

Chapter 20

The Understanding of Public Service Ethics in Turkish Municipalities: The Ankara Case

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ABSTRACT

Recent legal regulations provided more authorities and resources to municipalities, meanwhile corruption and unethical conduct cases were experienced more in the municipalities in Turkey. This paper aimed to detect the “public service ethics understanding” of municipality administrators in Turkey. To this end, a questionnaire was conducted among elected and appointed administrators of 9 urban-district municipalities in Ankara. Although the majority of municipality administrators agree that institutions and legal-administrative regulations based on universal values of public service ethics rather than the personal moral values, they still keep some local moral values which tolerate corrupt and unethical conducts. This reflects the dilemma of the Turkish administrators on this issue. Therefore, hard (like institutional and legal-administrative regulations) and soft (like training and cultural change) measures of public service ethics should go hand in hand in order to minimize the gap between the “good perceptions” and “widespread malpractices” of municipality administrators.

INTRODUCTION

The Turkish administrative system has long been criticised on the grounds of over-centralisation; and some studies have been done to find out remedies for such problems in the light of principles of local democracy, administrative efficiency and effectiveness. In this context, making local governments financially and administratively autonomous and strong has been one of the most debated issues in Turkey.

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Especially in the 2000s, many duties, authorities and responsibilities, which were previously belonged to the central government, have been transferred to local governments through some important legal regulations (i.e. subsidiarity vs. administrative tutelage). The effects of local governments, particularly those of metropolitan municipalities and district municipalities in metropolitan areas, whose authorities and resources have significantly increased recently, in achieving the aims of efficiency, effectiveness and participation have also increased to a great extent. In the recent debate on the efficiency, effectiveness and democratisation of Turkish local governments, public service ethics is, in fact, the missing point in terms of local governance. However, corruption and unethical conduct cases, which have been widespread in the Turkish public administration since the mid-1980s, have eventually strengthen the emphasis on the principles of transparency, accountability and ethical conduct as well as the principles of efficiency, effectiveness and participation in the reform process in the Turkish public administration. On one hand corruption and unethical conduct cases, which have increased rapidly particularly in municipalities due to the lack of effective control on their activities; on the other hand anti-corruption sentiment, which has gradually intensified in public opinion, have promoted the importance of ethical governance in the Turkish local governments including municipalities. Can Turkish municipalities be both ethical, effective and democratic?

In this paper, Turkish local (municipal) public administrators' "understanding of public service ethics" has been questioned. In other words, the opinions/perceptions of municipal administrators in respect to public service ethics (mainly ethical values) in the process of providing local public services have been surveyed with a field study conducted in 2008. With this aim, an empirical survey (a questionnaire) has been conducted among elected (i.e. Mayors) and appointed (i.e. Deputy Mayors and Directors of Departments) administrators of 9 urban-district municipalities within the boundary of Ankara Metropolitan Municipality. The Mayors and/or Deputy Mayors of these municipalities were also interviewed while they were answering the questionnaire. Data obtained via the questionnaire and the interview and the findings derived from the analysis of these data are helpful to get some important clues about Turkish local (municipal) public administrators' understanding of public service ethics and to guide for more elaborated studies in future. Although the findings of this paper cannot be enough to make some generalisations on the grounds of public service ethics and ethical governance for all the Turkish municipalities, they are very helpful for those aims since Ankara is the capital and second biggest city of Turkey.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Ethics refers to a set of universal principles, values and standards used to judge the rightness or wrongness of a person's relations to others in terms of truth and justice (Near, Bacus, & Miceli, 1993). Public service ethics provides a framework to evaluate the conducts of public servants in accordance with codes of ethics (principles, values and standards) in relation to the public service.

Ethical values of public servants are mainly based on public values. Despite widespread recognition of the significance of public values in the public service, theoretical and particularly empirical research on public service values has recently become a major feature of public administration (Kernaghan, 1994; Kernaghan, 2003; Van Wart, 1998; Beck Jørgensen, 1999; Beck Jørgensen, 2007; Beck Jørgensen & Bozeman, 2007). A general discourse on public service values is on the today's and future agenda of the public sector (Beck Jørgensen, 1999, p. 580). In recent public administration literature much attention

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