

## **The question of boundaries: a major issue for public managers and public management**

Management of a crisis like that of COVID 19 in the health sector illustrates the managerial issue of boundary management between health organizations. This management determines largely the performance of public action. It highlights the importance of inter-organizational and institutional relationships in solving problems that go beyond the usual boundaries of each organization.

But how can we define the notion of boundary? A boundary is “a potential or real mechanism which reduces or regulates the flows between two heterogeneous spaces, and makes these flows visible” (Star, 2010). These spaces can correspond to the delimitation of geographical territories (Ansell *et al.*, 2010), or to the delimitation of the organization and its environment. In a more prosaic sense, a border is defined as any form of separation between heterogeneous spaces. According to the International Court of Justice, the border is the exact line where the spaces where sovereign powers and rights are exercised respectively, which effectively excludes the concept of border spaces. However, a State may have different

borders depending on the function. According to Foucher (1991), borders or boundaries are elementary spatial structures, linear in shape, function of geopolitical discontinuity, which are a reference point on the three registers that are spatial (spatial limit of the exercise of sovereignty), symbolic (identity, belonging to a political community inscribed in a territory) and imaginary (the relationship to the others, neighborhood, friend or enemy, linked to his history and founding myths). The border issue apprehended from the spatial perspective is central because it delimits the framework for the action of local authorities, and public organizations. The boundary of action for the different levels, European, national, regional or local, are more or less clearly established. It depends on the kind of public policies, some falling under exclusive powers while others are shared between different levels.

Boundaries are an inherent of organizations, as they delimit and distribute domains of actions, norms and knowledge (Wolbers *et al.*, 2018). Boundaries are created, maintained or modified to simplify and

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classify the world within, between and around organizations. The first question is the border between the public and private sector. The basis for the exclusion of certain forms of organization is the reference to “general interest”. However the development of many public policies inspired by the New Public Management theory, which takes private enterprise as a model, blurs the public-private borders. The question of the specificity of the public sector is nevertheless essential for public management research. Writing and knowledge could be produced by “disciplined purists” - specialists in public administration producing research in public administration in public management journals by researchers who are members of the public management community, or otherwise by management researchers who occasionally take an interest in the public context and publish in management journals. This question of border is at the center of the analysis carried out by Rodgers and Rodgers (2000) in their famous article published in *Public Administrative Review* more than 20 years ago, on the frontiers of research in public administration and entitled “Defining the boundaries of public administration: Undisciplined mongrels versus disciplined purists?”. These authors, interested in the effect of the ranking of professors' publications in the 11 journals specializing in public management on the ranking of training programs, distinguish among others in the community the unruly hybrid researchers who publish in a wide variety of journals and “disciplined purist researchers” who publish only in specialized journals. Slagle and Williams, 20 years later in their article “Redefining the boundaries of Public Administration” examines again the question of the boundaries of our discipline. The methodology diverges from the previous study because their analysis is based on the examination of doctoral research and not on the production of professors in publications. They show that, from 2000 to 2015, research in public administration and management became “purist” research and research in the field a distinct field.

Territorial and organizational boundaries institutionalize a space of political, administrative, institutional or cultural duality (Dumez and Jeunemaitre, 2010), between the interior and the exterior, in which different perceptions and modes of action are born. While some limits are tangible (rules for example) others are symbolic (cultural differences between two groups) and raise the question of identity (cultural and organizational identities, etc.). The Boundary

Work Analysis describes the practices of managing boundaries to erect, maintain, move, or fill them. The statute of the public organization very often defines the geographical limits of its intervention but also its mission and its possible development choices.

However, organizational boundaries are permeable and even benefit from being crossed. Thus, to allow coordination with external stakeholders, crossing these borders is necessary to generate common interpretations and orient actions towards the same aim (Kalkman *et al.*, 2018). The question of the border is at the heart of the analysis of the corporate strategy and the choices of development paths such as outsourcing, vertical integration or diversification. It is central for administrations and communities in a context of development of outsourcing practices and public-private partnerships. These practices promote the porosity of borders and highlights the importance of the coordination between borders. The boundaries of local authorities can evolve with decentralization laws and mergers according to institutional changes in the administrative competencies assigned to them. Thus the NoTRE law led to the merging of regions and to modifying the powers attributed to the different layers of local authorities. Mergers obviously change these boundaries and require what researchers call “boundary work” (Kreiner *et al.*, 2009). This strategic action aims to establish a common authority on redrawn borders (Phillips and Lawrence, 2012).

Crossing borders is a fundamental strategic dimension for public organizations which must remain in tune with the environment and for communities which must henceforth unite a multitude of public and private actors who take part in the formulation and implementation. public policies. “Cross-border” individuals and organizations working in these liminal spaces referred to as 'borders' - play a key role in this new public governance. Network governance is developing in a context where governments move away from the direct provision of services and resort to multiple organizations that contribute diverse resources to solve complex problems .

