



THE 7TH EDITION OF THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE
**EUROPEAN INTEGRATION
REALITIES AND PERSPECTIVES**

The Communication in Public Administration in Urban Areas

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Abstract: The aim of this paper is to underline the role of communication in the public institutions by identifying the characteristics and peculiarities of the process of public administration, starting from the characteristics of administrative process and from those of organizational behavior in urban areas identifiable at the level of each public institution. The study of the dimensions such as the actors and the stakeholders involved in the administrative process, the goals and the objectives of the administrative evaluation, the criteria and the techniques of communication and all interpersonal hierarchies established, all of these can be considered variables that can offer distinction to the communication process in public administration, whether we speak about inter-institutional communication or intra-institution alone or about that one from the public administration to citizens. This article aims to underlie the characteristics of the communication process in public administration based on a quantitative study which appeals to the variables previously set and that can become models or labels for subsequent specialized studies.

Keywords: institutional communication; public administration; public policies; evaluation; methods of communication.

1. The Communication between Administrative Institution and Citizens

Institutional communication is now becoming more developed in the framework of public organizations. Public institutions have departments specialized in this area and try to maintain public image through policies and activities supported.

In this way, the communication is accompanying the work of public institutions, thus contributing to the achievement of it in good conditions. In addition, the communication responds to the need of the public administration to assert and to strength its specific role, by bringing to the attention of citizens the obligations and prerogatives which they have.

With the general concept of communication, in the next lines we will try to define “communication to the public” as the process of implementation of a system of public relations, conducted by public administration and aimed at providing the advices of public interest (health, citizen's safety, environment, public order and tranquility). Through the system of public relations, communication to the public can turn in a social one, or behavioral sometimes. The public communication includes the local communication, in which the central place of institutions is taken by the local institutions, such as the city halls or the prefectures. The representative of the public institutions, which provides most often with the citizens, is public officer (Rus, 2005, p. 117).

Stancu Șerb distinguishes six situations in which public officer shall communicate with citizens:

- “1. Receiving the public;
2. Offering aid and assistance to the victim;
3. The advices assembly;

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4. The notification of the infringement;
5. The intervention in the conflict;
6. The response to verbal aggression.” (Şerb, 1999, p. 43)

Of all the situations of inter-relationship of public servants with the citizen, the receiving is most important. To ensure that this situation can be optimized, it is necessary to conduct two types of actions:

1. Arranging some appropriate spaces. Thus, the places arranged for these activities must include all the necessary facilities. If the receipt is made in the office of public servant, the room must be sober and not hamper the work of the facilities itself. If it is necessary, we should have the possibility to remain only with the interlocutor in the Office, in order that he can be able to unburden myself in all honesty.
2. Adopting an attitude consistent with the mood of the person with whom we enter into contact, to overcome moments of discussion.” (Şerb, 1999, p. 43-44)

Institutional communication is a “extra-organizational” communication and the institution of public administration aims to enhance, to consolidate the image, to create around it a climate of trust and sympathy on the part of citizens.

By its nature, public administration depends on the communication that takes place between the various levels of public administration; the communication on the same level; the communication between the Board and the Executive Office; the communication between the Administration and political authority; the communication in the social environment.

There is, therefore, a multitude of forms to promote the image, the values of a specific services or public institutions. The most effective and the cheapest form of promotion is, however, more often not ignored. It is available to all officials and it has to highlight permanently the positive aspects of the institution from which they came from on all the occasions of the contacts with the external environment, whether personal or professional.

The idea is that every public official can assume the role of a smooth external Communicator, his message being centered on the reliability, efficiency and quality of the institution. This implies, however, that the public official should *know* (what keeps on the internal communication effectiveness), *believe* (this means the consistency of his speech and his actions) and *want* (to feel the need to talk about the institution of public administration, which refers to the idea of motivation). (Nedelea & Nedelea, 2006, p. 104)

By accepting the idea that public authorities must, through its whole activity, to pursue the general interest of population, we will agree that public administration has the obligation to approach the members of local communities and to maintain continuous contacts with them.

