

DECISION-MAKING TRANSPARENCY - A GOAL ACHIEVABLE THROUGH USE THE INTERNET BY PUBLIC ADMINISTRATIONS

**Florina BRAN^a, Roxana SARBU^{b*}, Dumitru Alexandru BODISLAV^c, Corneliu GUTU^d,
Cristina Carol GOMBOS^e**

^a Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Romania

^b Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Romania,

^c Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Romania,

^d The Academy of Economic Studies of Moldova

^e Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Romania,

ABSTRACT

One of the most important effects of the use of the Internet by public administrations is the increase of decision-making transparency. Currently, the government is characterized by a low level of trust from the population because there is a very low level of transparency regarding administrative activities that take place in settings where the population does not have access. The use of the Internet can provide the necessary infrastructure to ensure the creation of a bridge between public administration and citizens.

The objective of transparency in public administration is to prevent actions that may endanger public integrity through acts of corruption and to achieve an optimal assessment of public administration performance. The objective of this paper is to present to what extent the use of the Internet in public administration can support the desire to increase decision-making transparency in public administration.

KEYWORDS: *decisional transparency, public administration, internet.*

1. INTRODUCTION

One of the most important effects of the use of the Internet by public administrations is the increase of decision-making transparency (Ioniță & Burlacu, 2009). Currently, the government is characterized by a low level of trust from the population because there is a very low level of transparency regarding administrative activities that take place in settings where the population does not have access. The use of the Internet can provide the necessary infrastructure to ensure the creation of a bridge between public administration and citizens (Burlacu, 2011).

The objective of transparency in public administration is to prevent actions that may endanger public integrity through acts of corruption and to achieve an optimal assessment of public administration performance (Brunswicker et al., 2019).

Most of the laws and normative acts are initiated by the Government and approved by the Parliament, and the public administration institutions take care of their drafting. Stakeholders, in this case citizens and organizations, are not involved in their elaboration, modification and implementation. The lack of decisional transparency (along with a number of other shortcomings) generates a low level of trust in the decisions taken by the leading institutions. Also, a framework lacking transparency can favor the development of acts of corruption that significantly affect the interests of citizens (Brunswicker et al., 2019).

* Corresponding author. E-mail address: florinabran@yahoo.com

At the same time, the absence of consultations with stakeholders leads to multiple changes and changes, which leads to a greater legislative instability that does not provide certainty about the legislative framework that characterizes Romania (Androniceanu et al., 2017). A higher level of transparency by consulting the public would generate the increase of trust and implicitly the increase of the level of observance of the law, which will ultimately determine the economic development through the sustained cooperation between the government and the society (Androniceanu et al., 2017).

Currently, there is a growing interest in increasing the level of transparency by establishing procedures to allow the public to participate in the processes of adopting administrative regulations. An example is the efforts of IRIS Center Romania, which organized a series of seminars attended by members of non-governmental organizations, business representatives and public institutions such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Tourism, the Ministry of Public Information or the Ministry of Administration. public. The purpose of these meetings was represented by the debate of the transparency law that aims to open the access of citizens to the activity of central and local administration through two mechanisms: public participation in decision-making processes and processes aimed at developing legislative regulations.

The law of transparency presupposes the assurance of a collaboration between the recipients of the legislative regulations and the public administration (Profiroiu et al., 2019). According to this law, the public administration is obliged to make public the draft regulations before adopting them. Thus, their recipients have the opportunity to formulate recommendations and suggestions regarding the proposals made.

Decision-making transparency generates a number of benefits for all parties involved.

Thus, these benefits are represented by the Romanian Association for Transparency:

1. Benefits for the beneficiaries of the regulations - are represented by the possibility to adapt the activity carried out in due time to the following changes, the expression of the points of view regarding the projects and the knowledge of the projects that are proposed by the public administration.
2. Benefits for the public administration - are represented by gaining the trust of the public opinion, removing the problems that may be generated by drafting deficiencies, removing the implementation problems that may result from ignorance of the regulations to be adopted by the target audience, explaining the need for adoption proposed regulations and obtaining free information from the sectors of activity that will be affected by the proposed changes.

