities to take responsibility for the management they perform and the results they are achieving by themselves.

An interesting aspect is that successful experiences, in a specific territorial area, do not have to give similar results in different contexts, important reflection when making generalizations and that do not give satisfactory results (Gutiérrez, 2014).

Arguments in favour of rethinking the approach to local government management

For several years, citizen orientation, relations with the economy, politics, cooperation for development, equity, inclusion, evaluation of public policies, use of resources, accountability, transparency,

among others, have been fundamental issues in the actions of public management, which establish an indissoluble relationship with the life of society and with the fundamental points for the development of an effective State.

A more contemporary angle is the recognition of the multifactorial character of management, which implies that the transformations generated activate processes and programs that seek coordination, cooperation and integration among sectors that present common and sometimes even different interests.

Under this scheme, it is imminent to dynamize processes aimed at continuous improvement that are accompanied by spaces for reflection and analysis around action with respect to citizens. This obliges us to strengthen administrative capacities to respond to the demands, interests and expectations of citizens, in addition to recognizing that the evaluation of institutional performance must be established in terms of quality and excellence in the provision of services, as a response to the complex problems that characterize contemporary societies.

In short, the aim is to make the public administration more efficient, since in essence it is a phenomenon of results which, after its multi, inter and transdisciplinary nature, responds to the needs of the State, citizens and communities.

This conception entails that it is conceived as an integral, flexible, systematic and continuous improvement process that is articulated from the planning to the evaluation of the results to be achieved, which allows for feedback and permanent learning as a contribution to the integrality and interdisciplinarity of management.

In the same way, the facilitation of dependent, integral and coordinated processes among themselves, which aims at the development of capacities for the fulfillment of the proposed goals, in order to offer an answer to the problems of the citizens' lives, leads to the recognition of the importance of the integration and active participation of all those involved in the organization.

In this case, the levels of efficiency to be achieved as a contribution to the generation of public value are the fundamental essence. Accordingly, effectiveness must be seen as the value that is related to the public benefits and costs that impact the lives of citizens and that, at the same time, transcends the mere relation of ends and means to be placed in the network of capacities, ways and means that are applied to achieve the values, objectives and goals in obtaining the results that society and the economy demand (Uvalle, 2005).

This shows how public management is transcendental in the evaluation of government functions in achieving higher levels of quality of life, economic growth, satisfaction and citizen safety. In correspondence, it constitutes a necessary component at the time of basing the scope of the performance of the governmental institutions.

To emphasize that public management should not be confused with the use or putting into practice of operative or mechanistic instruments to comply with the objectives pursued, its relevance lies in being conceived in accordance with the economic-social strategy of the country and of the locality in particular.

For these reasons, attention to management continues to be the object of analysis that determines trends in the way

the public is managed in each locality and in response to the strategies that are determinant in the actions of managers and in the exits from their models of action, as a result of public institutions developing in conjunction with societies, imposing challenges on their civil servants to transform themselves and adapt to new realities.

The trend or approach, carried out in recent years by international bodies, organizations and agencies, is made up of results management, having as a fundamental foundation the assumptions on which the new public management is based, which arises from the need to respond to more and new demands for service from society (UN, 2012; UNDP, 2000; UNICEF, 2017).

Consequently, the adoption of results-oriented management is a challenge for local governments, as it contributes to improving management capacity and orienting resources, systems, processes and activities to the achievement of previously established results. Underline that, although results are the fundamental motive, rendering accounts, developing participatory processes, generating timely, reliable and truthful information, subordinating procedures, regulations to citizen demands and, of course, continuous training of public servants are transcendental issues in the integral analysis that must be achieved in management.

This goal is recognized by many public administrations around the world. However, in many cases, it is only contained in some political agendas and in academic analysis because only the political will of a nation allows orienting all its economic and social efforts for the benefit of the citizen. In this sense, the approval of public policies to conduct good

practices in function of the welfare of man is gaining strength.

After the VI Congress of the Party in Cuba, the need to update our economic model was foreseen, which, in its conceptualization, paragraph d) proposes as one of the main transformations, "to perfect the State, its systems, organs and methods of direction, as rector of the economic and social development, coordinator and regulator of all the actors" (PCC, 2017).

