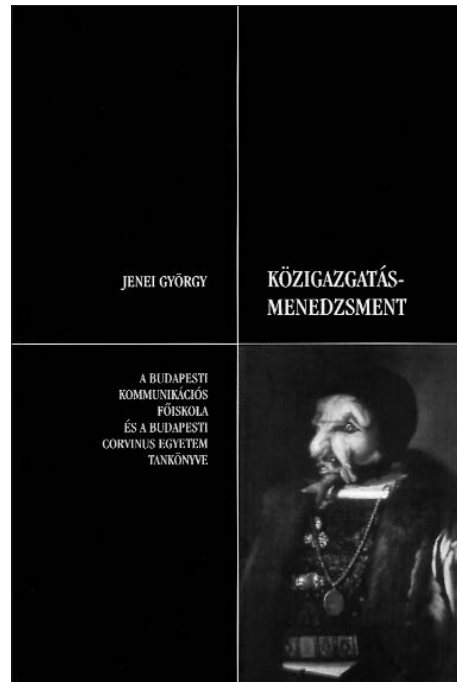


György Jenei

Public Administration Management

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Public administration reform endeavours date back much further than we would think in the first instance. Reading *György Jenei's* new (course) book, formerly sceptic readers – who label the nowadays frequently mentioned reforms as a new fashion – can also realise that the concept of a (more) rationally structured system of public administration, or that of the quality assurance of public services are not the results of the past few months.

■ PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION MANAGEMENT.

Any reader having at least some knowledge about the topic will surely toss his head since the title itself may give rise to a debate. Several terms are beginning to circulate in the Hungarian and international literature; however it is rather disturbing that they are far from having the same meaning. Let's take for example the term public service management, in which the 'public service' attribute is used differently in legal and economic circles. Without joining

the debate on terminology I would like to note: the author probably succeeded in finding the two most neutral terms that suit the nature of his writing best, i.e. public administration and public institution management (as a matter of fact, the title of the book is broader in meaning).

György Jenei assumed a great task when setting to write his book. This statement is true even if we take into account that the author possesses sizeable professional experience. The difficulty of the task itself would of course not be sufficient to draw the readers' attention. Why is it worth reading the book then? The first benefit can be realised almost immediately: the considerable logical framework, which can be of great help for newcomers to the subject. In addition to the introduction, the book is made up of four parts and altogether 14 chapters. The review of the symptoms, approaches and development paths of the reforms in public administration is followed by

the presentation of the theoretical background. Then the reader may study the usual historical typology related to the topic, and finally the components of the introduction strategies of the reforms, which contribute to the essence and better understanding of public administration management.

In my opinion one of the most positive things in the book is the introduction (Switching paradigms in the public sector). On one hand it sets the tone for the book, and on the other it outlines the economic and social context in which the author elaborates in the rest of the book. The “crisis symptom ridden period” and dual expansive force that the public institutions had to face were especially interesting factors that triggered a switch in paradigm. Both are thought-provoking: the subject of the welfare state is *ab ovo* ridden with controversies, and the dual expansive force – namely stagnant (or falling economic resources) and the increasing social demand for the quality and standard of public services – is characteristic for today's world, too.

■ **PART ONE** starts with a useful distinction: the public institution management reforms affected the organisational structure of public administration and the public services differently, and were more accentuated in the case of the latter. Naturally, these two areas cannot be hermetically sealed from each other, all the more since institutions that belong to the organisational framework of public administration (also) provide public services. This is why the author remarks that a clean-cut shift can be perceived in both areas towards the application of market type mechanisms.

One of the interesting features of this part is that it lists the symptoms of the management reforms, such as the transformation of the public service systems and organisations in a way that can increase efficiency, effectiveness, adaptability, and creates special conditions for competition. Or I could mention customer ori-

entation as an exciting symptom, according to which public administration management considers citizens as critical consumers. However, the strength of the subchapter is less in “mechanically” bringing the symptoms together, and more in the fact that Jenei speaks about both the opponents and advocates of the management reforms. As he puts it, the advocates support the establishment of business-type public service organisations “even if that requires the novel interpretation of the legal legitimacy of the political system”. According to the opponents, however, the dominance of the business-like approach in the public sector would shake the foundations of the modern welfare state. The author continues the description of the symptoms by analysing the essence of the management reforms from different aspects. As a conclusion of this part, he presents the development paths of the management reforms of public institutions along a similar concept, and in relation to this he remarks (presumably) correctly that these elements are present in reality in various combinations rather than in isolation, and can rather be regarded as an ideal.