The most important tool that can be used to increase decision-making transparency is the Internet because it ensures unlimited and fast access to the changes that are to be made by public administrations. The Internet has the ability to provide more power to stakeholders because it provides access to all the necessary information, which ultimately leads to increased transparency (Hanna et al., 2019, pp. 227-236).

2. DECISIONAL TRANSPARENCY

The phrase decision-making transparency means displaying the activities carried out by the public administration in the service of citizens (Bodislav et al., 2020). The public administration has the obligation to offer citizens the right to be informed, as well as the right to participate in decisions taken by central and local public authorities, which they support financially by paying taxes and duties.

The aim of transparency is to ensure wider access to information and documents in the possession of public institutions, to assist citizens in the decision-making process and to guarantee the legitimacy, responsibility and effectiveness of the public administration towards the citizen (Negescu, et al., 2020).

The concept of decisional transparency developed in public institutions represents ensuring the consultation of citizens in the adoption of regulations, but also ensuring the access of citizens to certain documents of public interest within the state institutions. Transparency means the possibility of accessing information of any kind in any form.

Transparency aims to prevent actions that could threaten public integrity (corruption) and to measure the performance of public administration.

Transparency must become an essential part of public administration, being rather a provision of the law, the distance between the current level of transparency of institutions and the goals set by law being quite significant (Alpopi et al., 2018).

Public institutions and authorities are obliged by law: to make public the normative acts at least 30 days before the start of the approval and adoption formalities; hold public discussions if requested by another public authority or legal association; to take into account all the recommendations received and to take them into account in the final phase of the normative act.

Decision-making transparency in public administration is based on the following principles:

- a) informing the persons about the issues of public interest that will be debated by the central and local public administration authorities, as well as the draft normative acts;
- b) consultation of citizens and legal associations, at the initiative of public authorities, in the process of drafting normative acts;
- c) the participation of the citizens in the taking of the administrative decisions and in the process of elaboration of the normative acts, with the observance of the following rules:
 - to make public the meetings of the public authorities and institutions in which the object of this law is debated;
 - debates must be made public and recorded;
 - the minutes must be recorded, archived and made public, in accordance with the law.

The purpose of decision-making transparency is to oblige the public administration to make draft regulations available to the public before they are adopted. The natural or legal persons who are the recipients of the regulations, have the possibility to offer suggestions and recommendations on the regulations that were presented to them in the project stage.

The recommendations need to be considered by the initiating authorities who will decide whether to include them in the final phase of the regulations.

The beneficiaries of this decision-making transparency are both the public administration and the citizens. Thus, public authorities obtain additional information on the proposed regulations and manage implementation issues more efficiently, and citizens can take into account in advance the requirements to be imposed.

The participation of the citizens in the process of elaboration of normative acts and the transparency of the decisional act, define a causal relationship through which the system and the way of management at the level of the entire public administration are followed.

3. DECISION-MAKING TRANSPARENCY PROCEDURES

Without free public access to information, democracy is inconceivable. The lack of transparency in the act of governing or administrative and in political life is one of the biggest obstacles to a democratic society, through which citizens can trust the public administration or politicians or rulers. In order to draft a normative act, the public administration authority is obliged to publish a notice referring to this aspect, at least 30 days before its analysis, authorization and adoption.

Subsequently, a period of at least 10 days will be decided in which those interested can send in writing opinions, suggestions or proposals in connection with the draft administrative act proposed for public debate.

After finalizing the draft normative act, based on the proposals and observations made, it will be sent for analysis and approval by the public authorities concerned.

The announcement of the public meeting proposed for the debate of the project will be displayed at least 3 days before the project. We can say that the adoption of administrative decisions falls within the competence of public authorities, and the opinions and suggestions expressed by the partners or citizens have only the role of recommendation.

There may also be a situation where immediate solutions need to be adopted, due to exceptional circumstances, in order to avoid a serious impact on the public interest. In this situation, the normative acts are adopted according to the emergency procedure in force.

There is also the possibility that it is not possible to intervene in the elaboration process, if the publication of normative acts infringes the principle of fair competition and concerns the values, technical-economic data and deadlines for carrying out financial or commercial activities.

