

THE RULING POLITICAL CLASS? A THEORETICAL ANALYSIS OF THE POLITICAL ACTORS' ROLE AS MAJOR DECISION MAKERS IN THE CONTEXT OF THE POLITICO- ADMINISTRATIVE RELATIONS

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Abstract

The paper examines and reframes several theories and approaches regarding the decision-making process and the politico-administrative relations. The inner logic and the structure of this paper should be scrutinized as an aggregate of three interdependent concepts. Firstly, we mention briefly the theoretical context of decision-making consisting out of a plethora of models developed in time. Subsequently, an overview of the politico-administrative affinities is presented to the reader in the second section of the paper with an emphasis on the patterns and asymmetries of powers between politicians and bureaucrats. Finally, the purpose of this paper lies in offering an up-to-date theoretical perspective referring to the political means of oversight and control over the bureaucracy, due to which use the political actors underscore and heighten their roles of major decision makers.

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I. Introduction

Most of the times, human beings as individuals do not realize that their lives and daily routines consist out of an indefinite and endless series of choices and judgments they make. The choices and judgments are the cognitive components of a decision. A decision can be automatic, reflexive, intentional or unconscious; a decision can be both individual and collective or it could be “programmed” and “ill-structured” as defined by Herbert Simon (1997), nonetheless any decision type will be referred to as a complex combination of one or more judgments and one or more choices (Goldstein and Hogarth, 1997), where the judgment implies arriving at some understanding of situations, probabilities, consequences and causes and involves matters related to learning, knowledge, as well as the discrepancies between the objective environment – consisting out of atoms and molecules, sums of active and alive constituents, humans beings and emotions, social and physical aspects, social norms and activities, as well as forces resisting to change (Barnard, 2003) - and the human perception of the objective conditions of that particular environment (Simon, 1997). Making a choice or giving preferential choice means selecting a course of action in order to achieve some expected and estimated utility or consequences which are in accordance with some previously established preferences.

In terms of the administration approach, the consequences of a choice made by an individual or a collective actor (whether it is the politician, the mayor, the public administrator or the whole legislative local or national body) relates to achieving general “welfare”, “common interest” or in “doing good” by continuously mobilizing the efforts to sort existing and available means necessary to achieve the wanted ends. Hence, the public administration becomes nothing but the “art of getting the things done” (Simon, 1997). In this context, our concern with decisions and decision making in the public sector is justified, as for public administration the generic questions *for whom, by whom* and *how* are central.

II. Theories and models concerning the decision-making process

In this section of our paper we will focus our attention on the last part of the question spelled out above. We will make an attempt in answering *how* the decisions are made or could be made in public affairs by presenting and revising some of the most important and relevant theoretical models of decision making: the rational-comprehensive model, the incremental model, the mixed scanning model, the garbage can model of organizational choice and the adjudicatory model. The models listed earlier were formulated under different circumstances: as a result of direct observation in time of a particular phenomena, as it is the case of the “garbage can” theory; other models were create to combat the previously existing ones, such as the incremental model; the rational-comprehensive theoretical assumption was detailed in the context of the raising aspirations for a more efficient public administration etc. Even so, the

entire plethora of decision-making models emphasizes either latently or explicitly the predominant roles of the politicians as policy-makers; none of the models denies or neglects the role the political “performers” have during policy formulation. No matter how many actors are involved in decision making and regardless the stages and the nature of the incremental or rational procedures prescribed by the theoretical models, the reality shows that the politicians are persistent and omnipresent actors, a simple look at “how things are actually done” in the public administration or in society will help any “observer” come to the assertion we are attempting to highlight in this paper.

A very much debated and criticized model, resides in the rational-comprehensive approach to decision making. The rational-comprehensive approach seeks to enable the actors in the public administration to make the decision as economically, efficiently and effectively possible. Within this theoretical model the decision maker has to follow a series of sequential steps or logical operations that will help him or her to arrive to a decision. These steps are (1) identification and examination of a problem and definition of goals, (2) clarification of all possible alternative means for obtaining the goals, (3) examination and analysis of each alternative, evaluation of the consequences of each course of action, (4) comparison of the consequences and selection of the best alternative to solve the problem and to attain the goal (Piffner, 1935). Many authors and scholars shared later a common presumption relatively to the limited rationality of the decision maker in the rational-comprehensive model due to the scarcity of information and resources (Rosenbloom and Kravchuk, 1992; Stone, 1997). It shows that their ideas coincided with the Simon’s bounded rationality. Herbert Simon proclaimed in this doctoral thesis that human mind and attention are among the scarcest of all resources, that is why fully rational decisions by unaided individuals are considered improbable (Simon, 1997). The rational model excludes the fact that rarely the power to make decisions belongs to one individual; as we shall see, the decision making privilege is dispersed among politicians, bureaucrats, citizens, groups of interests etc. Even the sacramental separation of powers among the legislative, executive and judicial levels suggests the involvement of multiple actors in decision making (Justice and Miller, 2007). Presumably, within this model, the politicians will be primarily engaged in the definitions of goals, which fact will allow them to “stay in the game” as the goals will be steadily, if not constantly, oriented towards their own preferences.

