

## The Model of Public Communication

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**Abstract:** This paper aims to structure a Public Communication model within the current social development context. The analysis of the existing communication techniques and the sociologic imagination as work methods applied to the administration field has identified the specifics of public communication, the features of cultural change engaged by the new notion of governing and governance with effects upon public action. Also, this paper explains the consequences, namely the effects of decentralization, European integration and globalization upon the transformation of the public sector and upon the state administrative reform. In a new social reality a new social communication model specific to governance is subscribed.

**Keywords:** public communication; public action; changing; governance

### 1. Introduction

The public administration can be defined as “the entirety of the activities of Romania’s President, the government, the central autonomous administrative authorities, the local autonomous authorities and, if applicable, the structures subordinated to them, by which laws are enforced or public services are provided in the public power system and within the limits of the law” (Iorgovan, 2001).

We could say that the public administration focuses on the executive branch of the governing act and it has a certain relation with the political field.

From the organization point of view, public administration includes all the institutions which mostly perform administrative activities (Alexandru, 2008).

There is a clear line between communication targeting the conquer of power, called political communication and the communication practiced for exercising political power by means of administration, in the name of general interest.

The specifics of political communication are given by its content and purpose (Denton, 1990). Political communication has a powerful international nature and it is a type of communication targeting directly politics, including:

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- all forms of communication in which politicians and other political actors are engaged, with the purpose of achieving their specific objectives;
- communication addressed to these actors by apolitical persons, as voters or journalists;
- communication referring to these actors and their activities, as it is used in news stories, press editorials and other media forms of political analysis (McNair, 2007).

National political communication refers to political programs, political statements, electoral calls, electoral campaigns (in this case, we are talking about electoral communication), all these following to produce effects upon the receivers of the message sent, establishing a public agenda. The effects of political communication can be evaluated by polls showing the way in which citizens reacted or by observing the voting behavior.

Politicians face two trends: one is to search in the ideological landmarks a means to state their position and the other one is to comply with the principles of the public sector (Wolton, 2012).

On the other hand, communication cannot be dissociated from mass democracy. The role of the public space is growing, Wolton states. *“As most of the social problems are more and more exposed publicly, where they are debated”*, another phenomenon concerns the political communication: the political logic is extended to all the spheres of the society. Both trends should be limited in order to achieve a balance in the society and in order to develop a new governing concept, in which the three protagonists (the politicians, the bureaucrats and the public) could adapt to adapt to the changes of the present-day society (Wolton, 2012).

The effects of liberalization and decentralization are the transfer of the power into the responsibility of communities. In other words, the act of governing in small scale and at the same time a higher and higher concern for the specific needs of the individual. Local democracy brings governing closer to citizens (Mulgan, 2009).

Globalization engages a complex cultural change for which permanent dialogue and negotiation are necessary, as well as changing the quality of the relation between citizens and the state. Change requires attitude, behavior and mentality changes. Efficient communication assumes this role as a catalyst of the change and helps the governing authorities to implement the reforms specific to a democratic state.

The social market involves democratically elected politicians whose constitutional part is to implement and represent the preferences of citizens, bureaucrats who plan and execute citizens.

## 2. Public Strategy and Communication within the Frame of Globalization

Public communication makes reference to the public domain or to the public transmitters and it presents a few features offering it a certain speciality:

- public communication targets the general interest;
- public communication belongs to a non-commercial sector, namely the public service sector which is financed mostly out of public money;
- public communication addresses a varied public typology (citizens, users, voters, associations, institutions, cultural actors, economic officers and so on);
- public communication is under the spectrum of two perspectives: the administrative one and the political one.

Public institutions forming the so called public domain are the following: the parliament, the government, the ministries, the central and decentralized administrations, various state authorities, bodies ensuring a public service mission, collectivities, development agencies, museums, theaters and other cultural institutions, the public transport institution, hospitals, health institutions and others.

