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# **Analysis on the Match of Competences Provided by University Programs and the Labour Market – A Case Study on Romanian University Degree Programs in Public Administration**

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The role played by the secretary of the territorial-administrative unit at local level in Romania, especially in rural areas and in small towns, can be quite significant in ensuring appropriate public management in general, and sustainable development in particular. The position of secretary of the administrative territorial unit can be held by people with legal or administrative Bachelor degree and a Master degree in its field of studies or in management.

Given the requirement for Bachelor degree in administrative studies, the current paper explores whether current public administration programs provide knowledge, skills and competences that would enable the secretary to support public management in general, and sustainable development in particular, in the community (s)he manages. In order to conduct this analysis, based on an observation grid, we analyse the information related to learning outcomes provided by Bachelor public administration programs, using information from the Romanian National Registry of Qualifications in Higher Education, as all universities have the legal obligation to register information about competences provided by their programs in this registry.

While specific local specificities are to be taken into account, we argue in favor of the development of a systemic approach at national level that would reflect the learning outcomes required for such public office position, which would in turn enable possible adjustments in the design of public administration degree programs and reduce the potential mismatch between educational offer and the demands from Romanian local public administration.

## *Introduction*

When discussing what happens in our society, in the way our society develops, one of the big issues at hand is related to education. Its outcomes, consequences of the quality provided in education, are seen in everyday life. For example, in the current research we discuss in relation to government performance, more specifically local government performance, in terms of quality provided in higher education in Romania. One of the criteria taken into consideration by international ranking systems for higher education (e.g. QS Ranking) is related to employability of graduates. And we refer here not only to employability in general, but to employability in the field of study, with employability in other areas than the field of study showing less efficiency in use of funds and less performance of the higher education provided.

Employability as outcome of education has become more relevant, when also taking into account the fact that over-qualification has increased in recent years in countries where such studies have been conducted (Kucel, 2011), with over-education and mismatch of skills and jobs raising issues in Europe, even if higher education graduates have a lower rate of unemployment than people with lower levels of education (Tarvid, 2012).

Our interest in the current paper is to focus on developments in public administration programs, with taking into account possible employability of graduates from public administration programs. In this respect, we look into what public administration degree programs from Romania provide to graduates as knowledge, skills and competences that enable them to find employability its labor market, meaning in public administration, and focus on a specific position in public administration, the secretary of territorial-administrative unit, as case study.

We look at competences from the perspective of the learning outcomes provided in the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) – more specifically looking at the level 6 EQF, as the descriptor for the first cycle in the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area corresponds to the learning outcomes for EQF level 6 (European Commission, 2008). Thus, the graduate of a bachelor program would have “a critical understanding of theories and principles (knowledge), “ability to solve complex and unpredictable problems in a specialised field of work or study” (skills) and can “manage complex technical or professional activities or projects, taking responsibility for decision-making in unpredictable work or study contexts; take responsibility for managing professional development of individuals and groups.” (European Commission, 2008) (Kallioinen, 2010).

## Methodology

In order to conduct such an analysis, we first looked into positions from public administration where public administration degree is specifically required, by reviewing current legislation, as the public administration labor market is rather highly regulated. Our research into current Romanian legislation turned out that the position of secretary of territorial administrative, a high level appointed management position from local public administration, is one of the few positions from public administration which specifically require public administration degree as access requirement for the competition to hold this public office (more specifically, the Law no. 215/2001 on local public administration, with further amendments, stipulates that the secretary of the territorial-administrative unit should have Bachelor legal or administrative studies, and Masters in the previous studies or in Management).

We reviewed the current legislation to identify the competences required for this public position, which is key in local public administration, and found that this position is the highest appointed position in public administration that is key in ensuring public management in local level, and also in supporting sustainable development, especially in small communities.

Secondly, we reviewed the current labor market for such a position. Thus, as the Law no. 215 /2001 stipulates in art. 83 align. (1) that „Each commune, town or territorial administrative subdivision of the municipalities shall have a secretary whose wages shall be paid from the local budget.”, we looked into the existing number of territorial-administrative units from Romania, shown in table 1.

Table 1. Classification of territorial-administrative units from Romania

<i>Type of territorial-administrative unit</i>	<i>Number</i>
Municipalities (including Bucharest municipality)	103
Towns	217
Communes (rural)	2861
Sectors of Bucharest municipality	6
<i>Counties</i>	<i>41</i>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>3187</b>

(Data source: Ministry of Public Administration and Regional Development - [http://www.dpfbf.mdrap.ro/nr\\_uat-uri.html](http://www.dpfbf.mdrap.ro/nr_uat-uri.html) [11.11.2016].)