The rational approach towards policy making is not flawless and one of the main obstacles to rationality is the ambiguity of goals in public matters, as there is no single definition of common interest or no single way of maximizing something good. If at the organizational level, for public administrators the statement of goals is rooted deep in strategic planning and in the achievement of objectives, for politicians it is all about gaining political support from different subgroups in the society, here is where the politicians refer to “wants” in defining goals and bureaucrats or technocrats to the “needs” of the citizens; in Herbert Simon’s words, the public administrator tends to *satisfice*. *Satisficing* means for the public administrator to get only enough to meet the immediate need or selecting the solution that is least displeasing to stability

(Simon, 1997). By all means, the *satisficing* theory represented for the administrative science of the 20th century a slow switch from the rational model of decision making, the fact that induced the development of the later models.

An elaborate and time persisting critique of the rational-comprehensive model was presented by Charles Lindblom and took the form of the so called incremental model of decision making. Lindblom suggested a “muddling through” model to depict how decisions develop incrementally. Even if the incremental approach replicated in detail the public administration operations in the United States of that times (Rosenbloom and Kravchuk, 1992), we have to admit it can be securely applied elsewhere. Lindblom retains that if the public administrator proceeds through a succession of small incremental changes, he therefore has the advantage of avoiding serious lasting mistakes (Lindblom, 1959). By these means, the incremental model represents a viable prescription for decision making, as it mainly employs marginal reasoning and a continuous and measured adjustment of the policy, based on learning of previous adjustments (Justice and Miller, 2007). The advantage of the incremental model relies in the acceptance of the bounded rationality, given by the practical limited individual and collective analytic capabilities. Nevertheless, its conservativeness, lack of responsiveness and circularity build up its disadvantages and flaws. It shows that the incremental manner of decision making is especially favorable for the political actors, as they are the first who are interested in maintaining the “status-quo”. In short, we dare to claim that Lindblom’s model manages to overplay the role the politicians hold in the policy-making process.

The mixed scanning approach appeared as an alternative strategy to both rational and incremental models. Amitai Etzioni (1986) himself related that the mixed scanning model emerged as a result of the fact that the rationalist approaches were blamed to be utopian because actors cannot command the resources and capabilities required by the model, while incrementalism was shown to overlook opportunities for significant innovations and to ignore the empirical fact that incremental decisions are made within the context of other decisions that are fundamental. The essence of the model consists in, first, scanning comprehensively but not too detailed the elements of the decision: values, means and ends.

“The term scanning is used to refer to search, collection, processing and evaluation of information as well as to the drawing of conclusions, all elements in the service of decision making.” (Etzioni, 1986, p. 8).

Secondly, the decision maker can focus on specific issues that require a further investigation. By exploring only the selective aspects of the problem/decision, the decision maker is not overwhelmed by details as to lose the sight of fundamental objectives and ends (Etzioni, 1967; Justice and Miller, 2007; Lutrin and Settle, 1992). This model vaguely portrays the role of the further discussed actors, politicians and bureaucrats. The bureaucrat is granted the role of the expert, the specialized and professional technocrat who is capable of providing the politicians with the information and expertise necessary to draw a conclusion or solution in the decision making process. To add to those previously said, we would like to stress that the basis of the political actions are

the constituency cases. In making decisions, the politicians approach issues case by case and this helps them put together a general attitude towards the issues, and focus on competing interests with the cases. It can be stated that the politicians possess an inductive form of logic. On the other hand, the underpinnings of the administrative actions are the statements of laws, rules, objectives and values. Consequently, the administrators can be described as having a deductive logic of action because they handle specific problems and cases by referring to general laws, objective values and rules, by these means focusing on the overall goals of the public organization (Hansen and Ejersbo, 2002). It is revealed that the politicians' interest in constituency cases embodies a mean to increase their visibility towards the public and it is an effective way to exercise control over the administration. Related to the subject of our paper, it is important to stress that "by following constituency cases politicians may gain an insight into the procedures of the administration and thereby increase the possibility of their finding cases of misuse of power by the administration" (Hansen and Ejersbo, 2002, p. 739).

On a lower organizational level, the garbage can model of organizational choice was initially conceived for university experience. The universities were described as organized anarchies that are characterized by problematic preferences, i.e. in the organization it is difficult to assign a set of preferences to the decision situations; unclear technologies, i.e. even though the organization succeeds in surviving and even producing, its own processes are not clearly understood by its members; and fluid participation, i.e. the participants may vary in the amount of time and effort they dedicate to different domains and activities (Cohen, March and Olsen, 1972). Assuming the fact that in the issues and policies regarding the public affairs, the goals ambiguity and the lack of goals clearness are common, the garbage can model can be successfully extended to all public institutions.