In the Bases of the National Plan of Economic and Social Development until 2030: Proposal of Vision of the Nation, Axes and Strategic Sectors, the content of the strategy to follow towards a socialist, effective, efficient and socially integrated government is expressed qualitatively (PCC, 2017).

President Díaz-Canel (2018), in an interview granted in September 2018 to Patricia Villegas, president of the multinational chain Telesur, outlined the fundamental pillars of government management, which leads to a rethinking of government management based on:

- Respond to the mandate of the people and for the people, therefore the cadres must be able and willing to be accountable to them for their management.
- Establish a permanent linkage, debate and dialogue with the population and that the directors, consequently, are there where there are more complications.
- Keep in mind that the solutions to the problems we have are very complex, therefore, we cannot speak of an alternative, we always have to face each complexity with several alternatives.

- Use social communication as a working tool

More recently, the Constitution approved in April 2019 frames the importance of granting greater autonomy to municipalities, which entails a process of modernization of Cuban public administration, based on the decentralization of powers to the local level, with the consequent need to improve the quality of public services offered through the implementation of mechanisms of collaboration, cooperation and internationalization to meet the expectations of citizens (National Assembly of People's Power, 2019).

These demands require new forms of public management in a new situation, with new terms of legitimacy. The emergence of the paradigm of public management, service oriented, combines the instrumental principles of the new public management with the political dimension of public administration, basically characterized by processes of decentralization and deconcentration, elements conducive to the environment in which we are developing (Martín Castilla, 2005).

It should be pointed out that public services play an important role as distinctive elements of a socio-economic organization. Lanza (2000) carries out a characterization of public services, based on the following ideas:

- Satisfaction of a general or collective need or interest
- That the activity aimed at satisfying this need is carried out by the State, on the basis of the functions and competences of administrative agents or by individuals through forms that

guarantee the defense of the public interest.

- That its legal system allows the administration to regulate, direct and manage, directly or indirectly, the service.
- That involves a technical activity, provided on a regular and continuous basis and that it is appropriate and predetermined by an equality in relation to those users of the service.

Martín Castilla (2006) defends the position of developing integral services, reorganizing the services so that the citizen can have global access to the administration, through integral management units that overcome the division of competence between the different administrations; an aspiration that is consolidated with the assumption of quantifiable goals, where monitoring and evaluating are distinctive elements for the continuous improvement of the effectiveness in the provision of services to the citizen.

Some considerations for the projection of Cuban local governments

New demands are revealed in the management of Cuban local governments with the involvement of institutions, officials, citizens and new economic actors. Issues that were not the object of attention, today are part of their responsibilities, in the middle of a complex scenario that requires people with competencies to assume roles that guarantee a good performance.

In this purpose, aspects in the work of public servants that are contemplated in the fulfillment of the objectives of the Public Administration in Cuba are reaffirmed. Among them:

- Its results depend on the perception of the citizens and on the sustainability achieved in that purpose.
- The satisfaction of the quality of life and its sustainability will depend on the economic support that they are able to facilitate and/or manage.
- To feel safe is a necessity of the citizen and determines his quality of life. It is part of the perceptions of citizens and society as a whole about what has been achieved and what needs to be preserved.
- The expectations of the Cuban citizen must only be fulfilled if national sovereignty is defended and what is Cuban is defended in the midst of an interdependent world, of large geopolitical movements in which the forces of neoliberalism retreat and advance, generating a context of uncertainties and threats.

As a consequence, citizen participation, accountability, impact assessment, among others, are paths to follow in the exercise of government action. The challenge is embodied in the governing documents of the Party and the Revolution, which leads to take into account, among other issues, the following:

- Re-evaluate the role of local governments in society

In this endeavor, for the achievement of true autonomy, it must be clear that the fundamental role of local governments lies in the development of management capacities and the organization of processes on the basis of a government that manages participatory, inclusive and sustainable economic and social development of the local community, in synergy with the different social actors and the rest of the country.

