

Determining factors and perceived quality of public service

Les Facteurs déterminants de la qualité perçue du service public

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Abstract:

This critical paper examines the complex issue of quality in public services. It explores the origins and definitions of the concept of quality, as well as the principle of the state's legitimacy as a service provider. It emphasizes the importance for public authorities, especially in Morocco, to measure the perceived quality of public services and its impact on public organizations. The SERVQUAL model is discussed as a tool to assess perceived quality in the public sector. The specific dimensions of public service quality are outlined, including accessibility, equal treatment of users, involvement of users in service design, complaint management, and transparency of information. The distinction between produced service quality and perceived service quality is highlighted, noting that public sector quality frameworks often focus more on internal management than user perceptions. The legal and constitutional regulation of public services in Morocco is examined, including the Moroccan Public Service Charter and various mechanisms to ensure quality. The paper concludes that the examination of quality in public services is particularly complex due to the multitude of legal and regulatory texts governing the public sector, making it a critical analysis of the existing paradigms and their effectiveness in evaluating public service quality.

Keywords: Public services, quality, perceived quality, SERVQUAL, Morocco, public service charter.

JEL Classification: M31

Paper type: Theoretical Research

Résumé :

Cet article critique examine la question complexe de la qualité dans les services publics. Il explore les origines et les définitions du concept de qualité, ainsi que le principe de la légitimité de l'État en tant que prestataire de services. Il souligne l'importance pour les autorités publiques, notamment au Maroc, de mesurer la qualité perçue des services publics et son impact sur les organisations publiques. Le modèle SERVQUAL est discuté comme un outil pour évaluer la qualité perçue dans le secteur public. Les dimensions spécifiques de la qualité des services publics sont décrites, incluant l'accessibilité, le traitement égal des utilisateurs, l'implication des utilisateurs dans la conception des services, la gestion des plaintes et la transparence de l'information. La distinction entre la qualité de service produite et la qualité de service perçue est mise en évidence, notant que les cadres de qualité du secteur public se concentrent souvent plus sur la gestion interne que sur les perceptions des utilisateurs. La régulation légale et constitutionnelle des services publics au Maroc est examinée, y compris la Charte des Services Publics Marocaine et divers mécanismes pour assurer la qualité. L'article conclut que l'examen de la qualité dans les services publics est particulièrement complexe en raison de la multitude de textes légaux et réglementaires régissant le secteur public, ce qui en fait une analyse critique des paradigmes existants et de leur efficacité pour évaluer la qualité des services publics.

Mots-clés : Services publics, qualité, qualité perçue, SERVQUAL, Maroc, charte des services publics.

JEL Classification : M31

Paper type : Recherche théorique

1. Introduction:

Since the 20th century, the demand for increased efficiency from the government has led public entities to focus on delivering superior quality services. As a result, improving and enhancing the quality and efficiency of public services has become a central objective of current administrative reforms. Increasing attention is paid to evaluating the quality of public services as perceived by their users. Recognizing the importance of beneficiaries in defining public service is not a new approach, but governments face ongoing pressure to justify and validate their actions. Thus, efforts to modernize public administration, including in Morocco, seek to respond to citizen and taxpayer dissatisfaction: opinion surveys show that although Moroccans highly value public services, they are also very critical of their management.

The idea of a state as a provider of public services has seen its scope of action broaden. Following World War II, the rapid expansion of organizations offering public services, the variety of their objectives, and their management methods complicate the state's task in legitimating its goals. Service quality is now a key sector capturing the interest of professionals, managers, and researchers, due to its considerable influence on organizational effectiveness, cost reduction, customer satisfaction, and profitability. Numerous studies have been conducted to define perceived quality, model its factors, measure its impact, and develop methods for data collection and analysis. The contributions of these research efforts continuously enrich the field of knowledge, providing a valuable resource for the scientific community.

Public service is characterized as the set of activities aimed at providing essential services to the public and meeting general interest needs, needs that have become fundamental in the daily life of citizens. The exploration of the foundations of this notion began at the end of the 19th century, before the concept of public service began to be incorporated into political discussions and laws. The revolutionaries adopted a vision of power oriented towards collective interests. The State plays a crucial role in preserving activities crucial to the social fabric, thus considering public services as essential to the general interest. This responsibility defines the prerogatives of the State.

The progression of the concept of public service is at the heart of the second section. The theory of public services becomes the catalyst for state expansion. The State is seen as a provider of services aimed at ensuring social cohesion through public services, seeking to substitute for economic and social regulation devices. We will observe that, in practice, the theoretical framework proposed by Duguit (1928) has not restricted state power nor established a specific right for public services. Nowadays, the influence of the quality of public service has intensified in parallel with the growing expectations of consumers in an increasingly affluent society. In the past, quality was mainly associated with commercial services. Nevertheless, the quality of state services has long been a source of national pride and a real strength for our country.

However, quality is becoming a critical issue. On the one hand, the expectations of citizens/taxpayers have increased. Their tolerance for being perceived simply as "administered" is decreasing, preferring to be considered more as "clients".

On the other hand, public services, particularly those directly managed by the State, are hampered by multiple organizational and operational weaknesses:

- Difficulty in distinguishing structures, confusion of roles, and hierarchical heaviness,
- Rigidity and ambiguity of responsibilities, lack of management culture.

To explore the issue of the quality of public services, we will look at different key questions, such as:

- What are the determinants of public service quality and to what extent does it meet user requirements?
- What are the origins and definitions of the concept of "public service" and the foundations of the legitimacy of the State?

- What are the issues, developments and legal framework of public services in Morocco? To address these questions and the central issue, we will discuss in the first part "The Origins and Definitions of the Concept of 'Public Service' and the Foundations of the State's Legitimacy," and in the second part "The Issues, Developments, and Legal Framework of Public Services in Morocco."