Within the garbage can model the outcomes, decisions or nondecisions depend and are a function of the mix that consists of problems, solutions, participants and participants' resources. Based on the garbage can model the public organizations can be described as "collections of choices looking for problems, issues and feelings looking for decision situations in which they might be aired, solutions looking for issues to which they might be an answer, and decision makers looking for work" (Cohen, March and Olsen, 1972, p. 2).

Despite the goal ambiguity and conflict and the instability of the environment, the garbage can model is very much different from the two classical rational and incremental models, due to the fact that it offers a solution to the problem after all, and the decision gets materialized, and the last is partly owing to solutions and problems that have equal status as separate streams in the system. Finding a solution for a public problem first of all implies assigning the necessary resources for overcoming that problem inasmuch as the politicians entirely hold the power to allocate the resources among the members of the society, in this manner enjoying the budgetary authority, it could be presumed that whenever the garbage can model is detected in reality, the politicians will be identified as the most important decision-makers.

The last model of decision making mentioned here refers to the legal approach to decision making by completing the cycle of the previous two: the managerial approach (rational-comprehensive model) and the political approach (incremental model). The adjudicatory procedure is the core of the legal approach to public administrative decision making. The importance of this model for the theoretical investigation undertaken in this paper is crucial as the model relies on formalized procedure and rules intended to identify and to establish the facts of a situation (in managerial terms of a problem), the interests of opposing parties and the balance between these interests that best meet the legal requirements. The aim of the adjudicatory decision making consists in assuring a reasoned and based on sound information/legal provisions decision making process. Besides that, it follows that no individual, organization, political or bureaucratic actor is restrained from exercising or denied its rights (Rosenbloom and Kravchuk, 1992). It has to be mentioned that a complete and thorough comprehension of the legal decision making model can be achieved when adopting it to the particular legislation and legal provisions of the state or entity analyzed.

In conclusion to this part, we have to bring up the reasons for calling the above listed models – theoretical. Unfortunately, these models do not offer a clear-cut explanation of *how* the decisions are made in the public administration. Nonetheless, they stay at the core of every attempt to elucidate how decisions are made. Inasmuch as the models provide us a necessary background for further inquiries, they will function as “blueprints” on which the politico-administrative relations will be based and will provide us the necessary background to exhibit the imperative role the politicians have as decision makers.

III. Approaches regarding the politico-administrative relations

A basic literature review shows that the relationship between politicians and administrators is continuously under debate and that there is an ongoing development of theories, both normatively and descriptively. In this part of the paper, we attempt to offer a theoretical perspective of the approaches regarding politico-administrative relations. Our focus consists in depicting the evolution of the models in time, wherein we emphasize the way in which they either criticized or completed the previously formulated theories. The nature and the content of the theoretical patterns are dominated by unclarity, as some of the authors advocated either for a clear separation between the political and administrative powers (Wilson, 1887; Goodnow, 1900; White, 1926) or for intermingled relations between the two sets of actors (Hansen and Ejersbo, 2002; Hecló, 1978). Hence, we defend the opinion according to which the politico-administrative relations take place within a balanced and continuous spectrum of powers, which comprise four distinctive dimensions: mission, policy, administration and management (Svara, 1990 *apud* Hansen and Ejersbo, 2002). The above mentioned dimensions consist out of tasks and responsibilities that can and must be accomplished by politicians and public administrators, but the way these tasks are distributed among the actors is determined by the characteristics of the decision-making process, its

complexity and the interests and the roles the actors exhibit during the policy making course of action.

To a certain extent, at the beginning of the 20th century, the separation between politicians and administrators was overstated because the defenders of the dichotomy primarily sought to establish the importance of the public administration as a distinctive science and study field. At different moments in time, Max Weber (1922), Woodrow Wilson (1887), Frederick Goodnow (1900) and Leonard White (1926) asserted and advocated for the distinction between politicians and public administrators. M. Weber (1922) considered that the politicians' role is to establish visions, goals and general principles of action, while the administrators are in charge of implementing the politicians' wishes and the day to day administration. Nonetheless, M. Weber's model is an ideal type and should not be regarded as a normative model, as it does not explain the actual manner in which the political-administrative interaction takes place. W. Wilson (1887) is credited with suggesting the existence of a major division between politics and administration. He introduced the concept known as the *politics-administration dichotomy* arguing that the separation is needed due to the continuous interferences of politicians into the administrative affairs, referring to the *partisan politics*: "the administration lies outside the proper sphere of politics. Although politics sets the tasks for administration, it should not be suffered to manipulate its offices" (Shafritz and Hyde, 1997, p. 21). Largely, F. Goodnow (1900) reechoed the ideas of the above mentioned authors stating that the function of politics consists in the expression of the will of the state. According to him, the differentiation between politics and administration is demanded by the principle of separation of powers. Goodnow conceived politics and administration as two distinctive functions of government, where the politicians have to do with drawing guidelines and influencing the governmental policy, while the administrators have to do with the execution of the desired policies: "the executing authority shall be subordinated to the expressing authority". Therefore, Goodnow admits that the politicians hold the most important positions in the decision-making process and that there has to be created some mechanisms which will prevent politics from influencing the public administration in its activities. Based on these assertions, Goodnow builds his argument of political-administrative separation. L. White (1926) as well has granted public administration with an exclusively executive role. According to him, the purpose of public administration consists in the most efficient use of public resources that are at the disposal of the officials, meaning politicians. Contrary to the other authors, White emphasized the managerial function of the administration by minimizing its legalistic and formal aspects. In his attempt to foster public administration as a strong and separate field of study, White advocated for the clear-cut distinction between politics and administration, while admitting that the public administration has to be correlated with other branches of government, as well as adjusted to the particularities of the private sector.

