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Faculty of Sociology and Social Work

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Public Entrepreneurship. Study on Romanian City Managers

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

PART 1 CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS

1. Entrepreneurship and corporate entrepreneurship
2. Corporate entrepreneurship at individual level
3. Determinants of corporate entrepreneurship
 - 3.1. Individual level antecedents
 - 3.2. Organizational level antecedents
 - 3.3. Environmental antecedents
4. Conclusions

PART II. ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR

1. Public and private organizations
2. Conceptualization of public entrepreneurship
3. Determinants of public entrepreneurship – literature review
 - 3.1. Innovation in the public sector
 - 3.2. Risk taking in the public sector
 - 3.3. Proactive behavior in the public sector
4. Conclusions

PART III. RESEARCH MODEL AND METHODOLOGY

1. Argument
2. Research questions and hypotheses
3. Operationalization
4. Research methods and data collection
 - 4.1. Survey
 - 4.2. Interview
 - 4.3. Secondary data analysis

PART IV. DATA ANALYSIS

1. Quantitative data analysis
 - 1.1. City Managers' profile
 - 1.2. Organizational environment
 - 1.3. Institutional environment
 - 1.4. Entrepreneurial profile
 - 1.5. **Entrepreneurial orientation (EO). Impact of individual level variables on the dimensions of EO**
 - 1.5.1. Innovativeness

1.5.2. Proactiveness

1.5.3. Risk aversion

1.6. Entrepreneurial orientation. Impact of organizational level variables on the dimensions of EO

1.6.1. Innovativeness

1.6.2. Proactiveness

1.6.3. Risk aversion

1.7. Entrepreneurial orientation. Impact of environmental variables on the dimensions of EO

1.8. Competitive analysis on the determinants of entrepreneurial behavior

1.8.1. Innovativeness

1.8.2. Proactiveness

1.8.3. Risk aversion

1.9. Conclusions

2. Interview analysis

3. City managers' impact analysis – EU funds absorption

PART V. CONCLUSIONS

References

Annexes

The thesis *Public Entrepreneurship. Study on Romanian City Managers* addresses the study of entrepreneurial behavior and its determinants at the level of the Romanian city managers, a distinct class of local government employees, similar to American city managers in the USA and other European states.

The purpose of the research is, on the one hand, to analyze the entrepreneurial profile of Romanian city managers and to understand the individual, organizational and environmental determinants of innovativeness, proactiveness, and risk aversion. In particular, we try to identify which of the three dimensions has a greater influence on entrepreneurial behavior.

The research is based on several arguments, both theoretical and practical.

First, the literature lacks a comprehensive empirical analysis of the Romanian city managers. The central government's initiative - *The city manager - element of success for an efficient management at local level*, project implemented between 2008 and 2011 - is welcomed, but represents an isolated effort and is less scientific.

Second, while the positions exist for over eight years, there's no broad assessment of their impact on their communities. While our project does not exhaust this topic, does bring a new perspective by analyzing secondary data on EU funds accession. Task complexity and diversity makes difficult a general assessment of CM's impact on local governments. We thus chose to concentrate on the most shared responsibility of city managers, namely EU projects, and see if they make a difference in the level of EU projects spending of their institution.

Third, the project improves our understanding of entrepreneurial behavior in the public sector. To date, to our knowledge, there is not scientific endeavor on public entrepreneurship in Romania, although related topics, like innovativeness, appear sporadically in the literature. It's obvious though the need for a better understanding of the phenomena specific for Romania, a critical insufficiency considering the increased international interest for this topic.

In the same vein, the project offers an image about the entrepreneurial profile of Romanian city managers, or about their willingness to behave entrepreneurially. We have to understand if city managers have (or don't) specific entrepreneurial characteristics, assuming that these will translate in organizational or community initiatives.

Fifth, the projects improves our understanding of how city managers fit in the power distribution in local governments, by shedding light on their relationship with the mayor/president of the county council, and the local council.

The paper is divided in five sections.