Advantages and disadvantages of citizens' participation in the decision-making process

In order for citizen participation to be in line with public administration, certain techniques and tools are used such as:

- a) National Association of Citizen Information Centers;
- b) Citizen Information Centers;
- c) Citizens' Advisory Committees;
- d) Public Meetings;
- e) Opinion polls;
- f) focus groups;
- g) the Internet.

The participation of citizens in the decision-making process has advantages for citizens, who can defend their interests and rights granted by law, but also to the public administration.

Citizen participation defends and promotes democracy because it involves the real distribution of power. Participation empowers citizens to re-discuss, criticize or reject unjustified requests.

In order to guarantee effective results in the participatory process, citizens must be informed in advance about the public actions that will be referred to in the decision-making process. Their participation strengthens and promotes the relationship between public administration and civil society. In this way, citizens can understand the mechanisms of public administration, and projects that consider participation, have more viability. If the views expressed are taken into account, citizens will have more confidence in the administrative act, which creates a climate of community accession and engagement in decision-making processes.

Participation allows the community to have control over the activity of public administration, favoring a more flexible public management and providing constant feedback, which allows the public administration to identify favorable or unfavorable results, as well as key issues.

Taking into account these advantages, we can also deduce certain disadvantages or unfavorable approaches to it.

Participation can slow down the decision-making process. For example, when obtaining large amounts of information from community members, grouping preferences and identifying them can be a rather complicated process. Grouping opinions involves creating opportunities for community members to express their preferences. At the same time, this information must be correctly understood by the public administration, which requires additional and lasting effort (Costache et al., 2015).

Another example would be the complexity of the subject that will be addressed in the decision-making process. Citizens may not understand the subject at first, which will force the public administration to come up with special ways to provide information (Rădulescu et al., 2018).

Also, there is the possibility that ordinary citizens do not come with precise opinions on the subject that would target them, being a field inaccessible to them due to the lower degree of culture. In these cases, there is a very small step to the emergence of conflicting opinions and obliges the public administration to reconcile efforts (Jianu et al., 2019).

Another disadvantage would be the costs and losses that the administration bears in this whole process: time, energy, creativity, budgetary resources, political desire and courage (Rădulescu et al., 2018).

Sometimes, local governments have to communicate bad news to the public, such as: postponed projects, budget shortfalls or even mistakes made during the project. In this case, political will and courage intervene. Citizens have the right to be aware of decision-making plans or projects from the beginning to their completion. They have the right to know even if a project is more difficult or expensive than they planned. Honesty builds long-term trust, even if it creates difficulties at the moment.

4. CONCLUSIONS

The Internet has become increasingly used by citizens in terms of daily activities. Technologies have advanced rapidly at the same time as the services offered by the online environment, and this can be seen from the performance of IT and communication processes. Citizens have become addicted to the internet to the extent that it creates a comfortable environment to solve certain tasks and communicate with others around them.

Over time, the public administration has adopted electronic services to simplify bureaucracy, improve communication between institutions and at the same time with citizens, and disseminate information of public interest through digital platforms to increase transparency and eliminate corruption.

Transparency plays a very important role in a democratic society because it aims to prevent actions that could threaten public integrity (corruption) and to measure the performance of public administration. Transparency must become an essential part of public administration, as it is rather a provision of the law, the distance between the current level of transparency of the institutions and the goals set by law being quite significant.

The public administration must make great efforts to convince the citizens about the objectives it proposes and to show the desire to govern in the interest of the population, because nowadays people tend to have a slight distrust in the administrative system because different conflicts arise. at the political level which affects not only public institutions but also companies and citizens.

First of all, based on our research, we found a large part of citizens who are not involved in public administration, to participate in the vote or to feel responsible for how things turn out in the locality to which they belong. This can affect in the long run, both the relationship between citizens and the public administration, as well as the objectives proposed by both sides to develop a united community. At the same time, citizens want to have a say when it comes to decisions or decisions taken at the level, but from our research, citizens consider a viable solution to influence decision makers through protest. We can say that this can affect the integrity of the public administration but also their trust in the administrative system.