The straightforward and unambiguous division of roles between politicians and administrators has evolved into a normative ideal model in the Western societies.

Unfortunately for us, these approaches do not offer a viable explanation of the political-administrative interaction; they put forward a less in depth analysis of the politico-administrative relations and are criticized for being too simplistic; these approaches contradict the observed reality, as well as several empirical studies showing a more complex interaction between politicians and administrators, and the more diverse roles that the two sets of actors have in the process of decision making. In this sense, it is accurately said that the public administrators are indeed to a large extent involved in the formulation of the visions and missions, by these means playing an important role in the decision making process, while the politicians see themselves constrained to be involved in the implementation process as well.

By the 1950s the relationship between politicians and administrators was seen as evolving under the influence of the interest groups. The dominant approach of that time assumed that agencies are captured by the interests they are supposed to regulate. The so-called *state capture theory* claims that the public administrators respond to external pressures from interest groups when designing and enforcing regulations. The state capture theory explains how government responds to the different demands of interest groups. As a result of the literature on the state capture theory the bureaucratic politics could be best described as an *iron triangle* relationship, in which not only bureaucrats and politicians, but the representatives of the interest groups as well play a role in the decision-making process. The *iron triangle model* suggests a stable and autonomous set of participants congregated to control a fairly narrow public program, which is directly linked to their political or economic interest. In his *issue networks* theory defined as a shared-knowledge group having to do with some aspect of public policy, Hugh Hecló criticized the iron triangle model by saying that the number of participants in the decision-making process is quite variable. The emergence of the issue networks theory was based on a more pluralist view by which some previously neglected actors were granted with an important role in the policy-making. Under most circumstances, it was assumed that neither the president, the legislative bodies, the courts, the public, nor the media were even interested or active participants in bureaucratic politics. Therefore, Hecló conceived its model as composed of various political actors with different degrees of mutual commitment or independence, interested in a particular policy issue. Within the Hecló's model, the participants move in and out of the networks constantly, so that none of the actors holds the control of the policies and issues. Nonetheless, the issue network model suggests that "those who emerge to positions of wider leadership are policy politicians – experts in using experts, victuallers of knowledge in a world hungry for right decisions" (Hecló, 1978).

Regardless its thoroughness, the issue networks model proved to be more descriptive than predictive for the political-administrative relations. Therefore, the principal-agent model, which derived from such disciplines as law, finance and economics, has become the basis in studying the relationship between politics and public administration. In essence, it is a contractual relationship between buyers and sellers, assuming the fact that the social life is a series of contracts "the principal – agent relationship is governed

by a contract specifying what the agent should do and what principal must do in return” (Waterman and Meier, 1998, p. 174). In our context, the agent is the regulatory bureaucracy and its political principals are the legislators. Within the principal-agent model, the agents are motivated by the public interest or by their own narrow self-interests. Besides that, the agents enjoy a wide information advantage over their political principals. Hence, the model was criticized for allowing cheating, limited information and bounded rationality in general. For this reason, the model assumed that the political principals would have to monitor their agents in order to ensure the political control of the entire bureaucracy. According to the principal-agent theory, the bureaucrats are likely to shirk to produce outputs at higher costs or to produce a level of outputs lower than that desired, by these means arguing the necessity of the political control. The principal-agent theory explains the interactions between politicians and bureaucrats in time. Bureaucrats are assumed to have an informational and technical advantage over the politicians, therefore, they better understand the policy and the organizational procedures that are necessary to be implemented. In this manner, the bureaucrats have both the opportunity and the incentive to manipulate politicians and processes for their own political gain (Waterman and Meier, 1998).