The theories mobilized are The SERVQUAL Model, model is extensively used to assess perceived service quality, particularly within the public sector. It addresses various dimensions of service quality, including tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy, adapting them for the evaluation of public services.

Theories of Public Service and State Legitimacy, involves delving into the historical and theoretical frameworks that define public service and the legitimacy of the state as a service provider. It includes discussions on the evolution of the concept of public service and the state's role, influenced by theorists like Duguit, who emphasized the state's function in providing public services as a means to ensure social cohesion and address the general needs of the public. Legal and Constitutional Frameworks, the document examines the regulation of public services within legal and constitutional contexts, specifically looking at how Morocco manages public service charters and other mechanisms to ensure quality in the provision of public services.

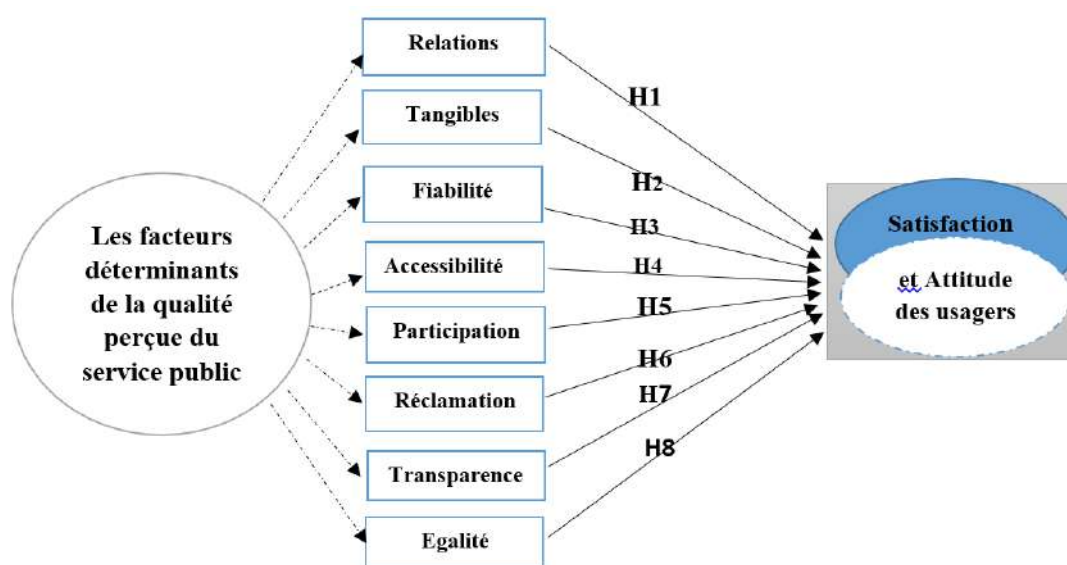
2. The origins and definitions of the concept of "public service" and the foundations of the legitimacy of the State

2.1 Conceptual Research Model: Determinants of Perceived Public Service Quality

The research model aims to formulate hypothetical propositions, including a main hypothesis and secondary hypotheses, which constitute the foundation of this study. We will develop the research model based on theoretical foundations, the problem statement, the definitions of the concerned variables, and the hypotheses arising from the relationships between the concepts defined in this model. This model will integrate the determining factors of public service as independent variables and will consider user/taxpayer satisfaction and behavioral intentions as dependent variables.

- The determining factors of public service as an independent variable
- User/taxpayer satisfaction and their behavioral intentions as two dependent variables

Fig 1: Research Model



Source: Authors

This conceptual model explores the multifaceted factors influencing the perceived quality of public services. The model posits that public service quality is determined by a constellation of interrelated factors, each contributing uniquely to the overall satisfaction and attitude of users towards these services. The eight determinants identified are:

1. **Relationships** - Reflecting the interpersonal interactions between service providers and users.
2. **Tangibles** - Encompassing the physical facilities, equipment, and appearance of personnel.
3. **Reliability** - Concerned with the ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately.
4. **Accessibility** - Relating to the ease with which users can access services.
5. **Participation** - Involving the role of users in the decision-making processes that affect the service they receive.
6. **Complaints** - The mechanism for addressing user grievances and feedback.
7. **Transparency** - The openness and clarity with which information is provided to users.
8. **Equality** - Ensuring all users receive the same quality of service without discrimination.

Each factor is hypothesized to have a direct impact on user satisfaction and attitudes, designated as H1 through H8 respectively. This model serves as a foundational framework for evaluating and enhancing the quality of public services, thereby improving user satisfaction and fostering positive attitudes towards public institutions. Through this analysis, policymakers and service administrators can identify key areas for improvement and implement strategies that directly address these determinants.

2.2 The evolution of the concept of Public Service:

Undoubtedly, the roots of the concept of public service lie in royal decrees, correspondence between the king and his vassals on their lands, as well as in primitive municipal charters, long before its blossoming at the beginning of the current century. This happened after the completion of major modernization projects in Western countries and the emergence of ideologies of political liberalism and solidarity in the field of ideas. Since World War I, the principles of the "laws of public service" (universality and equal access, continuity, mutability) have been embodied by Duguit's emblematic definition: "a service of collective interest which constitutes the foundation of the social bond".

The principles of continuity and equal access require constant adaptation to technological and economic developments, user needs and public demands. The need for this adaptation has increased under pressure, particularly from "users, citizens, taxpayers and payers", who have received increased attention from the political authorities responsible for the service. This requirement has become more pressing, requiring more rigorous alignment and more frequent adjustments to both the service offered and the conditions of its delivery. As a result, public authorities have sought to strengthen their control over the service, multiplying checks: technical, contractual or external, legal and financial, while striving to apply real-time regulation that combines flexibility, innovation and fairness.

