

THE COMMUNICATION-PROMOTIONPROCESS WITHIN THE ROMANIAN PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS

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Abstract: According to the Romanian Constitution, one of the main duties of the President of the republic is to mediate between the State and the society. This stipulation may lead us to the conclusion that between the State and the society there are so many differences justifying the need of creating an institution aimed at bringing together those two contradictory elements embodying a country. How do public organizations succeed to communicate with citizens? How do they manage to promote their image in order to become perceived as reliable by citizens? Public institutions have always to communicate and report their activity in order to convince the community that each contribution is designed to be converted in public policies aimed at satisfying legitimate needs of the society. This paper seeks to identify those functional and cultural problems faced by the public marketing process.
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1. Public marketing within Romanian organizations with a specific regard to communication-promotion- theoretical framework

It can be said that between public sector and marketing are two elements completely different and even impossible to “act in the same league” and in a way the truth is not so far. According to marketing practitioners, public administration involves among others bureaucracy, inefficiency and lack of a performance-oriented management (Kaplan, 2009). Taking into account the opposite perspective, marketing might be perceived by public managers as a range of procedures which rather use to consume that to produce resources. Moreover, marketing seeks to satisfy

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private consumers instead of general interest (Kaplan, 2009). Therefore, we should be entitled to ask ourselves about the links that can be set between a field entirely related to public sector (public administration) and another one related to the economy and free marketplace (marketing).

However, although the public sector doesn't seem to have too much in common with the private one, public organizations need marketing. Proctor for instance emphasizes two important reasons justifying the need of public marketing (Țigănaș et al, 2011). The first one consists in the scarcity of resources forcing public institutions to do more with less and to become thus efficient apart from effective. This means *to prioritize* which furthermore justifies the need to communicate to the citizens the reason why a certain decision had to be taken instead of any alternative solution. The lack of an efficient communication between institutions and citizens generates a general sense of public dissatisfaction which affects many times the willingness of citizens to contribute to the state budget. Therefore, the tax evasion is also justified by the public lack of trust in State institutions. In Romania, more and more citizens tend to consider that paying their contributions is pointless because the quality of the public service is debatable. The second argument pleading for public marketing consists in the raising competition coming from the private sector. This competition forces the State to permanently improve those tools aimed at satisfying public needs. Citizens are more and more used to the qualitative standards provided by private organizations and this entitles them to increase their expectations in terms of public service. Thus, if we accept that public service is a driving force for satisfying public needs, we can consider that marketing is an important tool in this purpose.

Budgeting public service is also a very important condition because the community has specific needs that neither private organizations nor NGOs are able to fulfil (Scutaru, 2009, p. 62). Considering that the public budget is increasingly lower and the public service demand is increasingly higher, it is quite obvious that public institutions won't be ever able to satisfy all the citizens. However, by using public marketing, a public institution can maximize the number of satisfied "clients" by improving the communication-promotion activity. Usually citizens are tempted to consider themselves "victims" of public administrations because they contribute a lot to the public budget and receive very little. Some of the traditional complaints of Romanian citizens (Scutaru, 2009, p. 62):

- They have to pay expensive road taxes but in Romania roads are full of potholes;
- Educational system has numerous weaknesses despite the so many reforms carried out by each of the last Governments;
- Taxes rise all the times which severely affects the welfare of the citizens;
- Poverty rises which sometimes leads to social movements.

These are some of the reasons justifying the duty of any government to convince citizens that each penny of the public budget is very well spent by the authorities with honesty and efficiency. Otherwise, the gap between the State and the Society will become bigger and bigger.

Taking into account the client (citizen), the price (public budget), the product (public service) and the place (jurisdiction), the theoretical framework of the paper will present the following definition of public marketing. This definition belongs to Codrin Scutaru and is based on the famous Kotler's definition of marketing but with particular approaches on the public field. According to this definition, marketing consists in the ability to obtain and maintain the beneficiaries satisfied of the development programs implemented by the public sector (Scutaru, 2009, p. 62).

2. Communication-promotion within public organizations- comparative empirical researches

2.1 Short description of the investigated universe

This paper will synthesize the findings of a research based on a study sample composed by 178 public institutions most of them headquartered in Romania. Among the Romanian regions included in this research we may count the North-Western Region including counties as Cluj, Bistrița-Năsăud, Sălaj, Satu-Mare, Bihor și Maramureș. In each of those counties there were selected 17 institutions considered to be vital to the well functioning of the society. Respecting the same algorithm, the research was extended to other Romanian regions as Western Region (Timișoara), Centre (Brașov), North East (Iași), South-East (Constanța) and Bucharest-Ilfov (Bucharest). In the case each of those regions, the data gathered were compared with those of the Cluj-county. The centre of the North-Western Region, Cluj was also compared with two regions from abroad: Auvergne, France and Castilla y León, Spain.

2.2 Methodology

On the selected institutions there were operated two distinguished researches: a qualitative one based on document analysis and a quantitative one based on survey.

