

RATIONALIST MODEL IN PUBLIC DECISION MAKING

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Abstract: *The paper addresses the issue of public decision-making rationalist model. In its preamble are presented the stages of the process of public decision rationalist model but also barriers and criticisms of this model. The core of the paper is represented by the public decision through the theory of rational choice, here being presented in addition to theoretical concepts, also some practical examples.*

Keywords: *Decisional process, public decision, rationalist model, rational choice theory.*

INTRODUCTION

Based on the distinction between objectives (background rationality) and means (functional rationality), this approach assumes that all public decisions must first be based on background rationality. Thus, society must establish through the government, the social goals and social values (such as equality, economic development or public order). Clearly, these goals and these values will be different depending on times and the countries that are being analyzed. We may discuss about the rationalist model, only when it was determined that these values or social goals can operate in functional rationality; it is a mean of seeking ways to maximize these goals. Goal setting and values of the society can often take the form of a concept of "general interest", which then helps to determine the importance and urgency of the problems to be solved (Mercier, 2008).

The basis for this rational model, are rationalist theories and those are being rooted in the illuminist rationalism and positivism, current which promoted ways of neutral and objective knowledge on human society. At the basis of these problems lies the idea that human society can and should be resolved in a rational and scientific manner, by gathering all of the information that can be found in the problem, followed by processing them, and obtaining, by applying the most efficient answer, from the cost point of view (Junjan, 2001).

DECISIONAL PROCESS – RATIONALIST MODEL

In Professor Marius Profiroiu's opinion, "it is about the approach on decision making, developed by classical economy, in which man is taking rational decisions. The decision is assimilated to a single actor reasoning that seeks to maximize the purposes depending on means at its disposal. He has preferences, he establishes its goals, set's

some values and choose their utility. Then searches for available alternatives to solve the problem, alternatives that exhaustively inventoried and whose effects can also worth trying to identify them. In the next phase, it adopts a criteria of choice as objectively as possible, to allow him to identify the best balance between the advantages and disadvantages of each possible alternative. The set of alternatives will then be sorted using these criteria, yielding the solution considered most appropriate to resolve the matter" (Profiroiu, 2006: 161 - 162).

The decisional process presented by the rationalist model, comprises the following distinct and sequential stages (Mercier, 2008: 149):

1. Identifying the values and objectives achieved;
2. Analyzing all possible alternatives for achieving the objectives;
3. Researching and selecting information based on the efficiency or effectiveness of various alternatives;
4. Making a comparison between alternatives and their consequences;
5. Choosing the alternative that maximizes the values and objectives;
6. Implementation;
7. Feedback.

The rational actor model has many qualities as decision maker should focus essentially on the problem, the contents of alternatives and preferences, as well as choosing good criteria suitable to the content. Several analysts have adhered to this model and tried to improve it by examining all possible options and their costs. The improved model is called the rational – comprehensive model (Profiroiu, 2006).

In Professor Lucica Matei's opinion, according to the "rational understanding model" the decision-making process includes the following steps:

- Determining the objectives. In the process of decision-making, public administrators must first determine which the public policy objectives are. These objectives must be identified in operational terms, so they can be observed and measured. Must be noted that the public administrator does not have the freedom to set goals, being constrained by authority, specialization, hierarchy and so on.
- Establishing the means. Once you have established public policy objectives should be considered the different means to achieve them. At this stage should as far as possible, that all means that can be identified to be examined. Note that it is unlikely that all possible means were at one time tested and evaluated in practice. The public administrator must try to estimate the consequences of each means in all areas of public interest.
- Choosing the best alternative. Once all means potential have been identified to reach an end point, it is necessary to choose between them. In accordance with the present model, this choice must be such as to cause maximum efficiency, economy and effectiveness. In situations where these three values are in perfect harmony, shall create an appropriate balance between them.