The first one – **Part I CONCEPT CLARIFICATIONS** – tackles the concept of corporate entrepreneurship. Among others, we discuss Schumpeter's (1934), Kao's (1993), Sharma and Chrisman's (1999) definitions of entrepreneurship. The diversity of labels and perspective put

scientists in a challenging position, several trying to clarify the key concepts related to entrepreneurship. Among the most respected such efforts is Sharma and Chrisman's (1999, p. 17), which define entrepreneurship as 'acts of organizational creation, renewal, or innovation that occur within or outside an existing organization' while entrepreneurs are 'individuals or groups of individuals, acting independently or as part of a corporate system, who create new organizations, or instigate renewal or innovation within an existing organization.' Their work highlights a critical aspect of entrepreneurship: whether or not independent initiative is required. They continue by discriminating between independent entrepreneurship, or the process by which one or several persons create, independently of any existing organization, a new entity, and corporate entrepreneurship, or the process by which an individual or a group of individuals, connected to an existing organization, create a new one or instigate to organizational renewal or innovation inside the existing organization (p. 18. Similarly, Miller, 2011, p. 875). Normative and pragmatic reasons – data availability (Nguyen-Chyung, 2013) – have convinced most scholars to focus on independent entrepreneurship, even though starting with the 1970's specialists made efforts to understand behaviors associated with entrepreneurship inside organizations – corporate entrepreneurship.

In this section we also review 24 definitions of entrepreneurial orientation or its synonyms, to identify their communalities. Whilst, predictably, there is no consensus on what corporate entrepreneurship means, we do know that it entails novelty, either process, procedural, product or business. Moreover, this novelty needs to bring some added value to the organization; to represent a source of profit and success (Schollhamer 1982). In order to be a source of profit or competitive advantage, the novelty has to be implemented ahead of the competition, which suggests that not all organizational innovations are also entrepreneurial, but only those that are proactive and that, because of the uncertainty about their results, entail a specific level of risk (Miller 1983, p. 154). It becomes obvious, thus, that entrepreneurship requires innovation, but it is more than that. It's a **proactive and risky innovation**.

Probably the most popular approach to corporate entrepreneurship is the one that sees organizations as being entrepreneurial if they are innovative, proactive and willing to take risks, the three dimensions being, *de facto*, generally accepted as descriptors of entrepreneurial orientation (Rauch et al 2009, Randerson, Bettinelli, Fayolle 2014, de Jong et al. 2013). First used as such by Miller (1983 in Covin and Wales 2011), it became the most popular perspective in studying corporate entrepreneurship. While other authors identified additional dimensions of an entrepreneurial company, like autonomy or competitive aggressiveness (Dess and Lumpkin 1996, Lumpkin and Dess 2001) or change orientation and opportunity (Lau et al. 2012), the core model remained unchanged, being used also in the present study.

The first section also discusses about corporate entrepreneurship at individual level and ends with a review of the literature on individual level (personality, human capital, networking, age and sex or social context), organizational (rewards and sanctions system, managerial support, resource availability, organizational culture and decision making autonomy, organizational tenure and size)

and environmental (industry competition, technological advancement, environmental complexity) determinants of corporate entrepreneurship.

The second part of the thesis - **PART II PUBLIC SECTOR ENTREPRENEURSHIP** – talks about the particular characteristics of public organizations (Rainey, 2009), but also about how scholars view public entrepreneurship to date. In particular, we review 29 definitions of public entrepreneurs and public entrepreneurship, with the same goal of finding critical communalities. While the definitions show the lack of coherence in the use of the same labels, they point out to several common elements. Again, the most shared is the idea of **innovation or novelty**. Public entrepreneurship is a different way of doing things. Another communality is **taking advantage of the opportunities**, either for the public interest, or for individual reasons (re-election, prestige, and reputation). Public entrepreneurship is also frequently depicted as an effort of building coalitions, supporting networks for change implementation. Building on the belief of public sector particularities, the promoters of this approach argue that, because of multiple sources of power existing in public organizations, implementing change is not possible without a sustained effort of mediation and persuasion. Last but not least, several definitions see proactiveness and risk taking, beside innovation, as indispensable for public entrepreneurship

The part continues with a discussion about the determinants of entrepreneurial behavior in public organizations, both generally and at the level of its three critical building blocks: innovativeness, proactiveness and risk taking.