The so-called *trustee theory* was formulated as an alternative approach to the principal-agent model. The main argument of the authors lies in the fact that the principal-agent model leaves space to the elected officials to pursue their self-interest in a way that can harm the public welfare (Knott and Miller, 2005). In their opinion, trustees sometimes conserve principals by not being responsive to their interests, especially when the principals are after self-interests that can threaten the public good in the long run. In contrast, the applicability of the principal agent theory demonstrated that no one was watching what bureaucrats were actually doing, and appropriations kept coming with little interruption in the form of principals’ sanctions and interferences. Moreover, the trustee theory completes the principal agent approach for the cases in which the absence of massive monitoring and frequent punishments can be substituted with other means of principals’ oversight, such as through incentives, determining nevertheless the same consistent level of control over the agent. In short, if agents are aware of the fact that bad outcomes for constituencies would imply bad consequences for themselves, then the agents, as rational actors, would follow the actions that the principals want from them, by these means avoiding the negative incentives. There is evidence in this sense that agency officials are making decisions which are consistent with the preferences of their principal overseers rendering it unnecessary for the principal to undertake costly actions addressed to employ punishments for the agents’ defiance (Knott and Miller, 2005). The trustee approach is feasible under the condition of authority delegation from the principal to the agent. In order to accomplish its mission, the agent must benefit from complete mutual trust from the principal. In this context, the relationship between the principal and the agent cannot be altered, as it could render a questionable commitment of the agent towards his or her mission. Finally, the bureaucratic trustee does not necessarily focus on the equilibrium of powers between politicians and bureaucrats. It seeks to

promote a complex system of checks and balances, which purpose is to subordinate the bureaucracy to the laws and to the common public interest, and not to make the bureaucracy dependent to the politicians, meaning the lawmakers.

Waterman, Rouse and Wright (1998) move away from the dyadic model of the political-administrative relationships to a multiple principle model, called the *venues of influence*. They hypothesized that agents do not perceive their principles as separate and distinct political actors. They contend that the bureaucrats perceive influence as emanating from various and competing groups of principals with a shared type of perceived influence. In their opinion, the type of constraint exerted by each of the venues of influence is important as it frames the manner in which the agents respond to their principals. According to the venues of influence model approach, agents recognize principals both as separate and distinct decision-maker actors and as sets of actors who share some type of similar characteristics; then bureaucrats may respond to different sets of principals in different ways. For instance, the agents reply to the courts in a highly legalistic manner, to the legislators in a political fashion, to the interest groups in a more substantive way and finally to the public or the media in a more symbolic way. Contrary to the principal-agent model, which primary emphasis addresses the hierarchical control of the bureaucracy and tends to ignore the possible role of other non-hierarchical actors, the venues of influence approach underpins the idea of high involvement of other actors, such as interest groups, the media and the public. As a result to that, the political-administrative relation becomes less bi-dimensional; it gets the characteristic of a complex process, which in the end stands at core of every decision-making process.

In conclusion, it is noticeable that there is no easy way in defining and describing the patterns of the political-administrative relations. During the last century, the models and the approaches drifted from normative or descriptive explanations trying to offer a clear imagine of interactions between politicians and bureaucrats. Along times, the different opinions of the scholars ranged from exclusively dichotomist perspectives to mutual commitment and more pluralist views regarding the politics of bureaucracy, nonetheless they all suggested that one should be aware of the complexity of the issue at stake. From this vantage point, that is particularly what we try to achieve in the last part of our paper when tackling the subject of bureaucratic politics.

IV. The political actors in the decision-making process – their role and the unilateral means of control over the bureaucracy

Regardless the theories referring to the decision-making process and the political-administrative relations, the scholars identified a very large array of actors that can be involved in the decision-making, ranging from citizens, interest groups, mass-media, representatives of the business groups, courts and legislatures, politically elected national and local entities, scientific advisors and experts, bureaucrats, politicians as well as international organizations (Waterman and Rouse, 1999; Nicholson-Crotty and Nicholson-Crotty, 2004; Dahl, 2008; Waterman, Rouse and Wright, 1998; Shapiro

and Guston, 2006). The above mentioned parties do not necessarily participate in all the stages of the decision-making process; rarely all of them take action within the same policy-making debate or negotiation. The depth and width (Dahl, 2008) of their involvement depends on the available resources at their disposal – financial, physical and informational resources, political will, and capacity to build support among other actors –, the type of intrinsic motivations, the personal or collective interests that are at stake, the ability to mobilize public opinion and the access to the agendas of the public institutions (Kingdon, 1994; Stone, 1997).

Supposedly, most of the times, there is more than one actor involved in the decision-making process and even if they act independently, the mechanisms used to influence this process are similar and converge at a certain point. Waterman and Rouse (1999) argue that there are six types of mechanisms¹, which different “venues of influence” apply every time they want to be better off before or after the process of bargaining or negotiation. The first set includes *linkage mechanisms*, such as the media and the public, so-called because they link the public to their governmental principals. The law venues introduce the *legal mechanisms* used by national courts and legislatures, which are entitled to interpret and make the law, by these designing the public agencies. The third type can be summarized as *traditional mechanisms* through which the two traditional political actors (the President and the national legislative body) exert their budgetary and statutory authority. The fourth type of mechanisms is specific for the *interest groups*. The *internal hierarchical mechanisms* refer to the political appointees in the public institutions. Finally, the last type includes the mechanisms used by the *permittees*, or what is called the regulated entity, comprising its clients and its personnel.