Given that the absolute number of positions may raise discussions as to whether there should be dedicated programs to this position, we then looked into current market developments for this position, more specifically we looked into competitions announced for this position. We could not identify particular studies on the public administration labor market with respect to this position and decided to check such developments by looking into competition announcements for this position in a month, selected randomly – September 2016. In this sense, we

reviewed the website of the National Agency for Civil Servants from Romania ([www.anfp.gov.ro](http://www.anfp.gov.ro)), where announcements are published for all civil servant positions. We found that there were 23 announcements in that particular month, out of which 19 were for secretaries in communes, in rural areas, and 4 in urban areas. Given the results of this brief verification, we considered that the current research should be conducted.

Thus, the review of legislation was then followed by secondary data analysis, looking into data about degree programs in public administration from Romania, available in a National Registry for Higher Education, available in Romanian, on the website of the Romanian National Agency for Qualifications. Using data for this registry is justified by the fact that all universities are compelled by current legislation to register their degree programs in this registry. The data from this registry included diploma supplements, which had a specific field of interest for the current research, more specifically that related to competences / learning outcomes.

### *Brief presentation of the position of secretary of territorial-administrative unit*

The review of legislation revealed that key competences of the secretary of territorial-administrative units are regulated in the Law no. 215/2001 on local public administration, with further amendments. The legal or administrative educational background is relevant, taking into account the duties of the secretary as set by law. Thus, the duties of the secretary, as set in Art. 85 of the previously mentioned law, include:

- a. coordination of the compartments and the activities of legal, civil status, tutelary authority and social assistance within the own specialty apparatus of the local council; the secretary may also coordinate other services of the own specialty apparatus of the local public administration authorities, assigned by the mayor.
- b. organization and participation to local council meetings (e.g. participate, compulsorily, in the local council's sittings; endorse the draft decisions of the local council, assuming the responsibility for their legality, countersigning the decisions he considers as legal; ensure the carrying out of the procedures for convening the local council and the carrying out of the secretarial work; prepare the papers to be submitted to the local council's debate);
- c. ensuring legality (e.g. endorse the mayor's orders for legality; authenticate signatures on the documents presented by the parties and confirm the authenticity of the copies with the original documents, under the terms of the law);
- d. ensuring adequate measures for transparency and publicity of public decisions (e.g. ensure the communication to the interested authorities, institutions and persons the documents issued by the local council or the mayor, within maximum 10 days, if the law does

not stipulate otherwise; ensure the bringing to the public knowledge of the decisions and orders of a normative character; deliver extracts or copies of any document in the archive of the local council, excepting those having a secret character, established according to law)

- e. *The secretary also carries out other duties stipulated by law or tasks given by the local council or by the mayor.* Other duties are set in quite many other regulations, including duties related to management of public and private property of the territorial administrative unit, to internal management control of the city hall etc. Moreover, many other tasks are assigned to the secretary by the locally elected (mayor or local council), which may include attraction of European funding for projects, management of such projects, involvement in strategic planning at local levels etc.

Thus, in practice, the position of secretary or territorial-administrative unit at local level is crucial, especially in rural communities, where the city hall staff is reduced and the impact of the work of each and every one is more visible. In such communities, the competences of the secretary in ensuring public management in general, and sustainable development in particular are crucial for ensuring management of the city hall and management of the territorial-administrative unit, while also enabling the development of the respective community.

For the present analysis, we focus more on knowledge, skills and competences of the secretary, as resulting from public administration degree program, with relevance for the above-mentioned duties listed especially at points a) and e).

### *On competences from public administration degree programs for secretary of territorial-administrative unit*

The registry revealed that out of all the public administration programs registered in this registry, only one listed the occupation of secretary as one of the potential occupation for their graduates (Ovidius University from Constanta).

When looking into the information about the publicly available public administration degree programs listed in the Romanian National Registry for Higher Education, we identified 12 Bachelor programs in public administration (in case a university listed one program with daily frequency and a similar one with reduced frequency, we counted them as one program of that university, as the vast majority of the universities had both versions of programs, with similar content in the diploma supplements).

Out of the publicly available Bachelor public administration programs in the registry, about 75% of these programs are similar, from the perspective of listed learning outcomes. Only three programs were

different - out of these programs, one belongs to Ovidius university. Given these observations, the focus of the analysis was on the program that lists secretary of possible occupation and on the large category of universities with similar program.