According to Réjean Landry, the rationalist model of decision-making process involves the following phases (Réjean, 1980: 15):

1. Identifying the context - in this stage are identified the issues to be investigated and the objectives of the involved actors.

2. Determining the possibilities of action – In this stage is seeking actions that may be undertaken for the settlement of the problem.

3. Estimating the consequences

Shall be determined the implications of each possibility action on the issue taken into consideration.

4. Comparison of consequences

At this stage are being calculated the relative costs and benefits of the various possibilities for action.

Choosing a possibility of action: This phase involves choosing the variant that produces the highest net benefits.

A group of American specialists, Charles Lindblom, in "The Science of Muddling through" - Public Administration Review, Herbert Simon in Administrative Behavior, Alan Altshuler and Norman Thomas, in "The Politics of the Federal Bureaucracy" described model and the three stages to be completed in public decision making.

Must be emphasized the characteristics of this model (Androniceanu, 2005: 149):

- Proceedings of decision making process in three distinct phases:

- 1) Determination of objectives;
- 2) Formulation of decision alternatives;
- 3) Choosing the best alternative.

- Emphasis should be placed on maximizing efficiency and effectiveness;

- Elaboration of a program with practical nature, according to the three criteria: effectiveness, efficiency and rationality;

- Accentuated specialization of the public servants involved;

- Taking into account the total cost;

- Specifying clearly decision objectives that should be concise and non-contradictory, etc.

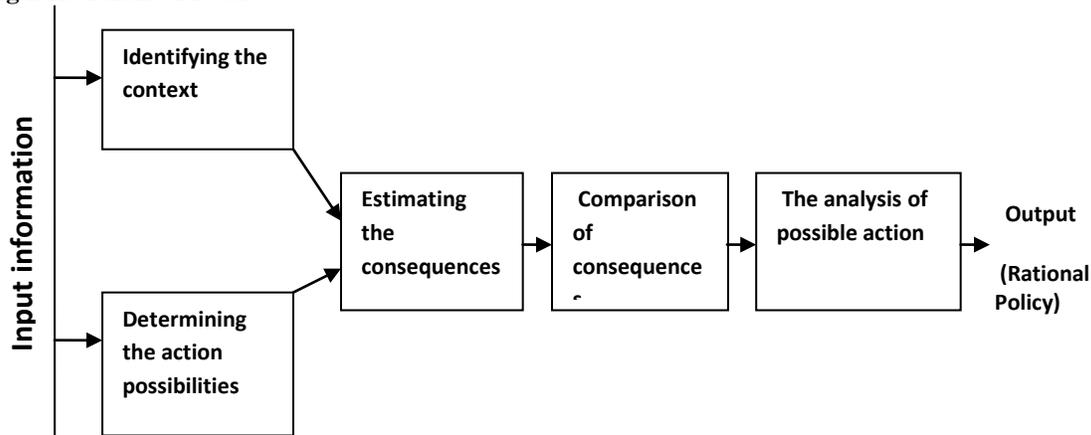
So it must be stressed that the rationalist model of decision-making is not a simple sequence of actions. It is assumed from the beginning, that there is an order between the values established, and public decision-maker is aware of the values on which it intends to be concentrated. Also it is assumed that decision-making stages of the process must always be presented in the order that was established above. It is also assumed that the decision maker is able to obtain all information related to the subject of the decision, and therefore he may actually take into account, all possible alternatives. In conclusion it can be said that the rational model has a large number of requirements (Mercier, 2008).