The third section - **PART III RESEARCH MODEL AND METHODOLOGY** – discusses the methodological side of the thesis. The section describes the central research questions and the expected hypothesis/interactions, as well as their theoretical background.

1. Which are the individual level determinants of entrepreneurial orientation, namely innovative, proactive and risk taking behavior?

Table 1: individual level variables and expected interactions

| Determinants | Hypotheses / Expected interactions |
|--|---|
| Networking and network intensity | + |
| The professional sector of friends and life part | Private + |
| Professional history | Private + |
| Locus of control | Internal + |
| Professional safety (self-efficacy) | + |
| Education | + |
| Years of work | + |

| | |
|------------------------------------|-----------|
| Years of work in the public sector | +/- |
| Personal financial situation | + |
| Political orientation | Uncertain |
| History within the community | + |
| Time allocated to the media | + |
| Private sector relations | + |
| Business ownership | + |

2. Which are the organizational level determinants of entrepreneurial orientation, namely innovative, proactive and risk taking behavior?

Table 2: Organizational level variables and expected interactions

| Dimension | Determinants | Expected hypotheses interactions |
|-------------------|---------------------------|---|
| Relational | Superior support | + |
| | Job safety | + |
| | Job tenure | +/- |
| Process | Decision-making authority | + |
| | Decision-making autonomy | + |
| | Rules and regulations | - |
| | Organizational complexity | - |
| Input | Time and HR | + |
| | Financial situation | + |
| Output | Clarity of objectives | +/- |
| | Performance evaluation | +/- |
| | Sanctions and rewards | +/- |

3. Which are the organizational level determinants of entrepreneurial orientation, namely innovative, proactive and risk taking behavior?

Table 3: Environmental level variables and expected interactions

| Determinants | Expected hypotheses / interactions |
|---------------------------|---|
| Media interest | |
| Technological development | +/- |
| Community diversity | +/- |

| | |
|----------------------------|---|
| Labor unions | - |
| Competition | + |
| Political tensions | - |
| Involvement of politicians | - |

4. What impact do CM have on absorption of EU funds?

We expected that local public administrations already having a city manager would have a higher rate of EU funds accession than those without one.

Next, section three discusses the operationalization and the methodology.

1. Survey

We assesses the level of entrepreneurial orientation and its determinants at individual, organizational and environmental level by surveying city managers. We developed the survey instrument in several steps, during 2014 and 2015. We applied an intermediate draft on USA city managers in June 2014. The translation and adaptation of the scales was done according to the recommendations of the National Institute for Testing and Evaluation of Israel (2007).

2. Data collection

We collected the data online, using the *google docs* platform. We contacted the respondents through the Romanian City Managers Association (AAPRO), the president of the Association sending, on May 21, the first e-mail and survey link, as well as the project's description and the editable version of the survey (word document). Also, the participants had the possibility to partake in a random selection for three Emag gift vouchers (with a value of 200 RON each) and for a personalized analysis of their responses compared to the national trends. 35 of them opted for the Emag gift vouchers and 42 for the comparative synthesis of responses.

Respondents had three weeks, until June 17, to complete the questionnaire. Two weeks after the initial email we contacted, by telephone, all the city managers from the association's database. We reminded them about the research and the deadline. We also re-sent them the online link and the editable version of the questionnaire. Only two of them had not received the email and were not aware of the study, so they received all the information and the questionnaire on this second phase.

We extended the deadline for data collection until July 1st. A week before the expiration, we send a third reminder regarding the study to those who did not answer until then. In total, we contacted 224 local governments, 178 having a city manager in office. None of them requested the questionnaire by mail or in other formats.