The rise of collaborative governance and the establishment of public-private partnerships, necessitates the advent of frontiers 'management practices. The development of the principle of collaboration with various organizations for public policy reifies the boundaries between actors, among problems facilitating problem solving. Public managers must invent

new ways to negotiate through boundaries to other organizations or people in order to have more people, information, and resources to solve public problems. Working on boundaries can be a source of learning and change) through complex processes of transfer, translation, or transformation. This work on borders and inclusion opens up new research on the possible and appropriate roles of experts citizens, politicians and public officials in a participatory democracy. Inclusive public management brings together a set of public management practices that integrate aspects of the delimitation work between institutions (collaborative management), management levels, professional groups (intra-organizational integration), and between government institutions.

The use of boundary objects and experiences is a way of “facilitating a process where internal and external organizations and stakeholders can jointly transform their knowledge to achieve a common vision and facilitate joint work” (Feldman and Khademian 2007; Feldman, Khademian, Ingram and Schneider, 2006).

In their famous article entitled “Institutional Ecology, 'Translations', and Boundary Objects: Amateurs and Professionals”, Star and Griesemer (1989) have created the concept of boundary object on the basis of an ethnographic study of coordination mechanisms used for scientific work in the case of the zoological museum in Berkeley. The boundary object is an entity that serves as an interface between social worlds and actors with different perspectives. This object is “sufficiently plastic to fit to local needs and to constraints of various parts that use it. It must be both sufficiently robust to maintain a common identity for all part and be able to exist simultaneously in several social worlds to satisfy the informational requirements of each part”. The authors distinguish four main types of boundary objects: the repertoire (the museum as a “bank” of specimens), the ideal type (a definition of the concept of species), the envelope or object whose boundaries coincide (California Map), the standardized format (a form used to standardize information relating to specimen collection). (Ashforth, Kreiner & Fugate, 2000). The boundary object uses kinds of artifacts such as repertoires, classifications, materialized representations (maps, drawings), standardized methods used in the collection, management and coordination of distributed knowledge. The form used to document specimens serves as a link between the world of scientists, experts in zoology, and that of amateurs who, in turn, capture the

specimens. Boundary objects facilitate cooperation and interactions between heterogeneous actors, without imposing a single meaning. Their “interpretive flexibility” (allows them to take different meanings for different actors and to accommodate sometimes divergent perspectives. Boundary object must allow a common understanding, and this, without losing sight of the different worlds and their specificities. (Vinck and Trompette, 2009). Boundary infrastructure underpins boundary objects. They correspond to communities of practice, technical standards but also moral values and legal frameworks in which objects are anchored and circulate.

Since this initial work, the concept has generated significant academic research, particularly in the field of public management and crisis management.

From a crisis management perspective, organizations are led to conduct work to redefine their boundaries in order to develop “inclusion” between organizations and thus bring together a set of differentiated activities to allow unified actions. During a cross-border crisis, the actors transcend normative, functional and knowledge borders by modifying their normal functioning.

The article proposed by Isabelle BORIES-AZEAU, Fatiha FORT, Florence NOGUERA and Catherine PEYROUX, which is entitled “***The new challenges of universities in a regional entrepreneurial ecosystem***”, is on the issue of crossing organizational and territorial boundaries of universities. It questions the modes of management of proximity that universities can establish to play their role of mediation between the academic environment and the actors of the economic development of the territory. The results of the study show that the involvement of universities in the construction of an organized proximity is a strong expectation of the stakeholders of the territorial entrepreneurial ecosystem, who are faced with a deficit of institutional proximity, or even low geographic proximity to university resources.

The article titled “***Escape from the global field? Local and sustainable initiatives in the urban and peri-urban agri-food field: emergence of an institutional work reframing places***” is proposed by Flore TISSONE, Solange HERNANDEZ and Emmanuelle MOUSTIER. It shows how actors from different spheres (public, private, civil society, academia) organize themselves to encourage the transition

to sustainable and inclusive territorial food systems. It analyzes how the ongoing institutional work in the field of agriculture and food is leading to a redefinition of borders, practices, and areas of intervention.

Xavier MOINIER and Liliane BONNAL in their article entitled “**Satisfaction and loyalty of the Pharmacy customers: a public health issue**” raises the question of the boundaries between public and private sector, through the perspective of a health course and the relationship between pharmacists to users. The article highlights important criteria that can help pharmacy owners develop a relationship of trust with their users, and enable them to develop the status of referral pharmacist.

The article proposed by Florence ABRIOUX, Philippe TANCHOUX and Gregory SPIETH is entitled “**Labellisation or social networks in the field of heritage: which winning strategy? The example of the Domaine national de Chambord**”. It raises the question of the sources of competitive advantage and the changes in organizational boundaries induced by the development of digital technology in relationships with visitors. The alternative digital strategy launched at Chambord on Facebook makes it possible, on the basis of a qualitative (nethnography) and quantitative study, to establish a new relationship based on trust between users and the tourist site, capable of strengthening its attractiveness.

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