This evolution was crucial to respond to the criticisms addressed to the public service in the last century, trying to appease them while recognizing their legitimate foundations. However, it remains difficult to reach a general consensus that had prevailed for more than half a century. First, the economic critique raises questions about the legitimacy of exclusively assigning certain activities to the public sector, based on a debatable application of the notion of natural monopoly, and criticizes pricing structures that disadvantage certain categories of consumers. It also points to the burden on the economy of the financial aid and subsidies allocated to public enterprises, aimed more at the organization of the service than its fundamental mission.

Can the interaction of market forces better define the definition and scope of public service? It is necessary to assess their risks: the insufficiency in meeting the needs of non-solvent individuals, or the non-commercial needs of society, the difficulty in maintaining social cohesion, particularly in the face of exclusion, or the risks inherent in an open and liberal economy (overexploitation of scarce resources, environmental damage).

Next, the legal critique questions the effectiveness of the great principles of public service - equality, continuity, and adaptability - which no longer guarantee concrete and assured benefits to users, sometimes to their detriment.

Overall, the question of the legitimacy of managing, under the aegis of public service, services such as education, training, social protection, or certain industrial and commercial services is not disputed.

The diversity of forms and approaches to intervention is essential, as it is justified to demand that the notion of public service does not lead to instability in the attribution of roles or responsibilities, in order to guarantee to users and service providers the legal security and protection they seek; and the flexibility required in its field and its methods of action is not called into question.

If the integration of this notion within the European structure seemed to disturb it, if, despite its political, economic, and legal significance, the term was virtually absent from the Treaty of Rome, if, in its liberal approach, it reserves a very limited place for the entities in charge of its management, the mission of the public service is nevertheless not neglected.

Thus, the foundations of the term public service are manifested in European Union law through the enhancement of the notion of "universal service", interpreted as a fundamental service accessible to all within the community, at fair tariff conditions and with a defined level of quality. Although this vision may differ from ours, focused on "service as an instrument of social cohesion", it nevertheless represents an elementary form of public service within a competitive framework.

The "delegation of public service" in France, because it touches on public services, is framed by European Union law: it is based on the principles derived from the Treaty, on the directives concerning "public contracts", or on the case law of the Court of Justice of the European Union. To fulfill its missions, the State and public authorities must, according to the context and the sector, mobilize a diversity of methods, ranging from the creation of directly managed services, to operation in the form of public establishments, or even private law structures, not forgetting mixed economies, concessions, and other forms of delegation of public service, considering the possibility of combining several of these approaches.

This approach is also based on the objectives of the European Union's policy as set out in the Commission's White Paper of 1985 and integrated into the texts of the Single European Act of 1986. The essence of public service does not coincide with the entities that employ it, nor with monopolies, large public enterprises or large public institutions and administrations providing essential services, but it does not encompass the entirety of public service missions. In general, the identity of the public service does not automatically overlap with the public sector, the public domain, or the civil service. However, the link between the public service and these various notions remains significant and may prove to be stronger than it appears.

The encompassing vision, however, has difficulty distinguishing between sovereign services, services of utility and social importance such as "education, health protection, sanitation", which are the pillars of the welfare state, and on the one hand, commercial and industrial services, market and non-market services, and on the other hand, national services, "established between 1936 and 1946 in the form of large public monopolies", as well as local community services, often entrusted to private companies for a certainly long but limited period, and without a monopoly.

2.3 The Notion of Public Service:

A public service refers to a service provided by a provider to users/taxpayers to meet their needs, whether they are individuals or entities, by providing added value. This service can be rendered independently of the user's request, either in a traditional way (in a physical location) or electronically, fully or partially. Two criteria define the public service:

- The organizational resources that are the property of the State.
- The preeminence of the decision-making power to establish the purposes of the entity.

The public service encompasses both state-owned enterprises and the public administration. These sectors represent a large portion of the public domain, characterized by a productivity often lower than that observed in the private sector. According to the European Center for Public Enterprises: "Public services concern activities which, for reasons of general interest, are considered unsuitable for exclusive market regulation or inappropriate for private ownership." Thus, the public service is divided into several distinct elements, including:

- A state entity or service responsible for providing the public service.
- A user who benefits from the public service.
- A concrete benefit obtained by the user, satisfying their request and providing them with added value.
- A means by which the service is rendered to the beneficiary by the government entity.
- A specific designation: this name must conform to standards to allow the identification and registration of public services.

According to the Moroccan Public Service Charter, "public services and any activity carried out by public services in accordance with the laws and regulations in force, aim to meet the needs of the user and to fulfill a mission of general interest" (Article 2 of Dahir No. 1-21-58 of 3 Dhul Hijjah 1442 (July 14, 2021) formalizing Law No. 54-19 establishing the Public Service Charter). The public services offered by public administrations, courts, regions, other local authorities and their groupings, as well as the entities that depend on them and public bodies are defined in this article (Article 2 of Dahir No. 1-21-58 of 3 Dhul Hijjah 1442 (July 14, 2021) promulgating Law No. 54-19 on the Public Service Charter).

2.4 Classification of public services

• Classification of public services according to strategic importance:

The presence of an administration is justified by the assignment of one or more specific missions, in other words, its field of activity, which only the administration concerned can exercise. To fulfill these missions, administrations are likely to offer public services related to their field of activity and to strengthen these main services with support services. These two categories of services play a distinct strategic role within the administration. Public services are divided according to their strategic importance into two categories:

- Main public service: this type of service is directly associated with the main domain of the administration and constitutes an essential part of its main functions and activities.
- Support public service: this type of service, which is not directly related to the main domain of the administration, aims to support the main services. Examples of support public services: information service, complaint management service and notification service.

