

# **PUBLIC RELATIONS IN ROMANIA. CAN ROMANIANS ADAPT TO EUROPEAN PATTERNS?**

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## **Abstract**

*The paper debates a model of understanding the specific of social behavior and attitudes in Romania. The dimension of this model of understanding about some factors that make human collectivities to be homogeneous is concentrate on the relationship between the members of the society and the public institutions. We try to make some comparisons with what happens in the communist period on the dimension of this relationship between people and social institutions and we are sowing in how way this things influence the present. This relation is affecting the phenomenon of social participation, the trust in public institutions and in generally speaking the democratic mechanisms of the society.*

**Keywords:** *social behavior, factor, dimension, society, public institution*

The field of the public relations has recently become a subject of great interest that is more and more often met in the discourse of the social studies in Romania. Books and items have been written, meetings have been organized, lectures have been voiced, being all directed towards the theme of the public relations.

From experience, the fields of first priority of the social studies are not at random. On the contrary, we can stand that the interest for a certain theme is in correlation with the needs of the society in witch they show themselves. So, if it were fulfilled an inventory of the approached subjects, in the last years by means of the social studies, it is quite probable that in Romania, on the firs places, there would be the studies liked to the problem of poverty, the problem of corruption or of the difficulties existing in the social integration of different categories of population. Meanwhile the social studies in USA approached more intensively the problems liked to the family dissolution or those in the field of immigration. What we want to stand here is that the scientific interest for a certain theme could be at a certain moment an indicatory for the kind of problems the respective society is confronted with.

The natural questions arising from this context are referring to the more or less functional aspects that should be correlated with the interest for the field of the public relations. Is this interest really justified by the problems with which the Romanian society is confronted, or it is rather a fashionable subject coming out of an international perspective?

One of the most important difficulties we are confronted with in treating such a subject is that the term of “public relations” is often met under the form of some ambiguous acceptances and exaggeratedly generalizing. In that case we sometimes very closely come up to the extreme situation of confounding the public relations with any process of communication. In the work that was coordinated by S. Cutlip, A. Center and G. Brown, they show that the idea of public relations designates the managerial function that identifies,

establishes and maintains mutual advantageous relations between an organization and different categories of public, relations on which the success or the failure of the respective organization depend<sup>1</sup>. Analyzing this definition some conclusion can be clearly attached. They are meant to suggest and sustain the place and essence of this concept:

1. We firstly think that there must be specified the idea of the link between the institutional field and the specific activities of the environment of the public relations. Thus we can make a clear-cut distinction between these activities and the other types of communication. Modern institutions are characterized by a complex net of links with other institutions and the performance of the institutions is dependent of the functionality of these relations. This is the cause of the development of the public relations.
2. As long as the departments of the public relations represent professional media specialized in the building up of a proper relational climate between an organization and different categories of public, one can stand that the real relationship manifests itself one more levels. Thus, we can speak about an inner level of the public relations (the relations between the persons who do the different jobs in an organization are attentively had in view), but also by an external level of public relations (thinking of the relations that are held by the organization towards the beneficiaries of the services and goods that are offered. From another point of view, thinking of the importance held by the organizational activity, we can speak about institutionalized public relations (specialized in the links that must be maintained with other institutions) and non institutionalized public relations (specialized in the relations of the organization with physical persons, having the quality of being either the beneficiaries or the employed ones).
3. We also consider as being important some short considerations about the fields in which the activities of public relations find themselves again. We can easily notice that, in fact, the services of the public relations can be adjusted to any field of any social institution. This phenomenon is very important from the point of view of the consequences it has upon the social level. As long as the citizens' relations with the public institutions represent a daily phenomenon, we have the right to conclude that the way of going on of these relations will greatly influence the social behavior, the degree of involvement in the public problems and the civic spirit proved by the member of the collectivity.

The hypothesis we formulate and put into analysis is the fact that there exists certain specificity of development of the relations between the members of a human community and the social institutions on which they directly depend. In their turn, these social institutions, being organisms with formal structures, are obliged, at a certain length, to build up strategies of relationship and implicitly of communication with the social categories which they serve. The good organizing of these activities depends on a corresponding vision that is specific for the public relations. This organizing has to impose specific solutions in order to optimize the institution's relations with the beneficiaries of the services offered.