*Category A:* Given the previous observation that only Ovidius University listed secretary as potential occupation for its Bachelor public administration program graduates, we looked first at the learning outcomes listed in the diploma supplement of this university.

Learning outcomes related to public management focused more on knowledge related to specific aspects (e.g. *Knowledge of the organization issues in national and local institutions; knowledge of legal provisions and administrative procedures; knowledge, understanding and application of principles specific to quality management at the level of the institution/system and economic process;*), less on skills and competences (e.g. *acquiring the capacity of solving the problems specific to the institution, Collection, analysis and interpretation of quantitative and qualitative data and information relating to a clearly defined problem by using alternative sources to formulate reasoned diagnosis and synthesis; the ability to work independently and or in teams in order to solve problems in defined professional contexts; taking responsibility to solve problems*).

In terms of ensuring sustainable development / growth, the interest was to look for possible learning outcomes that mention at least one of the three dimensions of sustainable development (economic, social or environmental protection). References were found only for economic dimension, in terms of knowledge and skills, not in terms of competences (e.g. *explaining and interpreting ideas, processes, phenomena, states and trends specific to the activity at the micro and macroeconomic level; Knowledge, understanding and application of methods and techniques for the assessment and certification of the quality of products and services* – although not explicitly mentioned, one may assume that such services include social services, which are in the coordination of the secretary).

*Category B:* This category groups the approximately 75% of the public administration degree programs. Such similarities may also be result of quality assurance procedures, in terms of learning outcomes listed in the education program, not necessarily in terms of courses. Yet, when looking into the employability of the graduates, from the perspective of possible occupations that the graduates may hold, as listed in the registry, one may observe that there are only partial overlaps, that the occupations listed for these programs vary.

For this category, the listed learning outcomes related to public management made reference to knowledge and skills (e.g. *Identification, analysis and solving the issues in the public administration in a co-operant, efficient and flexible manner, Administration of typical activities to the field respecting the ethics and professional deontology; Professional abilities: Use of concepts and fundamental principles of organizations and functioning of administrative structures for professional insertion in public*

*and/or private institutions; The application of strategical instrumentarium for institutional development).*

The way learning outcomes were formulated made difficult a possible analysis of the possible ensuring of the needed knowledge, skills and competences for secretary of territorial-administrative unit, especially those related to sustainable development. Thus, the analysis of competences had an additional component, related to checking the list of courses from the diploma supplements.

For the category A, relevant courses included public management, human resource management, administrative law. Category B provided a wider array of relevant courses, such as administrative sciences, public management, human resource management, strategic planning / management.

In the case of possible courses that could provide knowledge, skills and competences related to sustainable development, category B universities included in their curricula courses in urban planning, project management, even a course in sustainable development. For category A, there were significant challenges in identifying courses relevant for sustainable development, based on the title of the course.

## *Conclusions and recommendations*

Given the reduced number of positions of secretaries of territorial-administrative units, the state agencies that hold information related to fluctuations in the public labor market should make available data related to needs of staff in short, medium and long run, so that universities could prepare the needed number of people to enter this market.

As the legal tasks of the secretary are set in many legal acts, it is rather difficult to encompass the competences that such a *Renaissance* person should hold, as the competences are increasingly broader. Such a person should be oriented towards lifelong learning. Moreover, given the quite vast range of competences, in many fields, required for this position, it is challenging to design and provide adequate education for people for such positions.

When conducting the analysis, it turned out that the section on learning outcomes was rather incomplete, in the sense that insufficient information was available. Should this section contain more information on learning outcomes, a much clearer image would be provided with regard to what the graduate can do and would enable a much easier decision in the sense of ensuring employability, in terms of expectations both of the graduate and of the employer.

While specific local specificities are to be taken into account in terms of duties of the secretary, we argue in favor of the development of a systemic approach at national level that would reflect the competences required for such public office position. Such a profile would in turn enable possible adjustments in the design of public administration degree

programs and reduce the potential mismatch between educational offer and the demands from Romanian local public administration. Moreover, given the evolving nature of this position, universities could consider development of specific programs for secretaries in function of educational / training needs of secretaries.

The current research focused mainly on aspects related to the competences of Bachelor public administration programs, as reflected in competences, and aware that the position of secretary of territorial-administrative unit requires also Master program, we are aware that some relevant knowledge, skills and competences for exercising this public office position may be acquired also during the Master program. Moreover, the current analysis focuses on content of documents, such analysis could be continued with focus on the actual employability of graduates from public administration degree programs, which could provide more accurate and interesting results, especially if combining quantitative (survey) and qualitative research (e.g. individual interviews, focus groups).

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