The dual character of the governing act is represented by **demand** and **offer** which meet each other in communication. The political leadership must show a predisposition for communication, empathy and negotiation and the official leadership must show adaptability, being analytical and creative at the same time. The mission of public entrepreneurs is to permanently ensure the dialogue between the targets and the structures, having the capacity of organizing information, being persuasive, enjoying legitimacy and trust and performing an activity based on cooperation. The axis of the public field strategy passes through dialogue, decision and execution, without neglecting the feedback needed for a potential adjustment.

The functions of public communication correspond to the four communicational levels: **INFORMING** – informing the citizens, **LISTENING** – listening to their wishes and their opinions, **DIALOGUE** – ensuring the social relationship, **PERSUASION** – accompanying attitude and behavior changes. Being a communication targeting the individual, as citizen, public communication is grounded on **relationship** and on the **individual communication** firstly.

In any real democracy “the act of informing the public is crucial so that the citizens may judge knowingly the politics and the activities of their chosen representatives” (Wilcox, 2006). By informing the citizens, they can have the knowledge needed for participating in the elaboration of governmental policies. Generally, informing the public includes the information about an organization which appears under different shapes: press materials, press releases, newsletters, movies, video production, speeches, web pages, various publications.

Governmental communication or governmental public businesses have objectives related to the relationship with citizens:

- informing the public about public affairs, about the activity of governmental agencies;
- offering feedback to the representatives of the executive, in regard to programs and policies;
- ensures a way to work with the mass media and with its representatives;
- establishes and maintains the relationship of various central and local administrative structures with the citizens and with the communities;
- makes public interest information available for the public.

Governmental advertising, as an activity which is closely related to informing the public, it promotes public services and staff recruitment.

General interest campaigns or preventive campaigns have an educational role and the purpose of reducing expenses for the medical assistance. In the matter of campaigns, the focus is oriented towards persuasive communication.

Information is the key element of society and to inform already means to persuade because to inform is to show a will to trigger adhesion or conformation to an action. Persuasion becomes thus “a social deed” (Maus, 1960).

The two types of organizations by means of which the state acts, are the following: “political” governing authorities responsible for the decisions taken in the name of a democratic legitimacy leading from elections and so called administrative organizations, implementing public programs, whereas their legitimacy is based on competences, expertise and recruitment method based on professional rates. According to Max Weber, the administration is a separate and specialized institution which determines on behalf of the state and the political institutions the application of rules in order to guide behaviors within a social community (Weber, 1996). It performs its activity by applying constraints both on the material and on the legal aspect. The administration or the “state apparatus” is the instrument of political domination, by excellence; it allows the continuous application of the regulations on a geographical territory and it disposes of a legal prescription, being itself at the same time limited by the legal framework through which it acts.

*“The administration is composed of agents, officers or contracted staff, having grouping methods and multiple and heterogeneous affiliations: work organizations (professional systems which act as office systems for using work force), professional organizations (corpus, jobs, positions) or institutional affiliations (ministries, offices, central or local services etc.) defining a diversity of regulating methods and cultures taking the shape of beliefs, representations, power relations, practices, routines, etc. which make activities and worlds of administration radically difference between each other”* (Bezes, 2009). Bezes shows how

administration was transformed gradually into a “governing problem” and into the object of specific public policies, called the reform of administration, the reform of governing or the state reform.

These policies will determine the deep transformation in organizing administrations, their autonomy types and the power relations with the political and social actor groups.

In this new framework in which the world is interpreted, where state-centrism is abandoned and where processes for decentralization, regionalization, European integration and globalization are ongoing, there lies the movement for redefining public sector, based on partial or total privatization policies, as well as on policies for regulating monopoly sectors and regulating general interest activities.

In this context, it is necessary to redefine the concept of public action. The idea that public action is built within social interactions is subscribed to a systemic and constructivist approach (Berger, Luckmann, 1986), where the model of the hierarchy government/administration, published/private, local/national is abandoned in favor of a complex interrelation conception, of articulation between macro and micro, of mutual actions and adjustments, in a process of construction for confrontations, negotiations, for establishing arrangements or agreements between partners.