3. Interview

Based on the survey's data and on the aggregated scores of entrepreneurship orientation, we contacted the first 10 PAs with the highest score (from the highest score of 5.31 to 4.75), and the last 7 PAs, with the lowest score (from the lowest score of 2.95 to the maximum of 3.73). We set the limits so that we keep a 1 point difference between the PAs with high scores, and those with low scores. At the same time, we selected more PAs with high scores in order to improve our understanding of the determinants of entrepreneurship orientation. Six PAs accepted the invitation to participate in the study, five from those with high entrepreneurship orientation and one from those who have a lower entrepreneurship score. Two of these are PAs at rural level, two at the town level, one at the municipality level, and one at the county level.

We collected the data through emails or/and by phone, according to the PAs' wishes, as they could opt for an online interview, a written interview, an email interview or a phone interview (those living in Cluj-Napoca proximity, could opt for a face-to-face interview, at their institution).

The interview was structured and it included four types of questions: questions related to the position's status, questions related to the conditions which favored their significant initiatives developed at the local level, and, finally, questions related to the challenges they had with these initiatives, even with those they did not succeed to implement. We also included questions asking for recommendations for other PAs who might want to initiate significant changes in their communities and for local executives who want to hire PAs.

We personalized each interview based on the survey responses. Moreover, the interview included references to the PA's previous professional experience or to other public statements (i.e.: interviews, TEDx, etc.).

4. Secondary data analysis

The impact evaluation of the PA position included data about public expenditure with EU funded projects, per capita, during 2009-2013 period, for communities with a PA and those without a PA. The analysis was conducted using official data on budget execution, provided online, in an aggregated manner, by the Minister of Regional Development and Public Administration, at http://www.dpfbldr.ro/sit_ven_si_chelt_uat.html, and demographic data available on TEMPO platform of the National Institute of Statistics <http://statistici.insse.ro/shop/>. For the communities with a PA, I used data from March 2008, November 2010 and August 2012.

The demographic data were taken from the National Institute of Statistics' website; the data on the index of local social development were taken from the sociologist Dr. Dumitru Sandu's website - <https://sites.google.com/site/dumitrusandu/>, while for the data on the political profile of the communities with a PA, we used the platform administrated by the Romanian Electoral Data Team (<http://www.polito.ubbcluj.ro/romanianelectoraldata/elections-results-romania>), affiliated to the Political Science Department of Babes-Bolyai University from Cluj-Napoca.

Part IV – **DATA ANALYSIS** – includes the analysis of the quantitative and qualitative data and of the secondary data.

The first part includes the public administrators' socio-demographic profile, and the profile of the communities that hired a PA so far. The majority of the public administrators have at least 5 years of experience in the current position (approx. 57%, from which 28% have seven years, and 20% - eight years), while most of them had been part of the organizations previously to the current job (57%). In regards to their personality, the PAs have an relatively low external locus of control (the average 4.77, n=51, on a reversed scale), which suggests that the PAs are less likely to believe that their life is the result of context and more likely the product of their own work and competences (the average 5.35 n=52), experiencing, essentially, the feeling of control over their own existence (internal control=5.08, n=52).

In regards to the professional experience, the majority of the PAs have more than seven years of working experience in the public sector (76%); in addition, almost all the PAs (except two cases) have total working experience of at least 10 years

The analysis continues with the description of the PAs' organizational environment. Their responsibilities are mainly related to EU projects' management, infrastructure and local economic development. The data show that PAs are mainly responsible of the local investments, and, in a lesser extent, of the local expenses (social services, culture, etc.).

The data also show that human resource management (HRM) is the last represented responsibility among the PAs' tasks, which is understandable considering that the majority (approx. 56%) have as subordinates less than 40% of the total number of the organization's employees; 30% of the PAs subordinating even less than 20% of the employees. Less than 25% of the PAs subordinates at least 60% of the total organization employees.

Regarding the relationship with the mayor, the analysis shows that the great majority of the PAs (84%) benefit superior support, a similar proportion declaring that it frequently consults the mayor on solving problems, and that they are expected to come up with new ideas for solving community problems. PAs feel that they can act openly in the relationship with their superior, and that they feel comfortable acknowledging failures, even thou they may be responsible for them, but also that they feel free to test creative solutions without fearing repercussions in case of failure. However, far more less PAs (approx. 50%) declared that the mayor/supervisor consults with them on the decisions he/she makes.