According to Gournay, for the rationalist model, are not taking into account many factors that influence the decision. The first of these factors relates to the number of decision-makers in government. It should be noted that in the rationalist model we do not have to deal with a single decision maker. In public administration there are several decision makers, so more rationalities and values that are involved in the competition (see this and Androniceanu, 2005: 134-139). Basically in the rationalist model, the decision maker must take the decision at the right time. In reality, the decision-maker works with several dossiers in parallel and cannot fully concentrate on a single decision. Gournay insists that, for adopting a decision, decision makers do not possess the right tools for them, to make future projections of all the effects of a decision. He mentioned that the relevance of a decision is based on the underlying value of the information to, cases in

which all information is available are rare and therefore it is difficult to have an objective decision that takes into account all the important aspects. In addition to lack of time, resources and intellectual routine often prevents public decision-maker to consider all possible alternatives of a decision. This questions the rationality of certain decisions of the public administration. The author reminds us that despite all the efforts made in the sense of rationality, it is impossible to foresee all the consequences that would result from such a decision or another. He believes that a rational process of taking a decision demands from the decision makers, objectivity which cannot be achieved, especially in political decisions (Gournay, 1980).

The rationalist model of decision making process in five steps illustrated in Fig. 1:

Fig.1 Rationalist Model



Source: Réjean, 1980, p.16

3. BARRIERS AND CRITICISMS OF THE RATIONALIST MODEL

The rational model is very important for analytical purposes, due to the fact that, in practice, faces a multitude of obstacles, derived primarily from the difficulty of assuming a pure rational decisions. Further on shall be presented several of these barriers (Popescu 2006: 265):

- Benefits for the whole society can not be determined, but only for certain social groups or individuals, even in the latter case, this leaves to conflicts and contradictions;
- The conflictual benefits and costs, can not be measured accurately (eg: you can not buy the dignity of the individual with an increase of taxes);
- The decision makers are motivated not only by maximizing the social gain, but also by factors such as power, status, financial rewards, reelection, and so on;
- Searching for perfect rational alternative is very difficult, generally it stops when the chosen alternatives are working.
- Investment in major government programs and the adoption of decisions required, are timed by responsible factors, before the elections;

- Collecting the necessary information for choosing the best alternative encounter many difficulties: the cost of information, the time required to collect the most necessary one;

- Segmented nature of the process of public policy making in large bureaucracies makes difficult, accounting and the coordination of all inputs , provided by various categories of specialists and their incorporation into - the ideal decision.

In the literature are also encountered criticisms of this model.

Herbert Simon has demonstrated that the theory of absolute rationality is unrealistic. He tried to apply the theory of decision-making in large undertakings but also realized that its postulates are wrong. Herbert Simon questioned the idea of optimal decision making and demonstrated through empirical research, that the decision is frequently triggered by organizational problems. Simon has also shown that the process of problem solving leads to satisfactory solutions, and under no case to optimal solutions (Mercier, 2008).

The rational decision maker acts as if they act in a world of absolute rationality. No constraint (both cognitive and political) presses upon him or on his situation, but they exert a strong influence on the process. There is a certain rationality, but it is limited. Herbert Simon was joined in 1958, James March, together showing that organizations actors, act according to a limited logic rationality, choices made and decisions being subject to constraints originating from human nature itself (Profiroiu, 2006).

In the reality of action the decision maker encounters major constraints related to several factors (Profiroiu, 2006:164 - 165):

- Firstly, efficiency, effectiveness and economy are not prevailing values in the public sector. Public sector is reasoning, first, in terms of expenditure, means, budget, and not by income, results, operational account, as they do in undertakings operating in the market. He is also reasoning in terms of "maximum" and not "optimum".

- Information is missing and that is costly.

- There are few situations in which public decision-maker acts in advance (so-called proactive action) before trying to identify the problems and the means of solving them.

- Selection criteria are rare. The available methods to define any approximation of an arbitration between the advantages and disadvantages, there are very few. Are always evoked the same examples regarding public choices that can be based on a scientific set of criteria, allowing comparison of the various alternatives among themselves: decisions regarding major infrastructure of transport (location of roadworks, expanding rail networks, etc..)

- The ability to generate a state of exhaustive alternatives varies - rational decision maker inventories all alternatives and all related merits. But here there are limitations related to the nature of behavior in a cognitive situation. Some individuals may not act unless they have at their disposal a considerable amount of information. Others can not decide unless alternatives were reduced to a smaller number.