Decentralization, European integration and globalization as processes imposed an increased value of the local and supra-national aspects, in using perceptions and representations determining social construction. The old vision over public action as an instrument of the state planning, stimulating, determining objectives and conceiving rules (mono-centered, hierarchical, descending) is replaced with the idea of public action on several levels, involving several partners, whereas the state is only a partner participating in its construction (Chevallier, 2003).

Centralized regulation moves to a multi-polar regulation, marked of the multiplication and poly-centricity of action levels, with powerful interdependencies between actors with opposing or even antagonistic interests. Public action is not reduced any more to applying certain rules issued once and for all, yet these rules are born from discussions, from negotiations (for example forums) between actors placed on different levels, during the entire process. Also, the notion of territory becomes relative (Watcher, 1989), making also relative the notion of classic territory of public power, the nation state and the higher and higher influence of intermediate governing levels, new territorial, local, regional, urban corridors imposing the political game.

This is why, the notion of governing itself becomes inadequate in defining new realities of public action and the notion of governing is more and more invoked (Le

Gales, 1995) as recognition of the aging of the classical division between state, society and market.

The notion of public action is closely related to the notion of public problem. A public problem is also a social construction born following the questioning of a situation, following the confrontation between the perceptions and representations of the actors involved; the negotiations between political entrepreneurs – political elites and administration elites – result in subscribing on the public agenda a problem which passes from the private area into the public one and which is legitimated as such.

A problem can be public:

1. meaning that it mobilizes different public segments (the action on the public scene, the collective mobilization of all the actors involved who are concerned with the problem);
2. in the moment when it reaches the public area or the public field, becoming the object of a public debate (the part played by mass media and the insertion of the problem on the press agenda must be considered);
3. if assumed by public authorities – not necessarily by political ones – or if authorities are called in order to solve this problem;
4. finally, when the problem forms a part of a political agenda and it becomes a politicization matter.

### **3. Government and Governing as a Development Paradigm**

The state administrative transformation process and the mentality changes within public administrations made the role of local collectivities to grow during the last twenty years, as well as the competition between them, whereas the territory (as local community) became the main place for defining problems and a place of public action.

Along with the governing notion, the governance notion appeared.

*“To govern is to take decisions, to solve conflicts, to generate public assets, to coordinate private compartments, to regulate markets, to organize elections, to extract resources, to influence expenses”* (Leca, 2003).

In the opinion of Kooiman, governance is related to *“all these interactive arrangements in which public opinion and private actors participate with the purpose of solving the problems of society or for creating new opportunities in society, forming a part of the institutions within which these governance activities take place and having the purpose to stimulate legal debates related to the principles lying at the base of governance activities”* (Kooiman, 2003).

The notion of governance focuses on horizontal forms of interaction between actors, on interdependencies, conformity and interaction and exchange rules, on the autonomy of sectors and networks related to the state, on the temporal dimension, on coordination processes of political and social actors. The negotiated governance becomes a mechanism by which actors can reach mutually satisfying decisions and solve conflicts by negotiation and cooperation.

*“Governance can be defined as a process of coordinating actors, social groups and institutions, with the purpose of reaching objectives which have been defined and debated collectively. The concept of governance refers to the group of institutions, networks, directives, regulations, standards, political and social applications and to the group of public and private actors contributing to the establishment of a society and of a political system, as well as to its guiding, to its capacity of directing and providing services, and ensure its legitimacy.”* (Le Gales, 2006)

Governance though does not exclude the act of governing. It is found in national states, in the new local democracy. The administration is formed of communication intertwined networks, forming a central core found in the central administration. In Europe, the society being built will be more and more subject to communication and communication techniques.

Nationwide, the actors of the administration, the interaction between actors, the networks and decisions negotiated form a system of interactions following the model of reciprocity. Miede talks about the new communication owed to transformations taking place in the public area, computerization and acceleration of information, generalization of capitalism, changes suffered by social representations, media coverage of communication, individualized access to products and services (Miede, 2008).

#### **4. Dialogue and Negotiation – Fundamentals of Public Communication**

Governmental strategies or the strategies of communities must be supported by communication, which is in fact a condition of democracy.