In regards to the relationship with the local council, PAs' answers suggest a positive interaction. The PAs attend almost all council meetings and benefit from local councilors' support for most of the projects they coordinate. However, as expected, the relationship is less developed than the one with the mayor, PAs consulting the local councilors less than the mayor; while the local councilors rely less in their decisions on the PA's opinions.

Regarding the organizational environment, the data show that approx. two thirds of the PAs are more likely to believe that the press is very interested in the activity of their institution, as expected, the

score increasing while „climbing” on the administrative hierarchy. The rate is even higher (more than 80%) in the case of the recent IT developments’ impact on the institutions’ activities, the general score being 4.56 (min. 1, max. 6); in this case, the differences among institutions practically do not exist (4.65 – for the villages, 4.33 – for the counties). The majority of the PAs do not believe that local governments face strong competition from their peers, 60% of them actually disagreeing with this statement.

The opinions on the political tensions at the local level are far more diverse, half of the respondents saying that the political tensions are not frequent in their community. However, there is a significant difference in answers between the PAs from the county level and the others in regards to the degree in which the politicians get involved in the PAs’ activities. Despite this, the great majority of the PAs (84%) rather disagree with the statement that the politicians are very involved in the PAs’ work.

This part continues with the presentation of the entrepreneurship profile of the public administrators, built on the following dimensions: innovation, proactiveness and risk aversion.

At the innovation level, the data show that the PAs have an average score of 4.42, suggesting a relatively high level of innovative behavior, with more than 60% of the respondents having a score higher than the average.

At the proactive behavior level, the proactiveness scale, the average score is of 4.78, again relatively high. Almost half of the respondents (48%) have a general score below the average.

In regards to risk aversion, with an average score of 3.32 (1 – low aversion, 6 – high aversion), the data shows an average level of risk aversions. Importantly, the score of the last item on the scale – „avoiding risk at all costs in the workplace” – is above the natural average and scores for other items.

Even though the current paper does not plan to analyze the entrepreneurship orientation as a whole, and it approaches the phenomenon through its components, at the descriptive level we have developed an entrepreneurship orientation index calculated as the average of the three components. In the case of risk aversion, the scale was reversed in order to follow the same logical direction with the innovative behavior and proactive behavior.

The analysis shows that the average entrepreneurial score of the Romanian PAs is 4.31, higher than the natural average (3.5), even the lowest score being slightly high – 2.86. 43% of the respondents have lower scores than the average. Thus, the data proves a relatively high entrepreneurship orientation within the PAs population.

The data analysis continues with the presentation of the determinants of proactive and innovative behavior and of risk aversion, at individual, organizational and environment levels. In the table below we have noted the main interactions confirmed by our regression analysis:

Table 4: The main interactions between the independent variables at individual, organizational and environment levels and the entrepreneurship orientation dimensions

| | Innovation | Proactiveness | Risk aversion |
|-----------------------|---|--|---|
| Individual | Managerial experience in the private sector (-) Internal Locus (+) | Internal Locus (+) Private business in the past (-) | The frequency of interactions with the network's members (-) Professional safety (-) |
| Organizational | Superior support (+) SMP favorability (+) | Superior support (+) SMP favorability (+) | Organizational ambiguity (+) Financial shape (-) |
| Environment | Technological change (+) | Technological change (+) | Unions (-) |

Our analysis shows that, regarding innovation and proactiveness, the influence of the individual variables (both personality traits and managerial experience in the private sector) have a much lower effect if we compare them with the organizational and environment variables – better managerial support and the pace of technological change, which exert a discernable influence over innovative behavior and are in line with what other studies have found. (Meynhardt and Diefenbach 2012, Lumpkin and Dess 2001, Damanpour, Walker and Avellaneda, 2009).