- Choice situation triggers a psychological tension. The decision process is often expressed through moments of uncertainty, pressure and tension. The decision maker

capacity to support psychological the situation of choice varies from one person to another.

In Professor Lucica Matei's opinion "model of rational understanding" covers the following criticisms (Matthew, 2006: 234):

In practice, this model does not always match with the real process of the public decision adoption.

2. A second problem of understanding rational model is that it assumes that policy-makers have time to address the challenges in a rational way, to identify all the detailed and comprehensive potential means of achieving the objectives established and evaluate all these means based on efficiency, economy and effectiveness.

3. Another difficulty in approaching this model is that specialization which was used so powerfully can also become a burden. "We are all familiar with the image of the right hand of the Government, without knowing what it's doing with the left." This is because the hands operate in different spheres, under the limitations of different times and with different objectives envisaged. But modern government, of course, has more than two hands, he has rather countless tentacles. Public decision-maker that operates in one of these areas is determined from time to time, to disagree with ones another's actions.

Often, specialization makes it difficult to analyze the costs of any particular course of government action. An institution that makes decisions in a complex policy area, may create new problems for other institutions. In terms of the rational understanding model, the problem lies in the fact that these costs are difficult to be assessed and analyzed, because they tend to get lost in the system of specialized jurisdictions. The problem is worsened by the fact that, as the administrative status increases, costs that are passed from government to society tend to become a public policy concern. Such things gets even more complicated in situations of economic - financial crisis.

Finally, we can say that, because it is based on theory and abstract professionalism, decisions may be adopted that are inappropriate in practice and these do not match with the nature of contemporary administrative operations, calling for public policy makers to exercise a degree of rationality and competency (professionalism) comprehensive, which exceeds their ability.

PUBLIC DECISION THROUGH THE RATIONAL CHOICE THEORY

When making a decision must be find the answer to three questions: What is the problem? What are the possibilities (variants) for solving? Which is the better choice?

Concerning the public administration, because the decision takes different aspects and forms, depending on the author making the request, the field or object to which it refers, stretching sphere, content and nature of provisions that are established, the decision making process itself, presents some particularities which, given the theme, is needed to be taken into account.

Stages of decisional process in public administration may be presented as a logical scheme, as follows:

- Initiating decision adoption;

- Establishing the objective and the means of achieving it;
- Data collection, respectively, documentation, in order to formulate the decision;
- Selection and interpretation of data;
- Decision making;
- Implementation of the decision;
- The control execution of the decision.

To explain why in a situation has been taken a certain decision and no other should we appeal to rational choice theory.

In the traditional sense (general, logical) rationality, refers to the property of enunciations or judgments of being able to be deduced (derived) logically from other enunciations or judgments. The truth value of the succeeding statement is dependent on the truth of other statements accepted as true based on various grounds (observation, experiment, practice) and inferential derived through reasoning. Therefore to emphasize the reasons or the rationality of a proposition shall mean to determine the set of possible antecedents or the possible implications, to determine the multitude of possible consequences (Hoțu & Leordean, 1981).

The term "rational" has very different meanings, some of which relates to knowledge, other human action (Miroiu, 2006: 32):

- Rationality consists in conformity with the rules of deductive logic.

Let us take the syllogism. Whether we have the premises:

All the mayors are elected, and b) Ion is mayor, then it is reasonable to conclude from this situation, that Ion is elected - but it is unreasonable to conclude that Ion is a Romanian peasant who was concerned about local community issues.

- To be rational means to make accurate mathematical calculations. Indeed, it is reasonable to infer that the number x is bigger than 10 if they know that a) $x > 6$, and b) x is multiple of 5.

- Rationality consists in reaching to proper conclusions on the meaning of the words we use. If I know someone is a bachelor, then - because I know that "bachelor" means unmarried man - we can conclude that there is no person to be father in law.