• Classification of public services according to affiliation:

This categorization allows us to distinguish between the fundamental public service and the complementary public service. This differentiation is used to group the complementary services within a fundamental service, insofar as these services produce the same final result for the user, although in different contexts. Complementary services and fundamental services may

require different resources and/or a distinct management method, but inevitably lead to the same final result for the user.

• **Classification of public services according to service dependence:**

This final categorization is used to identify whether the public service offered by an administration is dependent on other services (within the same entity or between different departments). Consequently, it helps to differentiate cross-sectoral services (requiring coordination between several administrations). This approach will facilitate effective integration of services in the future.

• **Classification of public services according to the beneficiary:**

Each public service offered by the administration is designed to meet the requirements of a specific group of users, designated as "public service beneficiaries or users". Each group of beneficiaries has unique needs and may adopt various attitudes towards administrative services. The objective of this classification is to improve services by adjusting them to the specific demands of the target population.

• **Classification of public services according to the service trigger:**

The provision of a public service is triggered by an event that requires the administration to take specific actions to meet the demands of users. This classification makes it possible to differentiate the public services offered by the administration that generally require anticipation on its part and, in some cases, automation of the process (such as sending automatic notifications, making information available) from the public services activated by the user, which are often customized services responding to the specific needs of the user requesting the service. Thus, public services can be categorized according to their triggering element as follows: The public service initiated by the administration ; The public service requested by the user

• **Classification of public services according to their nature:**

The public service can generally be identified by the nature of its result, provided by the administration and received by the user. This categorization aims to define the nature of the public service, which can take one of the following four forms:

- A form of administrative document: this is a document prepared by the administration allowing the user to acquire an act, a certificate, an authorization or to comply with an administrative obligation. This document is personal and concerns exclusively one or more (natural or legal) persons designated by name.
- A form of modification in the administrative registers relating to the user, which may or may not be accompanied by an administrative document. Examples include the "National Register of Enterprises, the tax register, the civil status register, the land register, etc."
- An information form including:
 - Maps
 - Informative documents (different from the administrative document)
 - Directories
 - Audiovisual content
 - Databases
 - Legal and regulatory documentation

After defining the notion of public service, we will, in the next section, explore the specific characteristics of the public service. What are the peculiarities of the public service? To answer this question, we will begin by examining the distinctive elements that make up the definition of public service.

2.5 The Specificity of the Public Service:

Legal experts agree to recognize three essential components in the definition of public service: the organic aspect relating to the public entity, the functional aspect concerning the public interest, and the material aspect related to the special legal regime derogating from private law.

• The Organic Aspect:

This element indicates that the public service is carried out by a public entity, being an activity "organized, supervised and guaranteed by the authorities". Usually, a public service is perceived as an administrative entity operating under direct management. Public entities directly manage the public service activity with their staff, as well as their material and financial resources, sometimes resorting to modalities such as the public establishment or the concession. A public establishment is a legal entity of public law established by a specific public entity for a mission of general interest (such as health or education, etc.). The concession represents a method by which a public service mission is entrusted to a private entity for a determined duration. The organic element remains preserved because the public authority maintains its grip on the activity concerned (for example, through compliance with the specifications or the possibility of revoking the concession right).

• The Functional Aspect:

The theory of public service is designed to restrict the prerogatives of the State, which must not engage in activities beyond the general interest. Only activities essential to the preservation of social balance can be considered as public services: those relating to sovereignty, national education, social assistance, and public health. In theory, the general interest does not encompass profitable industrial and commercial activities, which are usually governed by the principles of freedom of trade and industry. However, we will demonstrate that the functional definition of public service does not hinder the scope of public authorities' action.

• The Material Element:

According to the analysis of Sabadie W (2010), the realization of the public interest necessarily implies the adoption of a specific common law legal regime for public services. Since the Bac d'Eloka decision of 1921, it is possible to distinguish two types of public services: industrial and commercial public services, and administrative services. This distinction stems from the desire to separate commercial public services from sovereign services. In practice, the former are intended for private entities and subject to private law, while the latter are assigned to public entities and governed by administrative law. The public service is seen as the foundation of administrative law.

The public service determines the content and scope of administrative law. In other words, administrative law is the law applicable to public services, assuming that the latter have prerogatives of public authority, that is, authorities that individuals do not have.

Case law confirms this approach by often using the prerogatives of public authority as a criterion for identifying an activity as a public service. However, the theory of public service proposes a different vision of the administration, where the exercise of the prerogatives of administrative law, or public powers, is legitimized solely by the public interest objective of public services: "if the administration is subject to rules distinct from common law, it is because of its mission dedicated to meeting the needs of the population, in the service of the 'general interest'".

Administrative law does not aim to dominate citizens. On the contrary, the concept of public service establishes new constraints for the administration and new rights for users. This evolution from the dynamic of domination inherent in the notion of public authority offers the administered protection against abuses of power and grants them a right of supervision over

administrative activity: the "law of service" emphasizes that the administered, as a user, has rights to exercise against the administration. Thus, administrative law is seen as a mechanism for protecting the administered: "the establishment of specific rules and a special court aims to better subject the administration to the respect of the law".

The public service is seen as a means of establishing an objective framework for state action, defining the duties of the authorities towards citizens. The framework of the public service is developed to impose on the administration the respect of certain operational norms or standards for the benefit of users/taxpayers. In the 1930s, Professor Louis Roland established a series of fundamental principles applicable to all public services, designated as the "laws of public service".