■ **PART TWO** analyses the theoretical background of public administration management. I must note here – mildly saying – that it is hard work to collect the theoretical tendencies influencing this topic, which is considered as a boundary area from several aspects, and typically requires a multi- and interdisciplinary approach. However, since the objectives of the book include the presentation of the multiple impact, obviously the author could not disregard it. The public institution reforms bring together the legal, public policy, management and economic aspects – i.e. the author has all the right to use the *complex* attribute. He is wise to point out in several passages that subjects based on a heterogeneous group of theories like this one inevitably lead to fierce debates and mutual tensions. This is true even

if the experts of the different fields try to take one another's viewpoints into account. It is sufficient to mention that no consensus has been reached on the fundamental terminology of public administration management – or as the author puts it: the meanings of the words are “obscure and varying”.

This part may arouse sympathy even in the most sceptical readers: the presentation of the essence of the different groups of theories is accompanied by the description of the critical approaches and the explanatory force of the different theories. For example, in relation to the community elections the author remarks that they definitely present the operation of one part of the public sector, but they cannot be regarded as an exclusive explanatory theory. When explaining neoinstitutionalism he points out that a further complementary theory must be taken into account, one that is able to reveal the social, cultural, moral and legal relations, too. Then during the description of the public service orientation model he proves that differences in value can be revealed between the private and public sectors, and although certain entrepreneurial ideas can be used in the public sector, it is impossible to adapt the entire model thereto.

The last chapter of Part Two looks at the connection points of organisational science and the organisational system of public institutions, primarily through performance promotion and the motivation of civil servants. Starting from scientific management through *Weber's* theory to the participative management systems (engaging subordinates that demand a share of power and decision-making influence in various management processes). In Jenei's words: the early homo oeconomicus human image of economic management considerably shifted towards the social and communicative human image that demands a share of power and involvement in the decision-making process. The author notes that the combination

of performance promotion systems can be a fortunate one in Central and Eastern Europe (including Hungary), since in these areas it is practically impossible to “wait for” the organic development of the subsequent processes, or to follow a path similar to the one performance promotion followed in countries that are considered as developed countries.

■ **PART THREE** presents the traditional historic typology of the public institution reforms. It first describes the characteristic features of the British reform process, then the German modernisation, and finally New Zealand and France. All four typologies are justified: the British, German and French examples are regarded classic since they involve three marked public administration models that are often cited as typical solutions. The inclusion of New Zealand in the study is exciting because of the extreme nature of its reforms: there the new public institution management dominated in a rather strong and extreme manner. The four typologies have different features, however Jenei remarks, too that “one can move in the same direction on different paths”. The author does not intend to provide a comprehensive presentation about the country-specific reforms. Part Three rather aims to help the Hungarian reform processes unfold by giving a historical background.

■ **PART FOUR** is of special importance since it plays a certain synthesising role, and is also a weighty section of the book due to its length. It contains a discourse about the managerial, public policy and legal components of the introduction strategy of management reforms.

It may be worth citing the conclusions summarised at the beginning of this part for those who are still indecisive about reading the book. According to the author, it is a general point that the introduction of the reforms requires cooperation between the politicians and civil servants; it is indispensable to confront and combine the professional and political aspects.

It is an equally important conclusion that an adequate strategic approach is a must during the implementation of the reforms – however this does not mean that detailed plans are needed. There is no generally applicable recipe; continuous adaptation is required during implementation. From among the conclusions we must also note that the changes show beyond public administration – they also appear in the day-to-day political and social life. Or, in Jenei's words: they have become public matters.

■ **AS A SUMMARY:** György Jenei's book – which demonstrates macro approach on the analogy of economics – may give a good foundation for both the newcomers to this subject and the more experienced readers. However, it is far from being an easy for one afternoon. Although it is hard work to go through the chapters of Public Administration Management, it is definitely worth the effort and time. On one hand because of its integrating force,

which can bring together theories and concepts that have been considered to be distant, even if every strand of this imaginary braid has been always criticized. On the other hand, the book contains a lot of Hungarian references: when presenting the international examples the author returns – from time to time – to the question: what lesson can be drawn for the new EU member states, including Hungary?

And what brings the book close to the reader and makes it, or rather the author's thoughts impressive, is its questioning, thought-provoking spirit that presents the complexity of the subject well. This means that it is actually mandatory literature for those who have considered the healthy operation of public administration a public matter, or to put it more emphatically, a matter close to their heart.

Enikő Szilágyi