On the part of the beneficiaries of the public services, if there are well introduced and if they correspond to the interests of those who ask for the services of the social

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<sup>1</sup> Scott M. Cutlip, Allen H. Center, Glen M. Brown – Effective Public Relations; Prentice Hall; 8 edition (July 26, 1999)

institution, we will see a positive attitude towards the organization in case. This fact will draw to the creation of a favorable image that the institution should have on the public consciousness. On the contrary, if the modalities of relationing and the offer services don't correspond to the standards imposed by the beneficiaries with their interests, the impression of that social institution, no matter the problem, will mark a descendent evolution. And the climax could be the discreditation and loss of authority.

From the perspective of the relations between the social institutions and the members of the society, in the period after 1989, there have been detached some specific situations in Romania and they, as we will later present, came to influence and determine a certain type of social behavior promoted at the level of large social segments. In other words, we will see that the persistence of a dominant type of manifestation in public relations will significantly influence a set of behavior attitudes and models of the social order.

A first idea in this respect is linked to the passing on from a central social system to a system based on free strategies of organizing, at least from the point of view of declared perspective of desirability of the new models to organize the institutions. Yet social and institutional liberalism did not offer a comfortable dimension at the moment of breaking off from the centralized regime. So it is necessary for an institutional system to work an ensemble of internal relations (the organization of the institutions). The matter that stood against the institutional liberalism, beyond the practical unknowing of what such a system is supposed to be, was exactly the characteristics of this internal and external relations that we rather going on in accordance with the old centralized system. In this respect we want to point out the transformational phenomenon of the specific character of the social relationships. It is a necessary and normal matter in the context of the transformation of the Romanian society by adopting the occidental methods. The all ensemble of the communist society, by centralizing all social systems, succeeded to exclude the beneficiary out of the economical equation and not only. In other words production and the quality of the services did not depend on the beneficiaries' evaluations regarding quality. This fact was caused by the lack of competition on one side, and by central authority on the other side. This authority was in fact only possible threatening for the functioning of the social institutions, so that central authority was the real beneficiary that had to be satisfied by all means. We think unimportant to insist here upon the nature of the central authority of the communist society, organized in an oligarchic and unitary way and having as a last and universal argument the Communist Party. Thus we have here an evidence of refusing the responsibility, a defalcation of authority, from the real beneficiary represented by the population towards the political and politicized structures of the state. The motifs of this model of social relationing used to be firstly linked to the need of social control, being exchange at that time any situation that could have been used as an instrument for that goal.

After 1989 the Romanian society was confronted with the powerful phenomenon of perpetuation of the patterns of social relationing, patterns that include economical, political, administrative and even educational dimensions. Thus we find ourselves in the situation in which the declination of responsibilities that should have become history became independent with an even greater force inside the vital bodies of the society. Happening like that, we can see once more how the rightful beneficiaries of the social products and services are avoided by history, being forgotten in a disconcentrating lake of authority. It is seen how Romania, in fifteen years, has experimented with success a democratic pattern build and perpetuated by elimination of the population from almost all decisional context, thus being

built up a social system that wants to be democratic but in reality it continues to elude the essence of liberal democracy that is the phenomenon of social control. Still, the mechanism of eluding the social control is different from the one of the communist period; the social control is not minimized by oppression, as in the former form of government, but by omission and poverty. The phenomenon of omission is in fact a poor offering of instruments for social control, which was created and promoted by the political systems of post-December Romania. A suggestive example in this respect is represented by the vote-on-list system, by which is defalcated the senators' and deputies' responsibility for their electors. This responsibility is directed towards the political parties and institutions that promoted them on the voting list, in a period in which the Romanian population was supposed to have understood and learned the mechanism of liberal democracy. The pauperization of the population was a powerful argument which succeeds to generate a weak social reaction and a diminution of the interest for a strengthening of a civic consciousness. In free societies there finally appear different modalities for the creation of the instruments for the social control, but only under the circumstances of a suitable civic education meant to stimulate the social participation. But if the population develops some rather atomizing models, where each individual looks only after his/her interest, ignoring the collective one, it is quite improbable to appear coherent instruments of social control, especially in a medium in which the political power deliberately discourages that control.