In this way, public administration must communicate, must be open to dialogue, must respect and take account of the citizen.

Public institutions make use of the communication within the actions or within the relations that they lay down.

External communication helps, as we have said, to raise public awareness and the image of the public sector organization. She fulfills the function of promoting the institution of the State towards citizens, local communities, partners, media, and other organizations, as well as against any other person or structure with which it comes into contact.

There can be no abstraction in the form of external communications impact on civil servants of administrative institution.

Communication is that type of communication that accompanies the work of public institutions with a view of meeting the general interest. The messages transmitted shall include advices of public interest. Thus, the communication to the public must make known citizens of the existence of organizations in

the public sector, the functioning and the powers of their legality and appropriateness of the decisions taken. At the same time, through the communication to the public, it can be pursued the needs and desires of the people, by the role of public institutions and the powers they hold to come meet them, realizing in this way the achieving of the general interest. Incidentally, this is the foundation of marketing optics in public administration.

Public communication is designed to convince, that through institutional policies carried out, as well as through public decisions adopted by achieving the general interest, yielding such adherence.

The citizen must be informed of the existence and on the way of functioning of public services, must be listened when he expresses dissatisfaction, must be taken into account with his wishes and his needs.

In conclusion, the marketing activity in public administration is considering designing and implementing plans for the communication to the public, aimed at exchange of information of public interest and social cohesion. Public authority seeks, through communication, a relationship of proximity to the citizen; approaching it and enter into dialogue, it knows the requirements, wishes. (Nedelea & Nedelea, 2006, p.107)

2. Methodology

The present research aims to identify and analyze the characteristics of communication process in public administration, based on a comparative approach. The research was carried out in May-June 2011 in two institutions of local public administration from Iasi and has a cognitive role, but also compared. The volume of the sample survey is eighty-two persons. The sample is probabilistic (Miftode, 2003), based on the snowball technique (Henry, 1990). The response rate is 100%. Research is prescriptive, assuming from the start the methodological limits.

The sample consists of two parts, including respondents from two institutions of public administration workers, one from local level and one county-level. The two parts of the sample are proximate equal: the first consists of forty-eight respondents and at the second of thirty-four respondents. The difference between the two parts of the sample could be reported to the total population of the two administrative institutions, the first being greater than the second.

The sample is comprised of 48.8% male and 51.2% female, most of the respondents aged is between 30-40 years old: 46.3%, and then between 41 and 50 years-28%, over 50 years – 19.5% and 6.1% in 30 years old. Of the total respondents, 59, 8% are married, 20.7% are unmarried, divorced: 9.8% and 4.9% widowers. The percentage of non-response is 4.9%. 36, 6% declared that they are college graduates, 12.2% declared postgraduate education, 14.6% declared that they graduated the College, 7.3% - the post secondary school and 25.6% declared that they graduated a high school.

The profile of the two institutions has put its mark on the skills of employees: 43.9% of respondents declared that they are graduates of technical and engineering sciences, 12.2% of Economics, 4.9% of legal sciences, social sciences 1.2%, 8.5% public administration, 3.7% of architecture, 2.4% of mathematics-Informatics, 1, 2% of political science. Non-answers rate is 22%. Then 24.4% of respondents work in a technical department, 18.3% in a Department with an economic profile, 3.7% in the legal department within 9, 8% in the department of public relations, 8. 5% of in the Department related to management quality. Offices of the respondents are generally of execution, as well as of decision: 30.5% are heads of sector, 9, 8% are engineers and sub engineers 4.9% are agents, 3.7% advisers, 6.1% economists, 3.8% assistants, 18.3% operators and 3.7%, head of the Office. Therefore the functions of the decision would be in a percentage of 34.2%. From the total respondents, 41.5% working under one of the two institutions, and 58.5 in the other organization. Referring to the money that the respondents have on average per month, the percentage of non-response is 19.5%. From the total valid responses, 34.8% declared that they charge per month between 500-1000 ron, 53% from 1001-1500 ron, 6.1% between 1501-2000 ron, 4.5% between 2001-2500 ron and 1.5% over 2500 ron. The characteristics of the two parts of the sample are repeated at the micro level.