Giving the variety of the players and the diversity of their means of influence and control, we will inquire exclusively the subject of the dichotomy politicians-bureaucrats, with a focus on their role in the identification of problems and policy alternatives. In this section of the paper we will analyze the manner in which the politicians insist on exerting their roles of primary decision-makers. In this context, the politicians’ means of influence over the bureaucrats will be examined as well. Nonetheless, the complexity of the modern administrative process and the citizens’ increasing expectancies and needs have contributed to a wider involvement of other parties in the decision-making. By these, the bureaucrats are indirectly entitled to become important actors in the identification of problems and solutions in public affairs. Their empowerment is explained by their technical expertise, political neutrality and their stability. Therefore, the second part of this section of the paper could address the means the bureaucrats use in order to maintain and increase their role in the policy making process, but that is a subject to another debate, which the authors aspire to undertake in a forthcoming article.

In order to assure a full comprehension of the influence exerted by politicians over bureaucrats, a short review of their intrinsic motivation, sources of legitimacy and goals

¹ It has to be mentioned that the mechanisms were elaborated for the American decision-making process. Therefore, not all of them can be entirely applied to other political and social systems.

is required. The literature mentions that the politicians are mostly “voters concerned” (Alesina and Tabellini, 2007) and that are trying to a large extent to satisfy the requests of their constituencies and of other stakeholders. Roughly stated, aspects related to intrinsic motivation are explained by the fact that they are interested in further gaining political support in order to be reelected. On the other hand, the politicians’ legitimacy rests in the power given to them by the citizens to make decisions on their behalf. The mandated political rivals tend to please their voters by constantly maintaining the utility and the outcome of the decision made, by this means somehow offering an illusion of “a common interest”. However, the politicians are self-seeking, meaning that they put their and their parties’ interest over the public interest. This situation is described in the literature as the “political moral hazard” (Knott and Miller, 2008), meaning the case in which politicians are not the only gainers, but other stakeholders too. The strongest interest groups, who manage to use the political power in their favor, will also gain benefits and in this way will protect themselves from the political moral hazard. Related to this, politicians prefer to deal with distributive decisions, such as the budgetary process (Alesina and Tabellini, 2008), in which the resources and the benefits are shared among different groups of interest. This type of decisions offers them the opportunity to build winning coalitions, by this assuring the success in the next elections. Some of the authors state that the politicians are not interested to gain control over the entire bureaucracy, but only over some of the public institutions. It is said that the politicians’ indifference originated from “the fact that agency policies are of little interest to their constituencies, so trying to change these policies has too little electoral payoff to make the effort worthwhile” (Hammond and Knott, 1996, p. 121).

Referring to the intrinsic motivations of the public administrators, the literature considers that they are likewise driven by self-interest. Downs (1967) mentions five types of motivations that reside in the self-interest of the public servants: power, money income, convenience, security and prestige. The same author classifies bureaucrats in *climbers*, being motivated by prestige and power, *conservers* as being driven by security, the *zealous* bureaucrats who are loyal to narrow policies, the *advocates* dedicated to a broader set of policies, and finally the *statesmen* who are loyal to the entire society.

Having said this, the debate over the political influence continues with the classification of the mechanisms and tools political actors use to control the bureaucrats. Gormley (1989 *apud* Furlong, 1998) classifies the national legislatures’ oversight mechanisms in *prayers* and *muscles*. Prayers consist out of coercive controls, such as legislative vetoes and legislative hammer provisions (provisions placed into a law that takes effect if the public institutions fail to meet the schedule). They involve public personnel techniques such as political appointments or the conduction of cost-benefit analysis by special scientific committees assigned by different political actors. Muscles are catalytic mechanisms of control that do not force a particular decision, but put a pressure on the bureaucracy to perform a specific function. The muscles techniques may include as well reorganization, the use of different budgeting policies and the issuance of certain executive orders. In practice, due to their more coercive nature, the muscles strategies

are more likely to get the attention of the bureaucrats, as well as a stronger potential influence of their decisions. Ogul (1976 *apud* Furlong, 1998) distinguished between two types of political methods of control: formal and informal. The committee hearings and the changes in the enabling statutes are recognized as formal techniques, whereas the private meetings and telephone contacts comprise the informal methods.

