POLITICAL SCIENCE – NEW AREAS OF INVESTIGATION

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Summary. The need to expand the scope of political science into new areas of investigation. Proposals for the development of this field in the following directions: governance, virtual political space, and public sector management. Criticism of the genetic-chronological method as the prevailing one in Polish political science. The need to conduct research on the 'margins' of disciplines in social sciences as the sine qua non condition for their further development.

Key words: political science, research/investigations, governance, public sector, management, methodology

INTRODUCTION

We would like to assess the condition of present-day political science (including, political science in Poland) by indicating those areas of research, not necessarily new, which political scientists have previously regarded as the realm of other scholarly fields, while, we believe, they should be included in the domain of political science interests, as well as those that, for no apparent reason, political scientists tend to avoid.

The object of our interest in the present essay will be three issues: governance, i.e. the problem of exercise of political authority in the environment of 'dispersed' control over resources, power, information and knowledge; e-government and administration, i.e. development of virtual political space; and management in the public sector – the shift of focus from the legislative process to the executive process.

MANAGEMENT OF THE DISPERSED DECISION-MAKING PROCESS
(GOVERNANCE)

Since the public sector accepted the previously absent economic categories such as efficiency, cost, quality, demand, customer, etc., decision-makers at different levels of administration have grappled with divergences between eco-
nomic indicators and social values. New Public Management has changed the way of thinking about the recipients of social policy or citizens turned consumers or customers of public services. The public sphere gained the economic dimension: differences between the former and the latter sectors pertaining not so much to principles (private interest versus public interest, profit versus common good) as mechanisms of operation became severely limited.

‘Marketization’ of the public sector, however, produced an unforeseeable effect in the sphere of interest in public life and civic activity, especially among local communities. The clash between economic factors and social values usually ended in the defeat of the latter, which resulted in citizens withdrawing from current social activities and in the diminished trust in local authorities measured by voter turnout. Deficient legitimation of the authority at all decision-making levels was quickly noticed and the search started for ways of counteracting adverse tendencies.

The crisis of legitimation of political power may turn out to be permanent; it can be essentially not so much a crisis as a new quality of political life, where no public actor has a monopoly of power, information, knowledge or other means of exercising political authority. The lack of one entity actually responsible for the course and results of the decision-making process is a symptom and feature of the emerging network society. What the politicians but also political scientists find debatable is the new role of public institutions – formally responsible but in fact less and less influential in the complex networks of interrelations dominated by non-political actors.

It should be pointed out that deconcentration of the decision-making process is not a new phenomenon. The activities of interest groups, corporationism, plurality and collective activities have been the object of numerous investigations and theories. A significant novelty is the ‘diffusion’ of responsibility for political decisions, a sui generis ‘governance without government’.

The development of the Governance trend has also a theoretical dimension apart from the practical one. The turn of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries is characterized by efforts aiming at the absorption by political science of phenomena related to governance. Governance is defined as a combination of self-government, joint government and hierarchical government; as a system which determines the direction of social development; the way the participants in the decision-making process cooperate in order to influence the effects of policies (supranational, national, regional, and local).

The institutional diversity – of non-governmental, quasi-governmental, public-private, network, etc. organizations, when confronted with government and

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local government administration, compels one to reject the Weberian tradition, according to which political leadership, parties and bureaucracy are necessary and at the same time sufficient to exercise authority. The hierarchical image of the institution of the state has been replaced by the vision of multi-level governance. The political process is situated in different ‘places’ of public space (local, regional, national, supranational, global) while the coalitions of local or regional actors can attain their interest in the international arena, passing over national decision-making centers.\(^3\)

It is not just the network society per se that needs to be defined and described. New reflection is needed on the role of government in the deconcentrated decision-making process, as well as on the role of public administration and other actors participating in making politics.

It would be also in order to consider the relation between provision of public services and the process of planning them. It appears that the assumption of New Public Management that decisions about the directions of social policies can be separated from the provision of public services is now untenable. Recipients of the latter play a crucial role in the process of providing them and take part in planning them to an increasingly large extent. The participation of nongovernmental actors, especially at the local level, in planning and providing public services is becoming widespread. We are also witnessing the growing involvement of public institutions in joint ventures undertaken by the public sector and civic society.

The three traditional sectors (private – public – nongovernmental) are characterized to an increasingly higher degree by close forms of organization and similar methods of operation. Close resemblance of the private, public, and nongovernmental sectors constitutes the sphere of common interests and joint enterprises. How is the traditionally conceived decision-making process ‘localized’ in this area? What is the place of responsibility for decisions? What is happening with the legitimacy of the authority? What roles are performed by political leadership? We regard the answers to these and many other questions related to decision-making in a network society as crucial in contemporary political science inquiries.

**VIRTUAL POLITICAL SPACE**

Information and communication technologies (ICT) ceased long ago to be treated exclusively as the instrument improving the work of bureaucracy. After decades of e-bureaucracy came the age of e-government: at first defined narrowly, as the use of the Internet in order to inform, communicate, and provide services, and at present defined in terms of objectives realized by public administration.