3. Results

3.1. The Characteristic of the Communicational Evaluative-Administrative Process at the Level of the General Sample

Starting from the characteristics of the communication process, we can specify first that 47.6% from the total respondents places the problem of transparency as necessary characteristic of the administrative decision-making process.

On the other hand, building the equation of the communication as a process deployed between administrators and citizens, it appears another dimension to communication: the access of citizens to information and administrative projects. From this point of view, 37, 8% of respondents consider that another objective of the administrative process relates to access to data of administrative projects held by citizens, while 62.2% provides a negative response.

As regards the purpose of the evaluation of the administrative process, 26.8% of respondents declared that the evaluation is locking on its necessity in relation to the community.

In relation to the criteria used on an administrative level, those relating to transparency and communication relationships are present but are rather weak valorized. Sensitivity criterion (the administrative project is necessary to the community) get 19.5% percentage positive pointed and 80, 5% negative percent.

As regards the instruments which are used on the administrative level, these are: customer-oriented questionnaires: 59, 8%; questionnaires oriented to employees: 48. 8%; the study of the archives of administrative projects: 7. 3%; research on the field: 43.9; studying the documentation: 36, 6%.

As regards the techniques of the administrative institution, the *benchmarking* (Deming, 1993, p. 55) is one of them. From the total respondents, 47, 6% declares that the evaluation pursues similar projects in institutions with the same profile from the country, 7.3% state that is pursuing similar projects in other countries, 6.1% declared that they don't follow such comparative analyses and 39% is the percentage of non-response.

Continuing the analytical approach at the institutional level, 54,9% of respondents declared that the evaluations are carried out by certain people who have this role in the institution, 35.4% declares that heads are directly involved, 8.5% declares that the evaluations are carried out by the project applicants and the rate non-answers is 1.2%. We can note that the hierarchical line is quite clearly present at the institutional level when it comes to evaluation, the percentage of those who declares that heads are directly involved has very high ratings -35.4%. Here the result that the circuit information is from top to bottom is quite centralized and external communication on the line of the process of the evaluation by external experts is quite closed.

On the other hand, the need to establish a link with the outside is recognized, but the practices are different. 92, 7% of respondents consider the external evaluation to be beneficial, but the percentages relating to internal stakeholders involved are much higher. Of the total, 24.4% declares that external evaluation brings a plus of objectivity, 7.3% - more subjectivity, 4.9% - on seriousness, 2.4% support the idea of comparative action of the external actors who make the evaluations and 1.2% on the impartiality and accuracy. It can be seen that the ideas of objectivity and subjectivity receive both positive percentages.

As regards the need for the administrative evaluation process, it refers to the communication report of the administrator and client: 24.4% of respondents declared that the administrative projects must be assessed from the responsibility to its customers. Alongside these percentages, the finality of the administrative process supposes economic needs.

3.2. The Characteristic of the Communicational Evaluative-Administrative Process at the Level of the Two Parts of the Sample

At the level of the two parts of the sample, the percentages are relatively similar. As regards the objectives of the evaluation process on dimensions of transparency and citizens' access to the data, at the level of the two parts of the sample, the percentages are totally different. 60,4% support the objective of transparency and 16.7% consider that the evaluation implies if the citizens had access to the administrative project data at the level of the first part of the sample and 29.4% supports the transparency and 67,6% supports data access for citizens to the level of the second.

The purpose of administrative projects on line of communication between administrators and citizens receives the following percentages: 27.1% argue that evaluation aims if the target-group received a response at the level of the first part of the sample and 26, 5% for the second part.

Sensitivity criteria get 29, 2% in the first sample and 5.9% at the level of the second.

Comparatively, the tools and techniques get different values of the percentages (see Table 1. Tools and techniques-comparison).

