

TRANSPARENCY OF THE DECISION- MAKING PROCESS AT THE URBAN LEVEL – CASE OF BUCHAREST SECTORS

Abstract

The paper addresses the issue of transparency at urban level, with focus on the Bucharest sectors. The main objective of the research process was to evaluate the transparency of the decision-making process at the urban level, in general and at the level of Bucharest municipalities; in particular. The work is based on the concept of good governance as it applies in the European Union countries. In this context are presented the main changes that took place in the Romanian legislation on transparency and their impact on the local public administration. In order to know and analyze the degree of transparency that the Bucharest sectors level have, the author conducted a research within the city halls of Bucharest which is representative at this level. The specific objective of the research was to find out the main factors which are influencing the transparency degree of the decision-making process within these institutions and to analyze the causes of such situations. The last part of the paper contains few recommendations for improving the transparency of the decision-making process within the municipalities analysed and the main conclusions of the empirical research.

Keywords: transparency, decision-making process, city management.

JEL CODES: R11, R28

TRANSPARENȚA PROCESULUI DECIZIONAL LA NIVEL URBAN – CAZUL SECTOARELOR BUCUREȘTIULUI

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Rezumat

Lucrarea abordează problematica transparenței la nivel urban, cu particularizare la sectoarele municipiului București. Principalul obiectiv al procesului de cercetare a fost evaluarea gradului de transparență a procesului decizional la nivel urban, în general și la nivelul primăriilor de sector din București. Lucrarea are la bază conceptul de bună guvernare, așa cum acesta se aplică în state din Uniunea Europeană. În acest context sunt prezentate principalele schimbări care au avut loc în legislația românească referitoare la transparență și impactul lor asupra administrației publice locale. Pentru a cunoaște și analiza gradul de transparență pe care îl au primăriile de sector din București, autorul a realizat o cercetare cu reprezentativitate la acest nivel. Obiectivul specific al cercetării a fost cunoașterea principalilor factori care influențează gradul de transparență al procesului decizional și analiza cauzelor situațiilor de fapt. Ultima parte a lucrării conține câteva recomandări pentru îmbunătățirea transparenței procesului decizional din primăriile analizate și principalele concluzii ale acestui demers de cercetare empirică.

Cuvinte cheie: transparență, proces decizional, managementul orașului.



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1. INTRODUCTION

The new approaches known under names as "New Public Management" or "Reinventing Government" position the citizens in the centre. The citizens are no longer a simple category governed, dependent on the state or public institutions, but also clients of public administration that have the right to be informed about how the administrative tasks are developed and to draw public institutions responsible in a situation in which services offered do not meet their needs. From this perspective, the transparency of the decision-making process appears to be a way to reshape the public administration preserve, in such a way as to be aligned to retail trends in the world. Also, many authors who wrote on the topics of the democratized former countries that have had a totalitarian regime, noted that transparency of the decision-making process is both a fundamental value under the rule of law, as well as a tool to increase the efficiency of the state institutions.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

According to the studies of different authors, the principle of opening and transparency may be understood as availability and accessibility to the relevant information (Gerring and Thacker, 2004). Transparency suggests that holders of public functions should be as open as possible of all decisions and actions they take (Curtin, 2006). Policy-makers should give reasons for their decisions and should restrict information only when public interest requires that (Abăluță, 2006). Transparency of public institutions can be measured by the degree of access they allow at the public interest information and by the attention to the answers given to the citizens requests (Colesca, 2003; Ciocoiu, 2011). A transparent organization is that in which the citizens are allowed to monitor performances of the organization and participate in the processes of policy making (Popescu and Corboș, 2009). According to Hood, the transparency of the public organization has different dimensions, such as:

- transparency of the events: input, output and outcomes;
- transparency of the process: open information about the changes that are going to happen;
- transparency in real time: information delivered just in time;
- retrospective transparency: information available after a period of time (Hood, 2007)

Transparent decisions should be clear, integrated into a larger context, logical and rational, accessible, accurate and precise, participatory and responsible (Drew and Nyerges, 2004)

As Daniel Kaufmann explained, transparency of the decision-making process is the set of instruments by which the administration is responsible in front of the citizens about the work carried out in the public services. In their capacity as taxpayers, citizens have the right to be informed and consulted, as well as to participate in the government decision making process (Kaufmann, 2007).

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1. *The scope and the objectives of the research*

The main objective of the research process was to assess the degree of transparency of the decision-making process at urban level, in general, and at the sectors of Bucharest city halls, particularly. The objectives of the research were: (i) to find out the main factors which are influencing the degree of transparency of decision-making process and (ii) to analyse the causes of particular situations, as a matter of fact.