- To be rational means to call for amplificative induction. If a student was very well prepared for all exams in the first two years of college, it will be reasonable to conclude that at the exam for today she came back very well prepared.

- Rationality consists in making use correctly of the probability that some event will occur. At the elections for mayor of Bucharest in 2005, polls showed that the difference between DA Alliance candidate, Adrian Videanu, and the SDP Vanghelie, was huge in favor of the first candidate. Therefore, it was reasonable to conclude that the probability that my vote could change the voting results was very small.

- To be rational means to make inferences based on empirical generalizations generally accepted as valid. If it rained yesterday and last night was cold, then it can be concluded that the streets and sidewalks will be slippery in the morning today.

In all six cases, the term "rational" was applied in some of its premises mechanism by which conclusions were inferred; rational is its arguments tautologically speaking, "reasoning" used to extract new knowledge. There are also some very different ways of using the term "rational", which does not apply this time to knowledge, but to

our action. The term "rational" is not applicable how we make judgments, but how we act and behave.

- To be rational means to act to achieve our best purposes;
- To be rational means to treat any other man as a goal in it, not as a means to achieve our goals.

The first meaning of the term "rational" has to do with the means we use to achieve your goals. The second meaning aims the goals rather than means. In the Weberian tradition, it is said that in the first case we are dealing with an instrumental rationality and in the second with value rationality (or axiological).

- Instrumental rationality.

If you want to talk about a rational choice, then of course that it assumes the reason is, in one way or another related to action. But perhaps we do not want just to assert that reason can judge the actions that we did or that we intend to do, and we can say they are good or not. Rather we want to support something more: that reason somehow influences our choice and, therefore, that reason influences human action (Miroiu, 2006).

Very generally speaking, instrumental rationality requires that people should in their choices to respect certain principles and J. Rawls, indicates the following three (Miroiu, 2006: 38):

- The principle of effective means. Due to a specific objective and more alternatives (means of achieving that objective) the principle requires adopting the alternative that best meets the purpose. "As a goal you must achieve the lowest expense of means (whatever it may be), or, given the need to fulfill the objective means as broad as it could be."
- The principle of comprehensiveness. An alternative is preferable to another if its application would result in the application of all the goals we attain the other application and other purposes, in other words it is the preferable alternative that has the required comprehensive consequences. If we chose to rehabilitate the sewerage system of a city by the classical method (breaking the road) or robotic (nonintervention on the road), and we know that if we use the second method do whatever we wanted in the first method, and saving funds for aftercare of road destroyed, then it is rational to prefer to use the method of robots.
- Higher probability principle. If the goals we can achieve by two alternatives are generally the same, but it's a greater chance to achieve those goals by applying one of the two alternatives, then it is rational to choose this one.

According to Rawls, the three principles (with a wide applicability in decision-making in public administration) define the idea of rational choice, which therefore could simply be replaced by invoking them. In other words, when we asked if a choice is rational, our response will be to verify that it meets the three principles (Miroiu, 2006).

- Valoric rationality.

Most of the times, the conception of rationality is derived from the human tradition and is contrasted with the one, which may be found in I. Kant's work. It should be noted that there are attempts to connect the two traditions. The Rawls one, particularly in later works -1993, 1999, 2001 - his first book *A Theory of Justice*, is well known.

Relevant to this paper is the notion of the categorical imperative, which represents a moral rule that allows us to judge our actions.

I.Kant gives three famous formulations of the categorical imperative (Miroiu, 2006):

1. Acting under that maximum that you would also like it to become a universal law;
2. Act so that you use humanity both in person and in the person of anyone else, always in the same scope and never as a mean;
3. Act according to the maxims which can also be subject to themselves as universal laws of nature.

Starting from the idea that administrative action represents a kind of human action this is itself influenced negatively or positively.