Essentially, social life reunites demand and offer, public opinion (citizens) and the open model of governing, a governing which promotes wellbeing, protects society from the threats it faces, applies the provisions of justice and promotes the truth. The relation between demand and offer is regulated by dialogue and negotiation, by collective perceptions, representations and opinions which ground the public decisions.

The complex cultural change process is engaged by the new notion of governing which influences behaviors, practices social marketing, it sells services on the internet and even customizes services.

The parliament is thus responsible for the public dialogue which subsumes the management of public information and knowledge, their integration, the feedback from citizens and from mass media, the right to an opinion, being characterized by empathy and negotiation.

Scenarios, prognoses, simulations, consultations, talks for elaborating strategic analyses under the shape of internal debates, independent thought groups are also methods of the governing strategy.

The features of a good governing act are the permanent feedback, the civic spirit, the actions strengthening trust and coordination of inter-department and inter-ministry communication, as well as communication with central and local administrative structures.

Centrally and locally, decisions are in the center of public actions. The process of elaborating a problem, legitimizing it and implementing it is founded on communication and negotiation techniques attended by all groups of interested parties.

Public communication is the interface between citizens and institutions, showing what is the true relation between citizens and institutions and ensures actually the functioning of democracy.

As a consequence of institutional reforms in the last decades, the decentralization in all national political systems and the effects of the economical crisis, public communication has changed. The change which emerged is related to the transfer of responsibility towards local collectivities and a revival of the territorial marketing. The general objectives of public communication aim for the following acts:

- informing, explaining, describing;
- promoting on a territorial level (identity elements, history, economy, culture);
- mobilizing: on one hand making decisions comprehensible (showing their objectives, their consequences and their financing sources) and on the other hand ensuring the participation of citizens to public forums.

The political speech is between ideology and the principles of public sector. Both types of speeches are founded on persuasion, on the change of attitude and behavior. In the public field, political marketing functions, as well as social marketing functions in the administrative field. The actors of the governing act are today politicians, bureaucrats and the public, whereas this triangle is supported by dialogue, negotiation and learning.

Governmental communication has as mission to make public policies known, to modify the behaviors of citizens (for example campaigns for preventing



alcoholism, smoking, domestic violence, campaigns related to collective stakes as civic duty, fighting against discrimination etc.) and value state related services, communicating ministries, agents and so on.

Local political communication includes the communication of great cities, municipalities in general, communication between regions, counties and communes. The communication policy in local collectivities is subscribed to three parameters: territory (region, county and commune) which is a well defined space, a representative institution which is a local governing authority and public services. The specific public engaged in this communication is represented by the persons chosen by collectivities, by agents of the public services, by citizens in their triple quality as inhabitants, voters, contributors and investors, tourists and several other societies which are territorial marketing targets. Territorial marketing promotes the territory by valuing resources, talents, availabilities which that places offers. As means to communicate, local public communication uses publications, press relations, internet, events, internal communication and communication of the elected persons. The new territorial communication operates with the territorial brand concept which means: notoriety, image, attraction elements for the public.

## **5. Conclusions**

The concepts of governing and governance changed the paradigm of developing communities. If governing is a complex phenomenon which requires taking decisions, solving conflicts, generating public assets, coordinating private behaviors, regulating markets, organizing elections, extracting sources, influence expenses (according to Leca, 2003), governance can be considered a coordination process for actors, social groups and institutions, with the purpose of achieving clearly defined and collectively discussed objectives. Both processes are based on communication, through dialogue and negotiation, parameters of the current public communication.

The negotiated governance (Kooiman, 2003) is a mechanism which allows the actors to reach to mutually satisfying decisions and solve conflicts by negotiation and cooperation. The focus is on types of horizontal interaction between actors, interdependencies, conformity, rules for action and rules for change, the autonomy of sectors and networks, coordination processes for political and social actors and the constraints associated to the decision.

The governance concept is a synonym of the network management concept. Interaction network management and communication networks' management are at the same time the coordinates of public action.

This study proposes the model of public communication as a crossing between interaction and communication networks, based on dialogue, negotiation, partnership and cooperation.

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