

The prospective approach in public management: the dynamization required to meet today's challenges

El enfoque prospectivo en la gestión pública: la dinamización requerida ante los retos actuales

A abordagem prospectiva na gestão pública: a dinamização necessária diante dos desafios de hoje

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Public management at all levels increasingly requires the use of modern and effective tools to address the pressing economic, social, environmental, technological and other problems faced by countries. According to García (2007), public management is required to meet real social needs, with efficiency and quality and, in turn, to be transparent and regulated by the citizenry. Although these ideas were put forward almost fifteen years ago, it is easy to see that they continue to be a chimera for the reality of most countries, as they fail to consolidate solid and stable States, due to corruption, deficient administrative practices and, above all, low effectiveness in solving the problems and requirements of the citizenry.

The problems of public administration today go beyond the legal and regulatory aspects, which are important and, in some cases, limiting, since they do not have all the required tools for public intervention and social control; they are surpassed by a praxis plagued by bad habits and, at the very least, by a short-sighted approach and a focus on promoting electoral results and political favorability. The present Editorial proposes, from an instrumentalist perspective, to go deeper into the subject of public management and its current challenges, in order to propose certain useful tools for practice at the different

levels of public administration, which guarantee greater effectiveness and relevance in the attention to social demands.

Beyond the classic and current questions about the role that the State should play in controlling the economic and social activity of countries, its optimal size, the need to increase social control in order to reduce its inefficiency and deviations that sometimes border on legality, among others. The guiding question of the present reflection is the following: *how to achieve a real practice of public management that guarantees a permanent and proactive solution to the social needs and challenges of various types faced by countries?*

In recent years, public administration has undergone profound transformations in order to achieve greater visibility and credibility at the local, regional and national levels. According to De la Garza, Yllán and Barredo (2018), a review of the evolution of public administration shows that it is marked by the political and cultural circumstances of the specific environment and by the practices of the past, giving it an eminently historical character, which in recent years has come to be more influenced by external aspects. This indicates that, in many cases, it will be complex to modify it, incorporating prospective approaches that guarantee a proactive intervention in the problems of the future, when short-term interests of an electoral nature and the reduction of the use of resources still prevail, in the face of the logic of satisfying needs at the lowest possible cost and with the formula of increasing trust on the part of citizens, who, in turn, increasingly demand attention to their needs (Monsalve & Gómez Domínguez, 2020).

De la Garza, Yllán and Barredo (2018) express the challenge for public management to achieve greater legitimacy through the articulation between citizen demands, efficiency in the management of public resources and effectiveness in the solution of such demands, to which it can be added that, under an integral perspective, these demands are not only those of the present, but also those that with a predictive nature could be determined. The use of forward-looking approaches in planning is not new, since with the evolution of the State itself, its new roles and the development of planning as a tool for the management of public interests, the need to broaden the short-term vision has become apparent in order to vindicate the functions of the State as "*the only entity*

capable of coordinating, articulating and leading a sustainable development process" (Bárcena, 2014, p. 10).

The deepening of the use of prospective techniques and other future analysis tools in public management will allow the State to broaden its knowledge of past, present and expected conditions in relation to the activities of society, the economy and others of interest, thus expanding the necessary "*understanding of general interests so that its management is equitable*" (Camargo Hernández, 2013, p. 9). Some of the advantages of this type of approach to public activity are related to the capacity to integrate public and private actors in state projects and programs, the integrated analysis of resources, the prioritization of territories, the creation of solid bases for national investment and the participation of citizens in the construction of medium and long term visions, which will mark the development model to be established and consolidated.

With regard to the creation of development agendas, there has been an increase in the use of foresight techniques by countries and territories at the international level in recent years, which denotes a greater concern for creating desired images for economic and social development. However, the level of applicability of these studies and their consideration as an input for public management are far from being at the required levels, since this requires sustained efforts by solid States and the conscious and transparent participation of private entities, based on aspirations for sustained and sustainable development (Bárcena, 2014). In addition to these efforts, according to Medina (2014, p. 174), there are the so-called "prospective capacities" that come from relevant orientation and training, which he classifies as "*new forms of strategic management that allow handling information and knowledge from different disciplines to conceive future alternatives in a global context, establish different paths to build the desired future and avoid the rigor and costs of undesired changes*".

These practices should be inserted throughout the public system, since it is not enough to have national development agendas or models if management is not extended to the entire sectoral and/or regional public apparatus, relying on the visions that are built at different levels (macro, meso and micro), as well as assuming the relevant characteristics and interests and the tools specific to each of them. In this sense, the wealth of existing prospective instruments constitutes an opportunity for deployment

and initiative at these levels which, in the end, will tend to consolidate public management through planning systems structured to the new conditions and processes for the design and implementation of public policies that meet the social challenges; all this on the basis of a deep and systemic knowledge, both internal and external, of the past, present and future.

This process of consolidation of public management, based on the prospective approach, starts from the premise raised by Parisi and Vargas (2017, p. 36), that "*The desired future scenario can only become a reality when those who chose it do what is necessary to make it happen. There must be a convergence of wills among social actors to make the changes and carry out the necessary actions*". Therefore, the phases of appropriation and action in the triangle of strategic foresight, described by Godet and Durance (2011), will be vital to achieve true prospective public management, which should encompass the process (planning, organization, direction and control) of the State's activity to ensure the satisfaction of the current and future needs of societies, through effective and efficient administration of public resources.

At the local level, especially, the benefits of applying the prospective approach to public management are given by the integration to the national development model, the coordination of actors at the territorial and national level around local projects, the integrated management of resources, greater citizen participation in the selection and application of instruments, the reduction of territorial gaps, inequality and the overcoming of conjunctural and historical conditions that mark weaknesses in the capacities of the State and institutions (Cuervo González & Mauricio Délano, 2019). Therefore, it is essential that the deployment of the prospective approach reaches local levels and is not exclusive to national and sectoral agencies.

As indicated, the challenge lies in introducing the prospective approach to the public management process through practices that optimize the capacity to plan, govern and integrate society in the visualization of desired future changes, at all levels, and in the formulation of contingent plans for undesired scenarios. In this last order, a quick look at the low foresight capacity of national States, regions and localities to face a crisis such as the one caused by the new variant of the COVID-19 coronavirus shows the need to reconvert public management practices in developed, developing and underdeveloped

countries. In this regard, the approach provided by CENEPRED (2013) is useful, associating prospective management in the public sphere with the prevention of future risk for society, the State and institutions.

In the current and foreseeable future conditions, there is an increasing need to build, through relevant tools, regulatory frameworks at global, regional, national and local levels, that allow the development of informed decision-making processes with proactive criteria by public entities at all levels. Efforts, technical cooperation, allocation of material resources, training and capacity building are just some of the necessary activities that this aspiration demands. As long as the construction of the future of countries, regions and communities continues to be only a technical and/or political *slogan* and does not take root in public practice, the need will continue to be an aspiration and the satisfaction of current and future demands a chimera for societies.

In this issue of the *Cooperativismo y Desarrollo*, as usual, the reader will find a variety of topics associated with economic and social problems at the organizational, local and national level, addressed by prestigious authors, with the aim of contributing to their solution from a scientific perspective.

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