

## BOOK REVIEW

Valentina Cornea, *Construcția socială a administrației publice. Procese și instituții / The Social Construction of Public Administration. Processes and Institutions*, Presa Universitara Clujeana, Cluj-Napoca, Romania, 2024

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The book „*Construcția socială a administrației publice. Procese și instituții*” [*The social construction of public administration. Processes and institutions*], written by Valentina Cornea, has an absolutely unique subject in the Romanian academic landscape and in neighbouring countries with common origins. It is written and structured clearly, coherently, and is very well argued. It represents scientific research that has as its object the processes and institutions within the social construction of public administration.

The issue addressed by the author is a current and relevant one for the field of sociology and public administration that she investigates and in which she works as an expert, researcher, and teacher who prepares future generations of specialists in this field.

The six chapters of the book address complex and important themes for public administration. One can observe the breadth and academic rigor that the author demonstrated when preparing the manuscript, because she analysed the particularities of public administration from all possible angles.

This work correlates very well the normative theories that guide administrative behaviour, with those designed to explain the concept of public interest (utilitarianism, contractualism, communicative action theory). Also, classical political theories are brought into discussion (May's Theorem), the theories of Gellner and Hobsbawm, and Anthony D. Smith, all of which try to capture the social essence of public administration.

It started from „Origins. Modeling the institution” (chapter 1), where it presents the analytical framework, the definitions identified in the national and international specialized literature of the „institution” and its implications, emphasizing also the „rationale of public administration” and concluding with the

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„ontological status” of this social construction.

In the following two chapters, the author focuses on „institutional architecture” and „utopian institutions,” where she manages to present elements of the distribution of power, the particularities of democracy and specific bureaucracy, local autonomy, and decentralization. And in the last subchapter, she professionally presents „Ethnic harmony: autonomy or decentralization? „with its particularities.

In the chapter that follows the scientific approach, the author highlights „public interest”. Here, various theories existing in the specialized literature are concentrated and presented, as well as definitions identified on the subject brought to the public’s attention. All of the above support the author in supporting the fact that the mentioned theories „give the public interest an ethical, non-subjective dimension, which serves the entire community” (p. 117).

I particularly note the way in which the author Valentina Cornea managed to bring to the public's attention the „iron law of oligarchy”, developed by R. Michels, which states that „any leader tends to distance himself from the concerns and interests of those he represents due to his functionality and specialization as a politician” (quoted from Vlăsceanu, p. 122 of the book).

The chapter dedicated to „public services” faithfully presents conceptual dilemmas, the way of organization and provision, the institutional-administrative responses, new paradigms and models of social involvement appropriate to the contemporary society in which we all operate, with the related challenges.

I particularly note the author's contribution regarding the final chapter entitled „Kitsch - an effect of discretionary power?” in which she presents its particularities in the field of public administration, a courageous and thoroughly argued interpretation, concluding at one point „Kitsch in itself is not offensive, but it vitiates” (p. 178).

The conclusions of the research are presented clearly, orderly, and succinctly at the end of each chapter. They are followed by the author's personal proposals worthy of all attention. Finally, I express my wish that the analyses and research carried out in this work represent starting points for new understandings and interpretations of the improvement of the social construction of local, regional, and national public administration (and beyond).

The methodology used for this manuscript is focused on the analysis of documents and legislation in the field of public administration and the social field. Also, the following scientific research methods and models used by the author can be identified: secondary data analysis and content analysis. The practical research was carried out on several levels, well highlighted in the paper.

The documentation for the drafting of the work is carried out at a high level. I particularly appreciate the personal interpretation that the author gave to the attributes of kitsch, identified in the decisions of local authorities, and presented synthetically on pages 172-174 of the book. This success in the content of the work is also explained by the fact that Mrs. Valentina Cornea is an expert employed at the University „Dunărea de Jos” from Galați and with extensive

previous experience in the field of public administration as a civil servant during the period 2000 - 2003, when she worked at the Cahul County Council in the Republic of Moldova. From this point of view, she has important and significant experience regarding the field of the administrative apparatus and its social construction from a dual perspective, both from Romania and from the Republic of Moldova.

The bibliographical references are varied and exhaustive. One can easily identify both classical references that underlie the subject analysed in this manuscript, by established authors such as: Locke, J. (1689); Mead, M. (1937); Weber, M. (1947); Mills, W. (1956); Bourdieu, P. (1984); as well as recent, current studies from the contemporary period such as: Abrutyn, S., & Turner, J. (2022); Bryane, M., Kattel, R., and Drechsler, W. (Eds.) (2017); Vlăsceanu, M. (1993); Zamfir, C., & Stănescu, S. (coordinators) (2007).

It is also worth noting that the bibliographical sources used represent a harmonious combination of local authors with remarkable activity, as well as those who have worked internationally and developed multiple theories and far-reaching studies on the subject analysed in this paper.

The book „*Construcția socială a administrației publice. Procese și instituții*” [*The social construction of public administration. Processes and institutions*] written by Valentina Cornea, is of a high scientific level. I note with particular pleasure that it brings new contributions both in terms of theoretical approaches and in terms of concrete analyses, proving an indisputable application potential for the process of management and administration of public administration in Romania, with the possibility of replication in neighbouring countries.