These principles reflect a renewed vision of the role of the State as a "service provider" whose mission is to respond to the needs of the population. The principles of continuity, adaptability and equity are combined with a commitment to better serve and respond to the needs of the general interest. According to the theory of public service developed by Léon Duguit, these principles establish obligations for public services and confer rights on users. Thus, the nature of the relationship with the public evolves: by using the services provided by the State and benefiting from its services, the user positions himself as the main beneficiary and the ultimate point of reference for its action.

2.6 Principle of Legitimation of the State as a Service Provider: The Public Service

Duguit argues that state authority should be restricted. He has established a theory according to which the State is conceived, not as an entity exercising power or sovereignty, but as a cooperation of public services orchestrated and supervised by the leaders: "The State is not, as has long been thought and believed, an authority that dictates, a sovereignty; it rather represents a collaboration of public services organized and regulated by the rulers". This perspective questions the foundations of political legitimacy. For Duguit, the public service constitutes both the foundation and the limit of governmental power. The French theory of public service draws on Durkheim's sociology and the solidarist doctrine, emphasizing the importance of cultivating a spirit of solidarity within society and promoting the development of the public service. The State is seen as "functional", its essential mission being to ensure, through public services, social cohesion and solidarity.

In other words, the State must "serve" the citizens for the common good through public services. The public service is seen as a vector of social cohesion, allowing the State to guarantee social solidarity: "The essence of the public service, as an instrument for strengthening the social bond and a means of social cohesion, is to contribute to certain forms of redistribution or transfers between social groups". The public service plays a crucial role in respecting fundamental rights, providing free public education, as well as health protection and safety. These rights are affirmed by the Preamble to the 1962 Constitution, which provides for the organization of public services in these areas. The public service acts as an agent of redistribution, aiming to reduce social inequalities. It ensures universal access to goods considered essential: public education, social and cultural public services, public network services. This culture of solidarity is also manifested by advantageous pricing for certain population groups (the elderly, the young) or social categories (scholarship students, war veterans, the unemployed).

3. The issues, developments and legal framework of public services in Morocco

Given the crucial importance of public services in the development of citizens, the authorities of all countries, including Morocco, have paid particular attention to public services, particularly in legal and regulatory texts, going so far as to incorporate this notion into the constitution to safeguard human dignity and the principles of social democracy set forth in the

Constitution, while responding to the strong expectations of Moroccan society in terms of efficiency. These rights and principles must be observed. To this end, it is essential to promote open and responsible dialogue, consultation and negotiation between all stakeholders in the political, economic, social and cultural spheres. So what is the regulatory, legal and constitutional framework governing public service in Morocco? The legal and constitutional regulation in Morocco:

3.1 The constitutional provisions of public services in Morocco:

The Moroccan Constitution contains several articles focused on the right to fair governance, emphasizing equality between women and men, equality of rights, the right of access to information from the public administration, as well as the right to bring an administrative court case against individual or regulatory administrative decisions. The 2011 Moroccan Constitution, in its Article 157, mentions that the commitment of public services to respect for citizens and users must be embodied in a public service charter. Article 156 of the 2011 Constitution stipulates that "Public services are attentive to their users and ensure the monitoring of their observations, proposals and complaints", thus emphasizing the vital importance of putting in place tools to measure user satisfaction in terms of the quality of services and benefits offered by the Moroccan public sector. To ensure quality public service, the public authorities have established several mechanisms, such as:

- The service delivery strategy which includes one or more tools to ensure quality (service charters, organizational quality management models, quality labels, self-assessment frameworks, ISO standards or other international standards, etc.).
- Regular procedures based on user satisfaction and an evolving analysis of their needs to monitor, evaluate and improve the service offering.
- Modernization initiatives for services aimed at reducing waiting times, costs, the number of necessary visits, and improving access to information on services.
- Continuous training of employees involved in service delivery.
- The establishment of tools for the sharing and dissemination of best practices.
- The establishment of service standards for the main public services provided by the administration.

3.2 The Moroccan Public Service Charter:

The Moroccan Public Service Charter incorporates the fundamental principles governing the interactions between citizens and public services, mentioned in Articles 154, 155 and 156 of the Constitution. It aims to encourage good governance and sustainable development, constituting a permanent lever for administrative improvement and modernization, in order to offer users services that meet their expectations while preserving their rights, dignity and privacy. Respect for the rights framework established by the CESE Social Charter of December 2011 is imperative. The charter should also be based on general standards defining the obligations and function of public services to clarify and strengthen their image and legitimacy, as well as on rules governing the behavior of civil servants, legislation, entities and monitoring and evaluation mechanisms. It must also ensure a balance between the rights of civil servants, the interests of the authorities and the demands of users of public services and citizens. This charter, as well as the texts defining it and implementing it, constitute one of the strategic foundations of the reform and governance policy of public services. According to the Moroccan public service charter, public services include:

- Public administrations, courts, regions, other territorial entities and their associations, as well as affiliated public entities and bodies;

- Any activity carried out by public services in accordance with the current legislative and regulatory framework, aimed at meeting the needs of users and fulfilling a mission of general interest.

Morocco has established standards and defined objectives to promote good governance of public services, in particular through:

- The implementation of the strategic objectives of these services, through the introduction of multi-year planning focused on performance and the achievement of results, taking into account convergence, the imperatives of development and the growth of the needs of users/taxpayers;
- The reform of the organization of public services, aimed at clarifying responsibilities according to organizational structures aligned with the established objectives and the principle of proximity, in the context of advanced regionalization, as well as deconcentration and decentralization;
- Strengthening the efficiency of public services in the management of their resources;
- The establishment of principles of interaction of public services with their environment and the participation of the various stakeholders in the improvement of services and their quality;
- Improving the quality and accessibility of public services;
- The application of transparency by disseminating and publishing data on platforms and information concerning public services and public services;
- The inculcation of values of integrity, through the adoption of ethical mechanisms and the promotion of professional conduct.