Hammond and Knott (1996) identify two types of control: ex-ante and ex-post control. In the first case, the administrative procedures function as mechanisms of ex-ante controls for determining and establishing the way the final decisions are made. The politicians can impose some changes in the structure of the public institution, or other measures related to the organizational dynamics (establishment, division, closure and mergence). They can also initiate the so-called "fire alarms" by which the constituencies can voice their disagreement with public institutions actions or the "police patrols", which represent the oversight committees whose purpose consists in monitoring the agencies' activities (Spence, 1997). The mechanisms of ex-ante control enable the politicians to design the agency in order to predetermine and achieve some policy preferences. By these the procedures and the activities of the public institutions are particularly directed to a preferable policy perspective. The political control over the bureaucratic institutions is even greater when some loyal and reliable persons are appointed by the politicians to the top management positions, guaranteeing in this way the internal control of the administrative activities reached through direct "manipulation". The politicians rely on this mechanism of control due to the fact that bureaucrats are in general politically neutral and their level of ideological political polarization is relatively reduced. The politically appointed officials, who favor the partisanship, will make sure that the public institution will achieve the politically desired outcomes (Alesina and Tabellini, 2007).

The budgetary process is another mechanism used to restrict the activities of the technocrats. All the administrative institutions are dependable on the budget and this becomes even more crucial taking into consideration that the budget is mainly distributed and amended by political bodies. The activities and the capacity of a public institution to achieve its goals depend on the amount of the estimated budget for the next year (Hammond and Knott, 1996). The last will be assigned in accordance with the political adherence of the top level public officials. This situation applies to the local public administration, because at this level of governance the amount and the priority of the funds are decided based on the political orientation of the local authorities (this case is specific for Romania). In the same context, the budgetary allocation is used as a mean to sanction the adverse "political behavior" or to reward the expected one. As decision-makers, politicians are "case oriented", i.e. they will prefer to successfully deal with those public issues which will bring maximum social impact, therefore will built their political support necessary to win the elections. It can be expected that those bureaucrats who are in charge with the implementation of the solution of a particular public issue affecting a large segment of the population will benefit indeed from the budgetary allocations.

The increasing complexity and number of administrative tasks and the rising expectancies of the population determined the enlargement of the public sector through the development of new public services and the establishment of additional public authorities. All these aspects have created a cumbersome administrative process too difficult to cover and manage for the politicians, reason for which they delegated a significant part of their duties to the bureaucrats. In spite of the delegation, which accorded to the bureaucrats a large autonomy in the decision-making, the politicians have kept their restraints by developing other types of mechanisms and tools of control (Spence, 1997; Furlong, 1998; Shapiro and Guston, 2006). Related to the delegation problem, the literature mentions two types of means that the politicians can use in shaping the public agencies decision-making environment. An appropriate control of bureaucracy can happen through participative administration (Edelenbos and Klijn, 2005), that is the citizens' participation in the bureaucratic decision-making, defined as "grassroots advocacy" (Campbell, 1995).

In the same vein, it is important to understand that the interactive model of government was not created by the politicians to benefit the politicians, but it was conceived as a way of conducting policies whereby a government involves its citizens, social organizations and economic enterprises, as well as other stakeholders, and only in the end the politicians and the bureaucrats (Edelenbos and Klijn, 2005). The emergence of a participative decision-making process was stressed by the democratization of the states; wherein the importance of all groups and actors from the society was acknowledged as each of them possesses vital resources to achieve the policy goals and outcomes, but also different perceptions on the problem, as well as different ideas and solutions (Klijn and Koppenjan, 2000). Theoretically, the interactive decision-making model provides each participant to the policy process with necessary mechanisms of control over other involved actors, which fact will limit their abuses and illegal interference. Within the participative process, there exist mechanisms which are favorable to politicians and citizens, being transposed into the transparency requirements. According to the transparency principle, it is mandatory for the administrative institutions to make public and to reveal any type of information and document, which is of interest for the citizens. Related to this, the politicians limit the actions of the bureaucrats by putting at the disposal of the citizens legal instruments of appeal and complain in case of injustice or restraint of rights (Cobârzan, Dragoş and Neamţu, 2008).

The empowerment of the citizens emphasizes the role legal courts play in constraining the actions of the public institutions. The rightness of the administrative decision-making process is often challenged and questioned in courts by the existing affected parties; this can happen before the decision itself takes effect and the legal proceedings often delay, sometimes completely eliminate the possibility of the public agency' policies to be implemented. The courts can make procedural rulings that can influence the decision-making capacity of the public organization or they can make substantive rulings that interpret the statutory intent (Furlong, 1998). Therefore, this mechanism of control, which is materialized in the legal court system functions both as an ex-post and ex-ante

mean of oversight. Herein, the legal courts act as an indispensable component of the checks-and-balances system in the nature of separation of power of every democratic government.