From this perspective, participation in development strategies will allow for greater clarity in the definition of the objectives to be achieved and the characteristics of the leaders who will lead the tasks, as well as in the training, updating, contextualization and specialization of the directors.

The assumption of the separation of functions, from those who make decisions to those who execute and evaluate them, will make it possible to articulate the planning, execution and evaluation of the actions undertaken by the State to respond to the needs of citizens, in a timely and transparent manner. A necessary imperative results from the recognition of a dual role in its management, as a driver and animator in development. As a driver, it must be capable of establishing negotiations at all levels (central government, with other municipalities, with the local community) and as an animator, it must promote the generation and analysis of information as a fundamental element in decision-making and in the generation of initiatives, based on individual wills and commitments (García & González Aznar, 1988).

In this direction, Sánchez (2016) considers that municipalities must play a relational role, through strategic alliances, with the social and economic agents of their territory in order to favour their development and increase the quality of life of citizens. This capacity for relationship favours the creation of networks between the municipal administration and the institutions and between companies and people.

- Recognize that the satisfaction of the public interest is paramount in providing a service, regardless of whether it is provided by a state governing body or another entity

This indicates that the management that is carried out must be oriented towards services, with the purpose of offering and ensuring efficient and quality services to citizens. Similarly, achieve the optimization of the circuit of service delivery where the systems, strategies to follow, as well as the contact staff, have as a center of attention to the citizen. This generates demands in local governments and demands to rethink the meaning of public service, from the perspective of defending the value it possesses for citizens. The generation of collaboration networks, in their management through the introduction of innovation and continuous improvement in the administrative activity itself, will contribute to improving the provision of services.

The implementation of quality management models that lead to changes in the organizational culture, that allow the delivery of services without duplicity, slowness and errors, reducing or eliminating steps, requirements, times and/or documents at the time of carrying out a procedure and always making an efficient use of resources and taking advantage of the facilities granted by the use of information technologies and communications, consolidates the above.

- Create channels of participation where citizens play a fundamental role and facilitate accountability that leads to citizen satisfaction.

It is important to bear in mind that, in order to achieve participation and accountability, the main directions on which management must be based revolve around strengthening the relationship between the State, through its local leaders, the citizen and the improvement of institutional relations. Opportunely, the facilities provided by e-government allow,

to a large extent, the achievement of these tasks. Díaz-Canel (2018) has expressed that the development of computer platforms that allow Cuban citizens to interact with the government, with institutions, find the information they need and, in addition, suggest, criticize, argue, propose, enable the establishment of new forms in the government-citizen relationship and, at the same time, facilitates the provision of services in an efficient and effective manner, regardless of the variables of time and space.

It is fundamental to create mechanisms that renew and open new spaces and forms of citizen participation in the process of government, the design and promotion of spaces of accountability that take into account the interests of citizens, coupled with the promotion of an organizational culture, focused on dialogue and exposure of the results of its management. Consequently, it must be borne in mind that the information provided must be proactive and aimed at simplifying, eliminating and automating procedures and other administrative procedures to facilitate citizens' access to their rights and compliance with their obligations. Integration of systems, services and information sources are elements to be taken into account through the establishment of internal processes that facilitate management.

The philosophy for change, in the management of local governments, is determined by the capacity to offer solutions to problems, through chains of results that generate changes and impacts in society, the achievement of the incorporation of citizens as active subjects in management, as well as the implementation of organizational systems, facilitators of opportunities, which enhance and make viable the interaction of the different actors.

For local governments, to assume this philosophy and demands, they have to redirect their management approach in function of adopting creative and effective conducts that entail the achievement of quantitative and qualitative leaps necessary for the insertion to the existing environment. To achieve a participative direction based on the linkage of common interests and articulating the priorities of the diverse actors, with the priorities of the locality, will lead the citizens to the promotion and development of

accountability, on the management that is carried out and the due transparency that is required in the decision making. Strengthen a culture of service quality, with greater efficiency in its actions and institutionalize mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating the results and impacts of its management, together with the assumption of a role of proposal, autonomous initiative, impulse, will enhance higher levels of effectiveness in decision making and in the results to be achieved, for the benefit of citizens.

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