Table 1. Tools and techniques – comparison

Tools	Sample 1	Sample 2
Questionnaires or interviews for employees	27,1%	74,9%
Questionnaires for clients	41,7%	85,3%
Study of the archive project	10,4%	2,9%
Research in field	66,7%	11,8%
Assembly information	47,9%	20,6%
Techniques		
Comparison with the projects of evaluation made by administrative institutions in the country	72,9%	11,8%
Comparison with the projects of evaluation made by administrative institutions from other countries	12,5%	0

At the level of the Sample 1, 66.7% declares that there is a Department/Bureau in the institution dealing with the evaluation process. At the same time 77, 1% declares that it has turned to experts from outside the institution for the evaluation process. From the total respondents, 93.8% declares that it is beneficial to use specialists from outside. Positive motivation falls the value of objectivity (25%), 8.3% speak of earnestness, 4.2% are for subjectivity and for the possibility to compare the forms of evaluation and by 2.1% for fairness and accuracy. Negative motivation refers to ignorance of the specifics of internal administrative process (6.3%).

At the same time, at the level of Sample 2, 70.6% of respondents argue that there is a specialized department at the institution dealing with evaluation and 88.2% admits that the institution appealed to external persons for conducting the evaluations.

88.2% of the respondents consider that the external experts are benefic to the institution, 5.9% offers negative answers and non-response rate is 5.9%. Of those who gave positive answers, 23 % sais that external experts offer objectivity and subjectivity 11.8% to the evaluation process.

Of those who do not see external evaluation techniques as being good, 5.9% claims that require extra funds, 2.9% claim that external experts do not know the specifics of the institution and 2.9% claim that it is too expensive. We can observe that the problem of objectivity and subjectivity receives only positive percentages.

As regards the need of the evaluative process, at the level of the first sample, 16.7% claim responsibility for the institution to its customers and 35.3% gives the same response at the level of the second sample.

4. Conclusions

After we realized this comparison, you can synthesize some traits of the communication on the administrative level: the objectives of transparency and of access to the data of the citizens are extremely valorized (and percentages are different from sample 1 to sample 2), the purpose of the administrative act supports communication with citizens on the replies gave by the public administration to the public problems initially raised by these issues, the administrative act supposes the criterion of sensitivity on the line of communication between administrator and public citizen's needs (this principle is present at the level of each parts of the sample, but it is more or less valorized), there are specific tools and techniques that facilitate both internal communication (intra-institutional) and external (from administrative institution to citizen or inter-institutional). The finality of the administrative process, as well as its objectives and its purpose supports external communication seen as the report between the citizens and the administrative institutions.

There are common elements of the communication at the administrative level which have obtained close percentages as the objectives, the purposes, the tools and the techniques used, but also there are elements that are more valorized in Sample 1 (identified with an administrative institution) and less in comparison with Sample 2: the sensitivity, the ranking of the communication process.

It can therefore be concluded that on the administrative level, the communication is closely related to the administrative process in itself and from its characteristics within each institution. Its dimensions are therefore a formula of the actors involved, of the stakeholders and of specialized structures, whence results a specific communication more or less hierarchical, with specific objectives: administrative transparency, public access to the data, with specific purposes: orientation from the administrator to the client, or the intra-institutional communication with the criteria: the presence of sensitivity in the sense of the necessity of administrative process in relation with the community, the use of certain techniques and tools that facilitate communication within the administrative institutions and from the inside outwards, and its needs, in the sense of identifying the administrative process aims at the communicational level with the responsibility of the institution to its customers. These dimensions do not have an exhaustive character, but can provide a starting point for future quantitative analysis on the communication of the administrative process and of the evaluation.

5. Acknowledgements

This work was supported by the **European Social Fund in Romania**, under the responsibility of the Managing Authority for the Sectoral Operational Programme for **Human Resources Development 2007-2013** [grant POSDRU/CPP 107/DMI 1.5/S/78342].

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