On the other hand, if we look at risk aversion, it becomes obvious that the frequency of contact with other members of the professional networks, as well as the professional safety variable are the main drivers of the PA's risk aversion, while the organizational and environmental variables show limited or no influence. These results are important, because, as opposed to innovation or proactiveness, in the case of risk aversion, great importance should be attached to the selection process of the PAs, especially in the areas of professional networks and professional competition.

The qualitative analysis (the six interviews with PAs) supports the quantitative findings. First, a good relationship between the mayor and the PA is essential for inducing the necessary structural changes in the community. Despite the formal divide between politics and administration, PAs are adamant that the support of the mayor is very important.

Second, the current professional standing of PAs (virtually unknown a few years ago in Romania) discourages local governments from hiring them and, implicitly, their professionalization, and represents the main challenge for the future of PAs. Creating some type of professional body is one of our recommendations; this could ease the possibility of making use of PA's experience and expertise in other communities in case their present mandate ends.

Third, although the PAs should not be involved in politics, they should conduct political activities, in the sense that they should try to create networks and coalitions in support of their projects. Intra and inter-organizational communication is essential for fulfilling these aims – a recommendation also found valid by other authors.

In addition, **the local spending analysis** regarding European funded projects for the 2009-2013 – used as proxy for the capacity of using European funds – reveal several interesting aspects.

First, communities that employed a PA spent, on average, slightly more on European projects than those without PAs; in the case of counties and cities, the differences were much more pronounced (+36% and +30%, respectively).

Second, these findings are reversed in the case of communes and towns. In communes, those without PAs spent, on average, 54% more than those with a PA – the percentage for towns is somewhat lower, at 22.6%.

Third, a community that has a PA for a longer period of time is not necessarily better at attracting European money. Even if, on average, communities with an PA for the whole cycle spent significantly more than those without a PA or with an PA for short periods, this result is due to cities (cities with long term PA spent a lot more – 43% – than those without). In all other cases (counties, towns, communes), the opposite is true.

A more in-depth analysis reveals the particular case of communes in Teleorman, Dolj and Olt counties. Numbering 36, and with a population of approximately 100.000 people, only 4 (2 from Dolj, 2 from Teleorman, none from Olt) have had any spending on European projects. Every county has communities that did not get involved in European projects, but there is a clear concentration of "have-not" communities in this area. If we exclude these communities from our analysis, the distance between rural communities without PAs and those with PAs decreases significantly.

The analysis shows that PAs can bring added value in their communities, but this is valid mostly for those that already have a high administrative capacity – county councils and cities. The explanation could be that in these cases, the requirements for a PA are more rigorous (a fact that appeared also in some of the interviews), and the public and media pressure are much more present. Another possible cause could be the quality of political leadership: the first mayors that hired PAs after 2006 were from the South of the country – a region with lower social development (Sandu 2011) and with important ethical challenges. There is a possibility that, in these cases, the PA job is viewed more as a political reward than an opportunity for local development.

Importantly, in urban communities, PA performance mirrors the social development of that community. Correlating the spending on EU projects with the social development level (Sandu 2011), for urban communities that employed a PA for at least 3 years, there is a strong correlation (0.501) between the level of social development and the European funds absorption rate.

The fifth part of our thesis – **Conclusion** – emphasize the role of the political influence – it will not only decide if a PA is hired, but it can also partially predict the PA success. Our analysis confirms some findings in the literature about the importance of superior support for entrepreneurial behavior.

Another important discussion, based especially on the interviews with PAs that exhibited high entrepreneurship, focuses on the need for the professionalization of the PA, both as an instrument for greater efficiency and as a mechanism for increasing their independence and increasing the political leader's trust. This development would increase the entrepreneurship drive of the PAs; our study shows that professional security is an important predictor for risk aversion.

Lastly, in this part we begin a discussion about future research, both in the area of innovative and proactive behavior and risk aversion, as well as in the area of the real influence that PA could have in local public administration. Keeping track of all the communities that hire PAs, either by AAPRO or by the government, is essential; this was also the main challenge for the present study.

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