Secondly, our research highlights certain aspects of informing citizens about administration and politics in general, as they have access to the necessary technological resources and at the same time give sufficient time to inform about the interests and objectives of public administration.

However, the inhabitants have a low level of knowledge in the use of computers and the Internet, but we cannot say that it is a major disadvantage, but rather a continuous development of learning technological systems and the online environment.

Thirdly, the relations between the citizens in the community are not as close as I expected. Although the residents know each other, I tried to find out what they think about others in terms of their trust and actions in the community. According to the answers in the questionnaire, the results show that there is a negative opinion on this issue and of course can affect relations between citizens.

Regarding the relationship between residents and local government authorities, we can say that we have a balance between good and evil, as there may be negative factors in local decision-making and

affect the community, but the administration explains the reasons behind the adoption these decisions or judgments, in an honest way and for the understanding of any citizen.

In conclusion, on this issue, electronic systems can be implemented at the level of local public administration to improve the quality of services provided and at the same time gain the trust of citizens based on the disclosure of information to the public through technological methods.

Our research shows that the inhabitants want the local public administration to be able to facilitate the whole decision-making process and to give more importance to the opinions expressed in connection with the decisions to be adopted at local level. Local authorities must start projects that are in the interest of citizens and provide transparency of the proposed objectives in order to reduce the effect of uncertainty and corruption.

REFERENCES

Alpopi, C., Burlacu, S. and Iovițu, M. (2018). Procesul de globalizare și politicile ecologice. *Competitivitatea și Inovarea în Economia Cunoașterii*. Chișinău, Republica Moldova: Departamentul Editorial-Poligrafic al ASEM, 2018, pp. 317-324. ISBN 978-9975-75-931-1.

Androniceanu, A., Burlacu, S., Drăgulănescu, I.V. and Nicolae, E.E. (2017). New trends of businesses digitalization in Romania and the behaviour young consumers. *BASIQ International Conference: New Trends in Sustainable Business and Consumption*. (Vol. 31, pp. 27-35).

Bodislav, D.A., Buzoianu, O.A.C., Burlacu, S. and Rădulescu, C.V. (2020). Analysis of companies in Romania from the perspective of risk perception and the management needs thereof. *Economic Convergence in European Union*, 341.

Brunswicker, S., Priego, L.P. and Almirall, E. (2019). Transparency in policy making: A complexity view, *Government Information Quarterly*, 36.

Burlacu, S. (2011). The role of NGOS in awareness of the public private partnership in the social economy in Romania. In *Proceedings of Administration and Public Management International Conference* (7(1):118-127). Research Centre in Public Administration and Public Services, Bucharest, Romania.

Costache, G., Marinas, C.V., Icret, R. and Burlacu, S. (2015). Internship in the HR department—organizational and individual perspectives. In *Proceedings of the International Management Conference* (9(1):359-370). Faculty of Management, Academy of Economic Studies, Bucharest, Romania.

Hanna, R.C., Lemon, K.N. and Smith, G.E. (2019), Is transparency a good thing? How online price transparency and variability can benefit firms and influence consumer decision making, *Business Horizons*, 62.

Ioniță, F., Burlacu, S. and Gaidargi, A. (2009). Modern approaches of the management of alternative trade systems, *Review of International Comparative Management*, 51:473-480.

Jianu, I., Dobre, I., Bodislav, D.A., Radulescu, C.V. and Burlacu, S. (2019). The implications of institutional specificities on the income inequalities drivers in European Union. *Economic Computation and Economic Cybernetics Studies and Research*, 53(2):59-76.

Negescu, M.D., Burlacu, S., Mitriță, M. and Buzoianu, O.C.A. (2020). Managerial Analysis of Factoring at the International Level. *Challenges of the Contemporary Society*. 13(1):99-102. Cluj-Napoca: Babes Bolyai University.

Profiroiu, A., Burlacu, S., and Sabie, O. (2019). Reform of the pension system in Romania. *Calitatea*, 20(S2):521-524.

Rădulescu, C.V., Dobrea, R.C. and Burlacu, S. (2018), *The business management of distress situations*. The 12th international management conference Management Perspectives in the Digital Era. November 1st-2nd, Bucharest, Romania.