3.2. *The structure of the sample*

The people included within the sample are civil servants with responsibilities for enforcement of the laws on transparency at the level of the six sectors in the capital of Romania, particularly from the information and public relations departments of the Bucharest sectors. It was a representative sample composed of 105 respondents. The structure of the sample is presented in table 1.

TABLE 1 – THE STRUCTURE OF THE SAMPLE

City halls of Bucharest	The number of the civil servants
Sector 1	12
Sector 2	23
Sector 3	17
Sector 4	16
Sector 5	10
Sector 6	27
Total	105

3.3. *The research lines and the main variables*

The main coordinated assessed along the research process were the following:

- a) the transparency of Bucharest town halls

The main normative acts considered were: The Law No 544/2001 on free access to the information of public interest; the Law No 215/2001 of the local public administration, with subsequent amendments and supplements; the Law No 52/2003 on the transparency decision-making in public administration,

and the Law No 161/2003 regarding some of the measures in the interests of transparency in the exercise public positions, the functions and in the business environment, prevent and penalize corruption. The degree of transparency has been measured taking into account the following elements:

- The number of normative acts posted on the city halls websites according to the article no.6, paragraph no. 2 of the Law 52/2003;
 - The number of announcements about public debates, according to articles 6, 7 and 8 of the Law no. 52/2003
 - The annual reports concerning the decision-making transparency according to article no 12, alignment 2 of the Law no 52/2003
- b) the accessibility of the citizens to the public interest information were assessed based on:
- The total number of requests for the provision of public information;
 - The number of requests resolved favourably;
 - The estimated number of visitors of the information and documentation point (notice-boards).
- c) the citizens participation to the public meetings and consultations was assessed by referring to:
- The number of the participants to the public meetings;
 - The number of meetings which were not announced and were restricted to the public participation;
 - The number of public debate organised on the content of normative acts drafts.
 - The main research instrument used in the process was a questioner composed of 17 questions.

3.4. Analysis and the main findings

In the content of this section we are going to present and analyse the main results received from the respondents based on each research line mentioned above.

3.4.1. The degree of transparency

In figure 3 we can see the degree of implementation of the transparency laws within the city halls of Bucharest, as the civil servants are perceiving it. There are several differences that can be analysed.

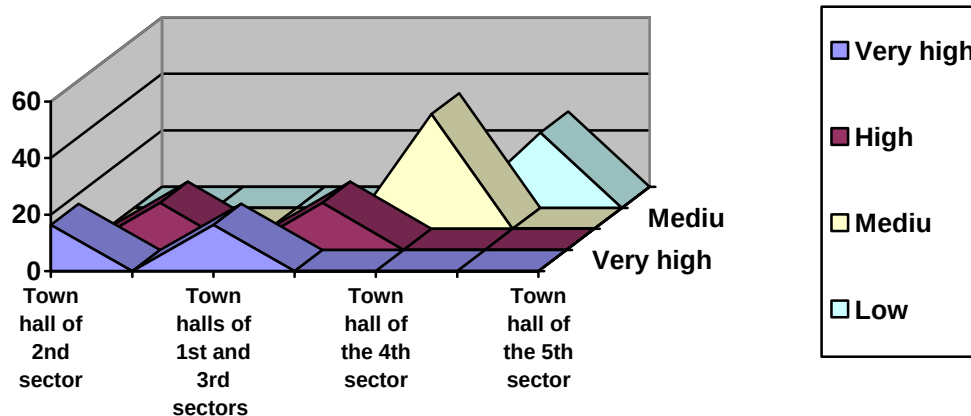


FIGURE 3 – THE DEGREE OF THE TRANSPARENCY LAWS IMPLEMENTATION

As can be seen in the figure above, the civil servants involved in our research replied their opinions on a scale with 5 levels: from 1- low to 5- very high degree of transparency. Approximately 33,04 % of the participants, in particular from the city halls of the 1st, the 2nd and the 3rd sectors have declared that the degree of implementation of the laws 52/2003 and 544/2001 is high and very high.

Approximately 40.63 % of them, mainly from the city hall of the 4th sector considered that transparency laws have implemented at a medium level. At the opposite pole is the town hall of 5th sector, where we found a low degree of the transparency laws implementation in a proportion of 26,04 %.