For this paper it is relevant that when we deal with an administrative decision that the entire decision making process must be rational, i.e. each stage thereof is logically derived from the previous step. If this is not achieved then the decision is not effective.

For better understanding the above stated it must be made an appeal, to what logician GH Von Wright says, that if an agent engages into an action or final state as scope, and for its realization, another action (mean-action), an absolutely necessary one, then the agent must engage in the achievement of mean-action.

Hence the appearance of rationality of logical derivation of the conclusion, that employment renders mediator agent, is to commit the action absolutely necessary to achieve the stated purpose (Wright, 1982).

Let us suppose that in an emergency (flood, earthquake, etc.), public administration namely its authority or authorities who manage this situation make a decision but do not compliance with the logical order of the stages of decision making, leading ultimately to extension or initial worsening.

To remember is that always results concludes to two or more premises of practical reasoning: the major premise through which is formulated the purpose (mission) to fulfill the minor (minor) premise (or the premises) which shows the action (or actions) intercessory absolutely necessary to the purpose described in the major premise. Conclusion specificity in such practical reasoning is that, it is a statement of intent, an engagement of the agent, regarding his future attitudes and behavior, often transmitted through an order (order) in situations where to accomplish the mission (purpose) requires the coordination of the subordinate agencies (means).

Here is an example of practical reasoning for an emergency:

1. Major premise: It rained a lot and the Danube overfished its quota of damage. The mission of the public administration is to limit the effect of losses.
2. Minor premise: Danube dams can break certain dike defense in the south of the country.
3. Conclusion: So the public administration decided to strengthen dikes in areas where they are weaker.

In a generalized formula, practical reasoning can be played as follows:

- Agent X plans to achieve goal S;
- Without X taking M action, he will not reach S;
- So if X will do necessarily M.

Finally if the decision and conduct of other agents (subordinate), judgment will have the following form:

- X has the mission to achieve S;

- In order to X achieve S, Y must accomplish M1, and Z must accomplish M2;

So X must determine Y, to accomplish state M1, and Z, to accomplish state M2.

Should be noted that practical reasoning has the opportunity to be enriched and improved by introducing chronological dimension structure. This has a great importance for the public action as introduces in its structure and the need for framing within certain intercessory actions and an order of their succession. Without ordering specified time, practical rationality loses partially or totally the meaning, as if an intervention is being made in the target range or at „t” time, when it is appropriate, it has no functional effect established (Hoțu & Leordean, 1981).

With reference to the above emergency situation (flooding) if the time factor is not taken into account this can lead to inefficiency of the decision.

The act of cognitive control of the situation ongoing constitutes the bases for an uninterrupted coordination of interventions which sets out whom to intervene in what place, at what point exactly and in what sequence, with what means to act to achieve partial goals, that contributes to the execution of the mission. From highlighting these coordinates appears more clearly the importance of relationships and systematic ordering of the involvement of a gear acting on analytical and deductive operations forming practical rationality. Through it are being conducted the means and instruments transformers so that at certain points or intervals to be obtained certain values of accomplished action (achievement of goals).

CONCLUSIONS

Public decisions are a kind of decisions and represents a conscious choice, a voluntary act, the final result of deliberation, a decision maker activities, with as object of activity public business. May be considered public decisions, decisions taken by the mayor, the President of the County Council, minister, secretary of state, civil servants having as object of activity public business.

The literature shows that the decision is the focus of all management activities of an institution or public authority, as it is found in any public function of management.