3.3 The Foundations of Public Service in Morocco:

Public service represents a complex and diverse entity, encompassing all organizations under the supervision of the State. The different types of public services, whether administrative, industrial or commercial, are administered either directly by the public administration, or through public service contracts (concessions). Due to their crucial role and their association with the management of these services, they are governed by essential principles, such as the "Rolland Law" or the "Laws of Public Service", which align with the objective of these legal frameworks to safeguard the general interest.

In this context, we will explore the foundations of public service by examining the principles that govern it. We will start with the principle of continuity, follow with the principle of equality, and conclude with the principle of mutability or adaptability, which are all central to the functioning of public service.

• Principle of Continuity of Public Service:

The principle of continuity, firmly rooted in case law and doctrine, implies that public services must operate in a regular manner, although not constantly, with a requirement of uninterrupted operation for certain essential services such as electricity, telephone and water. This continuity must be adapted to effectively meet the needs of users.

LACHAUME (1989) considers that "the elevation of a specific public demand to the rank of public service stems from the recognition by the public authority of its crucial importance for society, the economy, politics, law, etc., reflecting a rational and stable management, thus excluding any form of disturbance or interruption".

Consequently, the principle of continuity dictates that each public service must ensure continuous and regular operation, except for cases where the regulations provide for interruptions, including services essential to the functioning of society, such as "security services, health, energy, water, and other essential public services". The principle of continuity is elevated to the rank of a constitutional value, emphasizing the right to an uninterrupted provision of public services, essential to the fundamental activities of civil society.

In Morocco, the principle of continuity has an implicit constitutional dimension. In this regard, Article 175 of the 2011 Constitution stipulates that, in the event of non-adoption of the finance law at the end of the year, "the government may issue a decree to allocate the necessary funds for the operation of public services".

This principle constitutes a constraint for those responsible for the management of public services. "The obligation to maintain service continuity implies that access to the service must be satisfactorily guaranteed, that the service operates in a timely and adequate manner and that it is not interrupted without valid justification". It is intrinsically linked to the principles of accessibility and adaptability.

Accessibility concerns in particular opening hours and geographical locations, which must be adapted to local specificities, as well as pricing, adjusted for different categories of users. For example, public entities must also adapt to variations in demand or technological developments. However, the continuity of public services faces challenges, particularly the right to strike and the latitude recognized to managers of public services to eliminate non-mandatory benefits according to the law. The continuity and adaptation of public services are in reality two facets of the same notion. A public service can only last by adjusting to technological developments and social needs, this need for adaptation, oriented towards efficiency, defines a limit to continuity, while aiming to meet the expectations of users.

• Principle of Equality:

This principle is generally recognized as being of a constitutional and fundamental nature, incorporated into various national and international legislative texts. It is notably included in Article 1 of the 1789 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, as well as in the Moroccan Constitution.

Article 1 of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen: "Men are born and remain free and equal in rights. Social distinctions can only be based on common utility."

Article 39 of the Moroccan Constitution: "The State, public institutions and local authorities mobilize all available means to facilitate equal access for all citizens, enabling them to benefit from the right... ", to Public Services.

Each individual must benefit from fair treatment by public services. However, this equality is relative: it is possible to treat differently people in different situations without creating inequality:

Users/taxpayers placed in identical conditions must be subject to the same rules;

It is not forbidden to differentiate the treatment according to the specific situation of the users/taxpayers.

It is also manifested, among other things, by the right for users/taxpayers to uniform rates and comparable quality services. This also includes equality in access to public contracts, public employment, etc.

Equality is a principle of constitutional value in the context of general interest activities, ensuring that all citizens are treated fairly by public services. They are entitled to all dignities, positions and public employment without discrimination. The application of the principle of equality concerns both access to the public service and the provision of the service. Equal treatment of users/taxpayers is traditionally interpreted as formal equality: "It prohibits arbitrary preferences but admits differences, provided they are based on objective criteria".

Equality is seen as a principle of non-discrimination: "It prohibits arbitrary or illegitimate distinctions, those that are not objectively justifiable by differences in situation". The challenge lies in assessing specific situations to legitimize differences in treatment. Neutrality requires that the public service does not vary depending on the opinions of staff or users/taxpayers. The principle of equality before the public service is increasingly seen as a means of concretely

ensuring this equality: "The restoration of equality can therefore be carried out by the public service".

For example, the constitutional judge favors the principle of equality of citizens before the law and freedom of education over management autonomy. The legislator can authorize local authorities to support private educational institutions, but the basic criteria for applying this law must not depend on local decisions and must be uniform throughout the territory.

• Principle of Adaptability:

This principle, also known as the principle of mutability, emphasizes that the public service must be able to adapt to changes in collective needs in order to serve the general interest. LACHAUME (1989) defines the principle of adaptability as "the need for public services to evolve in their organization and functioning so that they always respond with the greatest efficiency to the requirements of the general interest". The modernization efforts of public services, particularly with regard to service quality, represent a tangible implementation of this principle. For J. Chevallier, it is a "law of progress" encouraging public services to improve the quality of their offerings. Contrary to the principles of continuity and equality, that of adaptability has not been explicitly recognized by the constitutional judge, neither in Morocco nor in France. This principle also imposes duties on users/taxpayers. Although they do not have a legal means to demand that the manager of the public service adapt it to their specific needs, they are often forced to calibrate their expectations according to the changes in the service.

3.4 Challenges of Measuring Quality in Public Services

Currently, service quality is a central element in performance management in the public sector. The way of designing and implementing service quality varies depending on whether the focus is on the quality offered or the perceived quality, and on the use of a generic or specific service quality model.