Let us proceed with the second mean of administrative control linked to the delegation issue. As a definition it involves the use of experts from one agency that are brought to other proceedings to advocate one side of a particular policy issue, thus providing a balance of expertise, defined as “proxy advocacy or fellowship of science” (Campbell, 1995); a similar concept referring to the expertise and the oversight provided by the academia is called “regulatory peer review” (Shapiro and Guston, 2006). These practices are mainly used in the following circumstances: the distribution of scarce, but important resources, the amendment of the Constitution and other judicial codes (for instance, the administrative and the penal codes), the review of regulations and regulatory impact analyses; any other case when the governing institutions need the advice of the internal or external experts. Another concept – of information asymmetry - is directly related to the delegation issue and has deepened the debate over the necessity of the politicians to control the bureaucracy. Some authors (Arrow, 1985 *apud* Hammond and Knott, 1996) have distinguished two types of information asymmetries. The first one, “hidden information”, refers to the fact that public agencies may control secret information or have technical expertise that other political actors lack. The second one, being called “hidden action”, explains that public agencies can sometimes take actions that are not easily observable by political actors.

As much as the political responsibilities and duties are transferred to the bureaucratic actors, the information asymmetry contributes to a more shaded role of the politicians as primary decision makers (Spence, 1997; Waterman and Meier, 1998). In this context, the political players become aware of the potential consequences of the information asymmetry, such as: *shirking*, situation in which the representatives of the bureaucracy consciously underperform in the delegation of their tasks; *corruption*, which refers to the capture of the public institutions’ decision-making by an external group contrary to the preferences of the legislature; and *oligarchy*, meaning the case when the democratic preferences are substituted by the bureaucratic ones (McCubbins, Noll and Weingast, 1987 *apud* Shapiro and Guston, 2006). These three scenarios are important because they help define those types of behavior that the politicians might want to anticipate and that could affect the preferred policy outcomes. To illustrate the above mentioned, we can presume a situation in which the “budget-maximizing” bureaucrats might escape the legislative controls that could constrain budgets because of the asymmetric information that exists between the legislators and the bureaucrats belonging to the public agency (Heikkila, 2007).

In terms of its usefulness, the regulatory peer review represents an ideal instrument against the informational monopoly over analysis that one public agency could possess. If the peer reviewers reveal that the agency bureaucrats had shirked the performance over an important technical analysis, the analysis would presumably have to be repeated or the bureaucrats replaced, at the command of the political interested actor. The mechanisms

of the regulatory peer review can be applied as well in identifying corrupt or biased analyses by showing that there was no technical valid reason for that kind of analyses, the case when someone within the public institution deliberately shifts an outcome that benefits a favored party, such as a client, an interest group or another bureaucrat (Shapiro and Guston, 2006). That is an illustration of the way how the bureaucrats can build their own support, which facilitates their control over the administrative procedures and the decision-making process, and therefore threatens the politicians' legitimacy. The peer review role also consists in drawing the political actors' attention upon a public problem that should or has to be investigated more closely, wherein the regulatory peer review functions as a "fire alarm" mechanism. By insuring that the selected technical inputs are adequate for the final decision that will be made, the peer review agents, assigned by the politicians, will carry on their responsibilities of a control mechanism (Shapiro and Guston, 2006).

V. Conclusions

One of the persistent preoccupations of the modern literature in political and administrative sciences consists in the reconciliation of the politicians' demands of solely and legitimately warranted policy makers in the society and the bureaucrats increasing allegations to be recognized as fully-entitled actors in the process of decision-making. The theoretical views are often observed in reality, when politicians frequently blame bureaucracy for its inefficiency and cumbersomeness, pretending to "cut the red tape" for the common good, meanwhile bureaucrats look to protect their decision-making from uninformed or polemical interference by political "amateurs" who seek influence and decision-making domination without having the expertise or experience required to handle technically complex policy issues. The aspect that underlines the bureaucracy problem and increases the rationale for political control is the public institutions' use of expertise and judgment to exercise what are considered political powers - the determination of *who* gets *what*, *when*, and *how* - by the bureaucrats, the unelected and insulated decision makers. This well-known feature of the bureaucratic decision making is regularly denounced by political actors, and the speech of bureaucratic criticism in society encourages the development of negative and skeptical public perspectives on bureaucracy, by this fostering the right of the politicians to exert on oversight over the bureaucracy and to reserve for themselves the primary role in policy making.

In this paper we endeavored to expose unbiased opinions and to formulate neutral pros and cons. Hence, we considered it important to define the theoretical background of the decision-making process by listing the predominant hypothetical models of decision-making which we think represent the interface to the politico-administrative interactions. The analysis undertaken in this paper brought us involuntarily and imperceptibly to the conclusion that in the politico-administrative debate the politicians will be most of the times the winning parties. While we consciously acknowledge that we have to "Give to *Caesar* what is *Caesar's*", we admit that at least from the point of view of their sources of legitimacy and means of control, the politicians are the only

subjects lawfully entitled to create visions and mission for the government and to make political decisions which affect the wellbeing of the entire society. Finally, we are completely aware that such a scenario is plausible and possible in a state or society governed by exclusively democratic principles.

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