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E-government is the whole of uses of information technologies in public institutions, aimed at enhancing the quality of services provided by the administration at all levels and improving communication of government and local-government institutions with private institutions, non-governmental organizations, citizens, and public administrations in other countries. This not the only one or final definition of e-government: it is evolving with the uses themselves of ICT and it is difficult to foresee what the eventual form of e-government and its definition will be. We are dealing, after all, with a highly dynamic phenomenon – not quite as dynamic as ICT development but undoubtedly more dynamic than other aspects of governing. The more so that e-government is still at the ‘growth’ stage and is far away from the stage of ‘stability’.

E-government is not exclusively a consequence of ICT development: it is the result of interaction of three independently developing fields: ICT, management, and government itself. We could therefore say, with reference to our previous discussion, that governance and e-government have a common origin. We will be able to find that in the same way they ‘double’ the previous way of thinking about government.

Virtual networks, on which e-government is based, are one of the few elements that put the Internet chaos in order. It should be observed, however, that their number and heterogeneity as well as dispersion are a significant challenge to anyone who would like to treat them as a research problem. In the Internet space people meet who would never do so under normal circumstances. In the virtual network they form a community of interests, more open than in the real world but at the same time more closed because entirely dependent on the sense of bond between its members. Virtual space can also form ‘duplicates’ of communities existing in the real world, e.g. local communities.

E-government is implemented through its own institutions, which combine the traditional model of hierarchical organization with the model of network organization. But it appears that the vast application of ICT in the process of providing public services will significantly affect the structures of public administration. The functions and personnel will be diminished at the lowest administrative levels, whose present tasks will be realized through information systems. Intermediate levels, located so far in hierarchical organizations, will gain in importance; their previous function of control and transmission of feedback to the decision-making levels will be replaced by the function of management of knowledge and experience accumulated by organizations. These are strategic resources and they are going to gain in importance in a network society.

The Internet is the dynamically developing space of not only provision of public services but also public activity. This medium of information and communication has so far been used more often in international relations whereas it turns out to be equally useful in activities of a highly local nature: it is the place of direct ‘encounters’ of citizens with their representatives in state and local government institutions as well as ‘encounters’ of citizens with citizens.
Virtual space is a new area of political participation and decision-making. Its significance for present-day political processes cannot be overestimated. Therefore, the object of political scientists’ interest should be the actors of this space, their mutual relations, rules of political functioning in the Internet, virtual organizations and their impact on public life in the real world.

**MANAGEMENT IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR**

One of the most eminent contemporary management theorists Peter F. Drucker made a critical analysis of twentieth-century management paradigms and as a result he formulated new ones, corresponding to the challenges of the twenty-first century. They are reducible to the following statements⁴:

– management does not apply only to the essence and principles of functioning of enterprise but it is a specific and distinctive feature of any, including public, organization,

– there is no single universal model of organization, hence an organizational structure has to be adjusted each time to the range of tasks, conditions and the time, in which they are realized,

– there is no single and right way of managing people because the task of an organization is to lead people rather than manage them, its principal objective being to use specific skills and knowledge of individual employees,

– the starting point for creating politics and management strategy should be information about the values and needs of potential customers,

– the scope of management is not defined by law but it is politically determined to a varied degree,

– the domain of management is not the inside of an organization because the effects of operation of each institution are seen only outside.

This conception of the essence of management enables the methods and techniques previously typical of private firms to be used more and more successfully by public sector institutions⁵. This does not mean, however, that public sector organizations do not retain their specificity consisting in that they make public choices, using above all social and political criteria, and to a lesser extent market criteria typical of the private sector. However, the significance of economic criteria, especially since the nineteen-eighties, has been clearly growing in public organizations⁶. As a result, the evolution in management of public or-

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ganizations is oriented, among others, towards the following\(^7\):
- ensure accountability in public management,
- measure and assess results,
- increase the state’s involvement in the administration’s human resources development,
- promote ethics in public service and eliminate corruption,
- undertake cost-reducing measures,
- introduce quality criteria in the whole sector of public services,
- define strategic and operational goals of public organizations,
- extend competencies and enhance the flexibility of the management and public organizations in managing finances.

The object of public management are public services. Their range differs depending on the adopted model of the state and the importance of the public sector in it. As part of analysis of the public sector it is necessary, J.E. Stiglitz believes, to\(^8\):
- identify the scope of activities, in which the public sector is involved and understand the manner of organization of these activities,
- understand and, if possible, foresee all effects of the state’s activities,
- assess alternative variants of decisions that the state has to confront,
- understand the working of political mechanisms.