• Incorporating Service Quality into Public Performance Management:

The evaluation of service quality is increasingly based on performance management, as the management control function must establish management systems aligned with the company's strategy and the key success factors of the activity. In the service sector, quality is a key success factor and must be integrated into the management control system. This approach is particularly relevant in the public sector, where internal and external production functions are combined. "User/taxpayer satisfaction is perceived as an essential element of management control", and the distinction between the measurement of perceived quality and internal control is blurred since performance is mainly achieved during the service co-production interaction with the user. Bouckaert and Halligan believe that the integration of quality frameworks "such as Total Quality Management, the International Standard Organization, the Balanced Score Card or the Common Assessment Framework" into budgetary systems represents not only a way to integrate the performance logic into public organizations, but also an analytical tool to discern the emergence of an integrated and coherent public performance management system.

In Morocco, the Organic Law on the Finance Law (LOF) adopted in 2013 illustrates the integration of quality into performance management. This new results-oriented management approach is based on a three-year budget programming and the definition of objectives through the performance project, with the selection of performance indicators theoretically intended to guide resource allocation decisions. By classifying these indicators into three categories, the LOF symbolically places service quality, management efficiency and socio-economic effectiveness on an equal footing. The institutionalization of Service Quality (SQ) measurement is concretely reflected in the increased use of ISO certifications and user satisfaction assessments, in both sovereign and quasi-commercial sectors.

• The Distinction Between Produced Service Quality and Perceived Service Quality:

Service quality in the public sector is a complex and multidimensional concept due to the specific attributes of services. The main quality standards in this sector are inspired by industrial methods aimed at improving internal control and establishing and maintaining quality standards. Another type of framework is based on the service logic, evaluating quality through the perception of clients and users/taxpayers and adjusting internal processes based on these perceptions.

It is crucial not to isolate these two approaches to quality management, as both aim to focus the evaluation and perception of public service quality around the user. While industrial models encourage the measurement of beneficiary perceptions, the industrial model is primarily focused on internal management and self-assessment, while the other seeks to influence beneficiary perceptions and expectations. The "Common Assessment Framework (CAF)" model, widely adopted in European administrations, favors the criteria of the quality offered over the perceived quality.

This model is based on a self-assessment based on nine criteria, five of which are internal organizational factors impacting the four other criteria designated as "results". Among these result criteria, only one focuses on the evaluation of the perceptions of "clients/citizens", the others being oriented towards internal aspects (staff perceptions) or vaguer (impacts on society and key performances).

This method gives little importance to quality as perceived by users. The tendency of public organizations to focus on their internal issues, even in their desire to place the user at the center, is highlighted by the use of service charters. Although these instruments, introduced on a large scale since the Citizen's Charters initiative in the United Kingdom, promise to ensure a series of external and internal commitments, they do not necessarily guarantee that users actually perceive the announced quality or are even aware of the existence of the charter.

An analysis of the Costs and Performance of Public Services reveals that, although attempts to measure the perceived quality of public services are numerous, they lack consistency and standardization, thus limiting the possibility of methodologically benefiting from the approaches developed. In short, there is a proliferation of empirical studies on satisfaction in the public sector that does not lead to constructive exchanges or conceptualization efforts. Two main reasons explain why the measurement of perceived quality has not traditionally been a priority in public services: on the one hand, it has been perceived as a matter of corporate marketing, which may have damaged its reputation with public officials, and on the other hand, it is based on the analysis of individual perceptions, often seen as incompatible with the general interest mission of public services. The challenge for public managers is to reconcile these aspects in a society that increasingly values individualism and consumption.

In summary, the accumulation of empirical studies on satisfaction in the public sector without exchanges or conceptualization represents a challenge. The reasons for this traditional lack of interest in measuring perceived quality in public services include:

- The comparison of this measurement with corporate marketing practices, which has tarnished its perception among public authorities;
- The basis of this measurement on personal perceptions, long seen as incompatible with the objectives of public services.

The search for a balance between these elements is an immediate challenge for public administration in a context of greater individualization and consumerism.

• The Distinction Between Generic or Specific Service Quality Models

The adoption of generic models has been the predominant trend so far, although gradually, some countries, such as Canada, have developed their own frameworks (such as the

Management Accountability Framework) or models specifically designed for public entities in Europe (for example, the Common Assessment Framework promoted since 2000 by the Innovative Public Services Group). The integration of quality into management raises various questions and challenges: when a management tool is adapted to the public sector and becomes relevant, it tends to reflect the peculiarities of government organizations.

The evaluation and perception of the quality of public services are becoming central to management strategies, touching on the methods of managing the quality produced. At the heart of this research, the perceived quality of public services remains insufficiently explored and problematized; the inappropriate transfer of analytical models designed for the private sector does not seem to concern the sponsors of studies on users of public services.

This results, on the one hand, from an insufficient theoretical capitalization of practical experiences in the evaluation of the perceived quality of public services and, on the other hand, from a variable experience of public bodies in the creation and interpretation of various performance indicators.

The approaches developed in France and in the OECD countries have focused on measuring effectiveness and efficiency (Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2004; Schick, 2003). The ability to decipher the "black boxes" that constitute performance indicators varies according to the type of indicator used. The limited mastery of methods for evaluating the perceived quality of service in the public sector becomes problematic when the latter founds resource allocation and service organization decisions.

Like any performance indicator, service quality indicators are at the heart of organizational dynamics and "cannot be perceived as neutral tools that do not influence the system they are intended to evaluate". According to Desrosières (2003) and Bouckaert and Halligan (2008), measurement is not an unbiased activity; it is therefore crucial to harmonize as much as possible the model for measuring perceived quality with the conceptions and perceptions of the actors on what constitutes a quality public service. Failing this, the danger is to limit oneself to measuring what is already measurable, thus neglecting fundamental aspects of the service, which can lead to confusion about the role of the administration and generate tensions and difficulties for the agents in charge of administrative tasks.