Regarding the qualitative research there was selected a set of criteria thought to be relevant for the study (Ticlau, 2010):

1. At least one person that has specific competencies in the field of public marketing;
2. A department/bureau or any kind of organizational structure which has responsibilities regarding the public marketing activity of the organization;
3. Financial resources allocated for specific marketing activities (budget). We have included in our analysis the budgets from previous years;
4. Activity report plan of the previous year in order to detect those activities related to public marketing;
5. Marketing plan for the current year with activities meant to be put into practice during this period.

All this range of data was gathered through a public information request compiled according to the Romanian law 544/2001 which allows any citizen of this country to receive public information.

Regarding the quantitative research, in the case of each selected institution top and middle management representatives were asked to fill a little questionnaire aimed at detecting their perceptions on the quality of the communication-promotion process.

2.3. Findings

2.3.1 Findings related to the document analysis (qualitative research)

The tendency of Romanian institutions to ignore a public information request was visible in the case of the majority of approached public institutions. Most of them didn't reply the public information request despite their legal obligation to proceed in this way. The rest of the tackled institutions have provided a sad picture in respect with communication and promotion. In overwhelming majorities, selected institutions have claimed their lack of necessary resources to support public marketing activities: funds, organizational structures but worse than anything they declared not to

have communication- promotion objectives. This situation betrays a total lack of interest in everything that concerns public marketing.

2.3.2 Findings related to the survey (quantitative research)

Through the applied questionnaire the research attempted to measure opinions and perceptions of public managers related to the quality of the public marketing activity within the organizations they are in charged of. Some of the questions of the survey: *do you consider that the institution you represent has enough public marketing resources?,are you familiarized with the current year communication-promotion objectives of the institution? orhow do you appreciate on a 1 to 5 scale the quality of the communication with citizens?*

If the data gathered through the document analysis have revealed the lack of basic conditions for carrying out public marketing activities, the findings of the survey have expressed a general sense of satisfaction among public managers. The overwhelming majority of them declared themselves very satisfied even proud of the way that those communication-promotion indicators do function within their institutions. According to them, the institutions they lead are very good even excellent in terms public marketing and everything that concerns the relation between the public sector and the community. Therefore, the research carried out is focused on emphasizing the so many differences between *reality* and *perception upon reality* within the public sector. Based on those differences between the findings of the two research methods, the research have compiled many hierarchies between the selected counties in order to see in which of them the distance between reality and fiction is larger and in which of them is bigger. Both researches although their differences were actually based on several common indicators allowing us to compare the findings. For instance, the question number 2 of the survey, *do you consider that the institution you represent has enough public marketing resources?* had its correspondent in that item of the public information request asking the institutions to declare their budgetary chapters related to public marketing. In respect to this indicator, the most “liar” county was Constanta: 83% of tackled public managers claimed their satisfaction regarding the available public marketing resources but 83% of selected institutions replied in the public information request that the lack of any financial resource related to this kind of activities.

Other discrepancies could be observed at the indicator related to public marketing objectives. The survey revealed an overwhelming majority of public managers answering *yes* at the following question: *do you know the current year communication-promotion objectives of the institution you are in charged of?* Nevertheless, while replying the public information request, most of the institutions declared that communication-promotion is not included in any of the strategic objectives of the institution neither for the current year nor for the following. The county with the bigger discrepancy was Iasi followed by Constanța, Cluj, Timiș, Brașov and Bucharest.

Strange differences between reality and perception could be detected at the relation with citizens. Most of the approached public managers have selected the *very good* qualifier on the 1 to 5 measurement scale asking them to appreciate the relation with the citizens. Paradoxically, the majority of the selected institution didn't even respond to the public information request showing a total disrespect for the law and contributors.

Above all, a constant tendency of the quantitative research consisted in a uniformity of the given answers despite the so many differences between the tackled institutions and the approached regions, a uniformity which might be justified by the centralism characterizing the Romanian public institutions. As a consequence of this phenomenon, behaviours, attitudes and organizational environments were more or less similar within these selected public institutions.

2.4 Conclusions and recommendations

The findings and the tendencies expressed through the gathered data may guide us to several recommendations that the present paper is able to formulate. All of these recommendations can be applied at the public sector level.

First recommendation consists in decentralization. Without public authorities empowered and responsible in their relation with citizens, the public marketing phenomenon will always have to face serious obstacles.

The second recommendation pleads for regional development which is considered to be the most appropriate administrative system. Therefore, the research stresses on the need to accelerate the regionalization process taking into account aspects as effective governance, history, culture, geography and the like.

The third recommendation consists in improving the horizontal communication process within the Romanian public institutions. Promoting a public service is difficult to be thought without coherent partnerships and strategies embodying counterpart institutions.

Another recommendation consists in organizing public debates regarding the opportunity of introducing the Chief Marketing Officer model within Romanian institutions.

The paper also recommends clear, specific and measurable indicators aimed at optimizing the public marketing activity. That's because the achieved researches underline that public institutions don't have touchable and easy to be followed objectives. At the end of a quarter for instance, many institutions are unable to communicate their activity due to their impossibility to quantify their successes and fails.

At the end, the present work recommends a constant, transparent, objective and accessible activity reporting, a principle which should function all the time not only in the proximity of elections. Through this last argument, the paper pleads that public institutions should be focused on public marketing instead of political marketing.

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