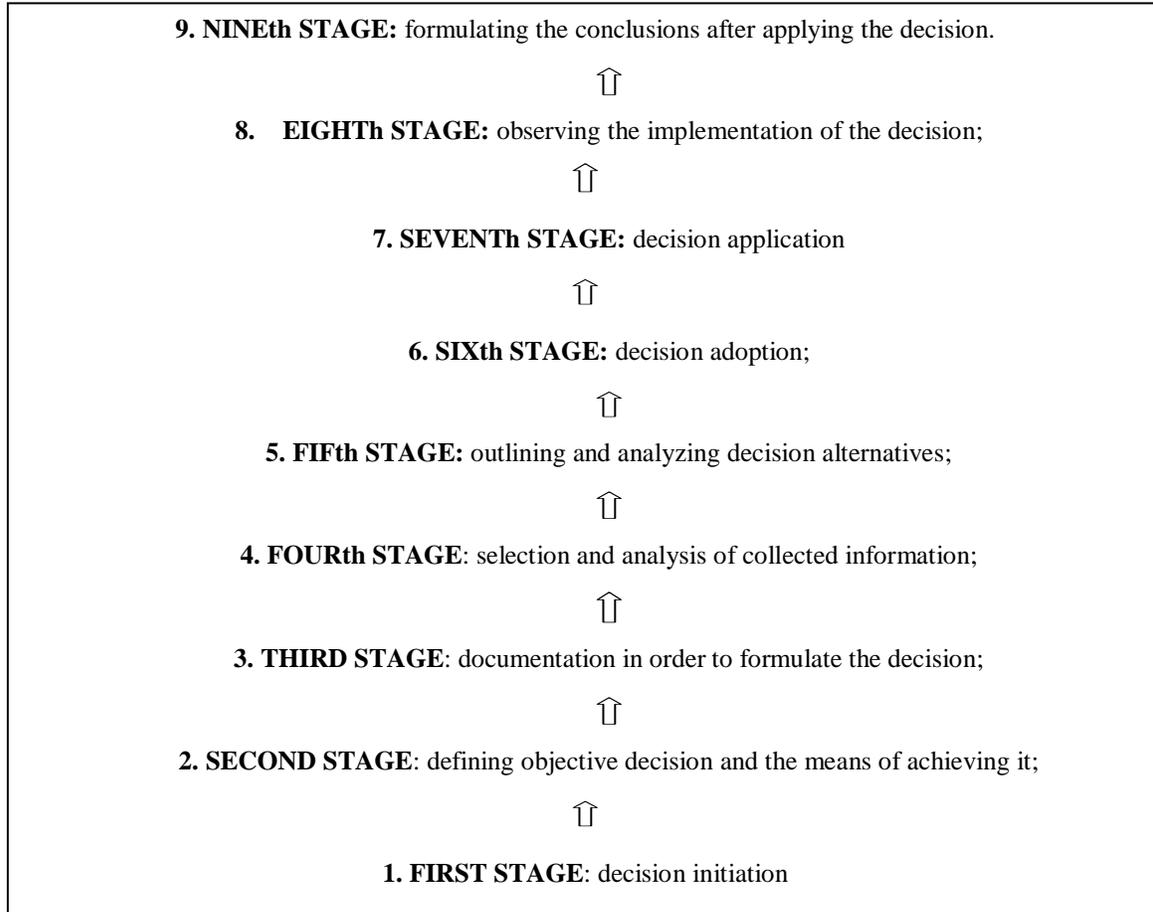
Public decision should not be seen only as a mere activity of rational choice of the best of several possible options but a complex act, whose implementation can have irreversible consequences on the lives of administrators (individuals and businesses).

Referring on public decision characteristics, we can say that it is more delicate one, than a personal decision. Since the decision maker must be held accountable, explain himself to the citizens or to the electorate. The right to mistake is rarely acknowledged, he must prove endlessly extreme rigor in the manner of deciding. Public decision must be legal: the judge checks due process and penalize violations of any kind committed by public authorities.

Even though the literature says that to implement rational model, it may encounter many barriers, and that in practice we can not speak of absolute rationality but only a

limited one, if we start from the premise that decision making is a process of logical type (stages must be to derive one from the other), rationally, it must include the following steps, shown in Fig.2:

Figure 2 Logical scheme of the rational type of decision-making process



Source: The author based on the literature

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