The analysis thus reveals the importance of the integration of services into public performance management and highlights the benefits of adopting user-centric service quality models, while being adapted to the specific framework of the public sector.

3.5 The Evolution of the Principles of Public Service: The Consecration of Specific Dimensions of Public Service Quality

Although originally from the commercial sector, quality is now legally recognized as a fundamental principle of public service. This assimilation of commercial values into the foundations legitimizing public intervention signals a reduction of the boundary between the public and private spheres. Nevertheless, the integration of quality within the public service makes it possible to enhance specific criteria, often secondary in the private sector. At this stage, the examination of the evolution of the principles of public service is considered crucial, particularly through the various aspects defining the quality of public service.

• The Evolution of the Principles of Public Service:

Historically, public services are required to comply with the three major principles of continuity, equality and mutability, which are supposed to ensure respect for the general interest and the satisfaction of users. However, under the combined effect of Community law and economic and social developments, these principles have been oriented towards a greater consideration of individual interests. Indeed, the frequent invocation in Community law of objectives such as the quality, regularity or cost of services has been integrated into the principles of public service in France. These new principles focus more on the relationship with

users. A "positive status of the user, combining public law and private law", has also emerged, granting users strengthened rights pertaining to public services: access to information, transparency, simplicity, accessibility and speed.

• The Specific Dimensions of the Quality of Public Service:

The expansion of these new rights leads to the establishment of the principle of quality in public service, which incorporates two specific imperatives: the accessibility of the service and the improvement of the service:

- The accessibility of public services goes beyond the simple physical adaptation of premises and schedules. On the one hand, it is a matter of making the services adapted to the various social and geographical conditions of the users to guarantee equal access to the services; on the other hand, to strengthen the clarity of actions by improving access to information and simplifying administrative procedures.
- The improvement of administrative service delivery implies a prompter response and intervention to user requests. The objective is to improve listening devices, increase regional proximity, prevent disputes, and also to make administrative processes faster and penalize delays.

According to Sabadie, this transformation of the principles of public service can be summarized and defined by the specific dimensions associated with the quality of public services:

- Equal treatment of users;
- Involvement in the definition of the service offer taking into account the opinion of users;
- Management of user complaints;
- Transparency of information communicated to users.

Furthermore, in the public sector, a more extensive definition of quality is adopted, which differs from that of the private sector. The measurement and evaluation of public quality, defined as "the ability to respond to the needs of the general interest co-produced" (France Qualité Publique, 2006), requires the development of a comprehensive model encompassing all its dimensions.

At the end of this section, we have observed that although the examination of quality in services is complex, the analysis of the quality of public services is even more difficult, as the inherently complex public sector is governed by a multitude of legal and regulatory texts that make the issue of quality even more complex. From this perspective, to better understand the notion of public service quality, we have taken into account the perception of users, conceptualized this notion by exploring its origins and definitions, and highlighted the principle of legitimization of the State as a service provider. It is also important to emphasize the importance of measuring the perceived quality of public service for public authorities in general, and for Moroccan authorities in particular, as well as its importance for public organizations. The dimensions of the SERVQUAL model, a reference for conceptualizing perceived quality in the private sector, are often integrated as is in studies aimed at measuring the perceived quality of public services.

4. Conclusion

In this paper, we have examined various aspects of the concepts of quality, service and service quality, both in the private and public sectors. We have explored the issue of service quality and the specific quality of public services, noting the complexity of defining the concept of service and identifying the issues related to quality. The non-storable nature of the service, resulting from its inseparable character as it is consumed simultaneously with its production, adds to this complexity. The analysis of the literature on services has made it possible to

highlight the attributes of service activities that can affect the quality of the service in general and the service relationship in particular.

We have also emphasized the importance of the customer, seen as a co-producer of the service, and of the contact agent, a key player in the success of the service delivery. We concluded that quality in service is not limited to an isolated characteristic, but to a coherent set of characteristics, designed to meet the explicit or implicit expectations of the targeted customers. The intangible nature of services makes their qualitative evaluation as complex as that of products.

Furthermore, in this research, the concept of perceived service quality is treated as a multidimensional construct, influenced by various factors such as the tangible aspects of the service, the interactions between personnel and the customer, and the method of delivery, among others.

Regarding the analysis of the concept of service quality, many researchers have explored the various elements that shape perceived quality. These studies have enriched our study, allowing us to grasp the ramifications of this concept, particularly in terms of the quality of the relationship between the consumer and their service provider. We have thus highlighted the correlation between perceived quality, consumer satisfaction and their attitude, illustrating the crucial role of the perception of quality in the establishment of relationships and therefore in customer loyalty. Many studies on customers indicate that service quality is a precursor to satisfaction, better service quality leading to greater satisfaction, which is itself a lever for loyalty and profit.

Moreover, the influence of the quality of public service has intensified, in parallel with the growing expectations of consumers in a society that has generally become wealthier. Although traditionally perceived as an attribute of public service, the quality of state services has long been a source of pride and strength for our country. However, quality is becoming a complex issue as user expectations increase.

Furthermore, the perception of quality in the public sector differs from that of the private sector. We concluded that the examination of quality in public services is particularly complex, as the public sector itself is complex, regulated by a multitude of legal and regulatory texts that make the issue of quality even more difficult. We have, on the one hand, conceptualized this notion by exploring its origins and definitions, and on the other hand, examined the principle of legitimation of the State as a service provider, while emphasizing to the public authorities, particularly Moroccan ones, the importance of the issues related to the measurement of perceived quality in public service and its impact on public organizations.

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