There is a whole gamut of state models that take into account the significance of the public sector to a different extent, from the liberal state derived from Adam Smith’s concept assuming a minimal range of the public sector and based on individual entrepreneurship, including the satisfaction of citizens’ needs, to A.C. Pigou’s model of welfare state or J.M. Keynes’s interventionist state that assume a considerable increase in importance of the public sector in the provision of services. The excessive growth of the public sector turns out to be highly inefficient since public services are provided under the conditions of state monopoly, at comparatively high costs incommensurate with their quality. Which is why, after the period of heyday of the public sector in many Western European countries, since the late nineteen-eighties we have been witnessing attempts to curtail its range and to introduce economic instruments into the operation of the public sector. Moves of this kind, supported by theoretical considerations, are termed new public management. It is based on\(^9\):
- introduction of professional management into the public sector,
- clearly defined standards and measures of activities,


\(^{9}\) A. Zalewski, *op. cit.* p. 27
- greater emphasis on the supervision of results of activities,
- orientation towards disaggregation of public sector units,
- introduction of competition into the public sector,
- emphasis on the use in the public sector of management methods and techniques applied in the private sector,
- emphasis on greater discipline and economical use of resources.

A manifestation of new public management is among others distinguishing between two functions of the state and public institutions, i.e. as provider of public services and their organizer. In the traditional interpretation, the public sector was expected to provide public services directly, while in new public management a greater emphasis is placed on organizing public services, defining their qualitative and qualitative parameters, and guaranteeing the continuity of service provision, but services are rendered directly on a limited scale. Obviously, there remains a certain exclusive sphere of the state in providing some services but the majority of services can be only organized by public institutions, which results in the need to apply the instruments of new public management that consist inter alia in:
- full privatization of entities providing public services, or, should it prove impossible, granting concessions to private entities to provide public services, or concluding managerial contracts with persons managing public institutions,
- creation of competitive markets of public services by introducing mechanisms that counteract the emergence of monopolies,
- introduction of payment for public services based on full cost calculation.

The introduction of the new model of public management is certainly facilitated by the process of decentralization of institutions providing public services, which is connected with the broader problem of building efficient, decentralized structures of managing the state. They should be distinguished by high dynamics and flexibility, and transparency of operation, taking into account strategic decisions and entrepreneurial imagination. Obviously, the efficient and citizen-friendly state is the result of the process of political decisions made by domestic and international decision-making entities, selected as the effects of the game played between politicians and voters. There is no doubt, however, that the decentralized state, based on public institutions operating according to the logic of new public management, can be better adjusted to the network model of domestic and international relations.

THE METHODOLOGICAL DIMENSION

The new areas of political science constitute a challenge not only regarding the object of research but also methodology. It is the latter that essentially influences the style of pursuing science and determines its cognitive value. We believe that the genetic-chronological method prevalent in Polish political science
is not conducive to broadening the knowledge of contemporary social phenomena; at best, it serves to describe them; to a limited extent – to explain them, and to a negligible degree – to forecast the future. As a result, this method is a poor instrument for evaluating reality and formulating directives on conduct. Hence stems the low value of political science in Poland as an instrument supporting politicians and the political process.

We should also add that this method is useless for exploring phenomena like governance, e-government or public management because:

1. It is based on traditional political science approaches, which, we believe, incorrectly describe the contemporary world. The existing categories of state, authority, political system, leadership, sovereignty, etc. are one-dimensional and present political relations as merely those of superiority-subordination.

2. It explains political phenomena by means of causal relations, which do not express the concurrence of diverse elements of the contemporary world and reinforce the one-dimensional description of it.

Impossibility of applying any other method but a genetic-chronological one may be the reason why political science in Poland cannot cope with description of the complexity of the contemporary world. While Western political sciences describe the public sphere by using institutional, behavioral, systemic-functional, or rational-choice approaches, Polish political science still remains in the ‘fetters’ of historical inspection, which does not bring us closer to gaining more thorough knowledge of the essence of contemporary political phenomena.

Domination of the genetic-chronological approach over political science in the first place, and then of an institutional-legal one, which hardly serves to describe and explain the phenomena of the present, reduces politicians to discussing either the historical or legal level of politics, leaving the crucial segments of public life to be considered by sociologists or administrative scholars.

Finally, it appears essential to say that the most dynamic science develops on the fringes of scholarly domains. It is there that the problems of governance, e-government, or public management, which we have presented, are located. And it is there that the cognitive effort of representatives of different sciences is needed. What social sciences in Poland obviously lack is interdisciplinary research teams. Remaining within the ‘bounds’ of the traditionally understood research field, failing to broaden the conceptual apparatus, and sticking to traditional methodological approaches results in stagnation and impossibility of facing new research challenges by political science in Poland.
Streszczenie: Konieczność poszerzenia politologii o nowe obszary badawcze. Propozycje rozwoju dziedziny w kierunkach: samorządzenie (governance), wirtualna przestrzeń polityki, zarządzanie w sektorze publicznym. Krytyka metody genetyczno-chronologicznej jako dominującej w polskiej politologii. Konieczność prowadzenia badań na „obrzeżach” dziedzin w naukach społecznych jako warunek sine qua non dalszego ich rozwoju.

Słowa kluczowe: politologia, badania, governance, sektor publiczny, zarządzanie, metodologia