On the other side, on the background of population's pauperization, society is dealing with the structures of the communist pattern. The historical evolution of American population and of that of the European Occident permits us to consider that the liberal democracy goes hand in hand with the society of consumption. In other words it is seen that the level of the social control increases directly with the power of consumption of the population for offered goods and services, which in their turn get diversified and increase their quality, generating a positive process in social evolution. Unfortunately the Romanian population is still far enough to consider themselves as a consuming force and the fact diminishes its authority, both directly and indirectly. In the direct relations the goods and services offered on the market are either of a poor quality or incomplete, usually to permit their selling at prices, or to be profitable when the phenomenon of consumption is reduced. From an indirect perspective the duties and taxes to the local and central authorities being reduced, we have to face the reality of a reduced budget which implies small salaries in the budgetary fields and on organizational substructure insufficiently developed. This brings with it a poor quality of services or even their inexistence. From another point of view we draw attention to a phenomenon of getting sometimes deliberately, more difficulty in the ways of access to different services that are usually compulsory for a citizen. This phenomenon is motivated by the practice of the preferential services that generate tips, the respective practice being very often met among the office workers. Although for a certain point of view we could consider that such phenomena have the role of protecting and conserving a certain category by a mechanism of auto protection against a prolonged state of crisis, all these things diminish the social authority because they become extremely noxious factors for the formatting process of a social ensemble.

## **The transformation of the specific of the public relations and the evolution of the population's belief in social institutions after 1989**

The field of the public relations in the communist society was practically useless and thus existing as a dimension of a superficial formula. That was mostly due to the specific of the depending relations of the different social institutions. In the situation of a competitive economy the depending relations of an organization become manifest at the level of its relations with the sources materials or with the necessary services for the private activity and, what is very important, of its relations with the potential beneficiaries. With no constraints generated by a competitive medium, the social institutions remained with no motivation in the direction of having proper relations with the beneficiaries. Thus, without direct responsibilities for their beneficiaries, the institutions of the totalitarian form of government in Romania, promoted an no evolved, no elaborated and incoherent relation towards the citizens, who, with no competitive field, had no other alternative. In the economical, commercial and even administrative surroundings of the communist period the relations of dependence manifested themselves at other levels; avoiding, as we have seen, the aspects of public's satisfaction, which was in rather ideological goal than a real necessity in the activity of an institution.

The strategies of the public relations develop and make evolutions in accordance to the necessities imposed by a social and economical context at a certain moment. The centralized economy of the communist period imposed efforts of relationing with the party structures and with the contractors of raw materials, materials and services. Even in the case of the services, the political arguments had an important role. As a result, the specific activities of the public relations were directed towards the social factors that could influence the activities of the institution by means of their authority. In most of the cases the relations where individualized and they were based on links with key characters who used to facilitate the interest of the institutions in exchange of some services of social and personal nature, thus strengthening their own positions. Due to the personal character of the professional relations and due to the restricted spheres of reference points of responsibility, the departments of public relations had no object of activity.

The poor quality of relationing between the social institutions and population implied certain results at the level of some behavioristic and attitudinal models of population. On one side, the trust in public institutions decreases, the collective mentality being feed continuously on the negative aspects of the activities of these institutions. On the other side the model of the institutional relations got very quickly to be adopted by population and it was also considered from the point of this efficiency. It was like that, that at an individual level, there was developed the idea that the standard of living depends on one's net of "acquaintances" that should facilitate and promote the personal interests in different fields. Thus the defalcation of the social responsibilities and the lack of any direction of social control became accepted and naturalized relations in the Romanian society.

The process of passing to a competitive economy has not brought great changes in the field of the public relations, fact that was generated both by the low competitive context and by the small power of buying. From another point of view the system of personalized relations was maintained at all levels, which determined the economical, administrative and political surroundings (having no external authority like that of the former party) became more and more hermetically for those who had come from outside the system. On the other

side, due to a very poor market of working force, the society had to face a phenomenon of hermetization of the guilds, crafts-man-ships and fields of activity passed on from one generation to another. All these brought their contribution to the perpetuance of a lack of trust of the population towards the social institutions and to the maintaining of a bad relationship with those.

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