3.4.2. Accessibility of the citizens to the public interest information

In the figure 2 we can see which are the main channels for the citizens information. The research found out the fact that, according to the civil servants view, almost 50% of the citizens are accessing the city halls public notice-boards and other sources. Approximately 25% of the respondents mentioned the city hall's web page as another information source for accessing the public interest information.

There were 25% of the respondents from the city halls saying that the citizens used to call the city halls or to come to the public relations office directly in order to ask for their information and for getting an answer to their requests.

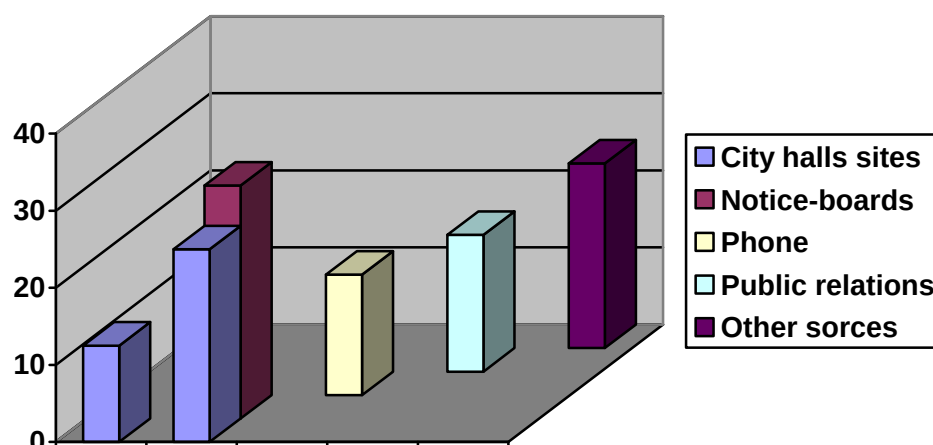


FIGURE 2 – THE MAIN SOURCES USED BY THE CITIZENS FOR THEIR INFORMATION

3.4.3. The degree of participation in the public meetings and debates

The figure 3 is showing the main participative methods of attracting the citizens within the decision-making process. The figure below is showing us that public meetings are the most widespread methods, at a rate of 43,75 % by which citizens can tell their points of view, as the civil servants mentioned.

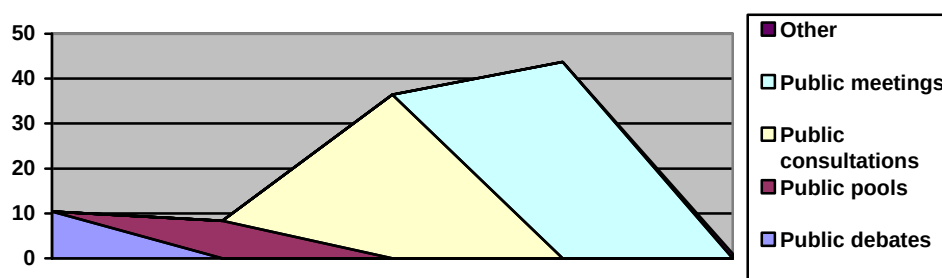


FIGURE 3 – THE MAIN PARTICIPATIVE ACTIONS

On the second position are the public consultations with a percentage of 36,46 % followed by public debates with 10,42 %. Approximately 1 % of civil servants replied that there are other methods by which citizens can participate at the discussions on the public interest subjects. The research results are containing few recommendations set up by the respondents: modern and more sophisticated interactive websites; greater williness of the mayors and the counsellors to communicate with the citizens; setting up a call-center within the town-halls; other ways of the civil servants for communicating with the citizens (e-mails, mail correspondence, phone answers, on-line public services, accessible public information databases).

4. CONCLUSIONS

As it was probably to be expected, the EU policies on transparency and the openness of the town halls to the citizens is increasing, but to a minor extent practically. However, the civil servants are optimistic about the development of the public institutions transparency within the town halls in which they work. The research results revealed the fact that, transparency is not a current practice within the town halls of Bucharest, mainly because the civil servants are perceiving it like an obligation related to the transparency laws implementation, not like a form of respect and obligation to the citizens .

Based on this empirical research study, we can say that the transparency of the decision-making process is still at a low level and even if something has been changes after the EU accession, the entire process is a very slow. As the research results are showing, the communication with citizens is good in the opinion of the civil servants, but as we already explained in this paper, there are not enough possibilities for the citizens to receive public information and to take part within the decision-making process from their community.

The empirical research has shown that the tools to ensure transparency of the public policy process is very poor too, mainly because there is not an efficient dialog between citizens and the local public administration, in general.

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