

GENERAL ISSUES RELATING TO THE ACTIVE INVOLVEMENT OF CITIZENS IN RESOLVING LOCAL ISSUES OF INTEREST

Roxana DOBRIȚOIU

Lecturer Phd.

**Faculty of Education Science, Law and Public Administration
University "Constantin Brancusi" Tg-Jiu**

ABSTRACT

PARTICIPATION SHALL DESIGNATE ACTORS IN THE COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT IN ORDER TO SHAPE STRATEGIC PLANNING OF LOCAL DEVELOPMENT IN THE LIGHT OF ALL EXISTING OPINIONS AND ALSO TO BUILD A TRANSPARENT FRAMEWORK THAT CAN INCREASE THE INVOLVEMENT OF VARIOUS SOCIAL ACTORS IN ACHIEVING GOALS.

THE CONCEPT OF CITIZEN PARTICIPATION IS BASED ON THE NEED FOR CONSULTATION OF CITIZENS AND THE EXPRESSION OF OPINIONS IN CONNECTION WITH THE DECISIONS TO BE TAKEN AT DIFFERENT LEVELS AND THEY CAN BE AFFECTED DIRECTLY OR INDIRECTLY.

KEY-WORDS: CONSULTATION OF CITIZENS, PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION, CIVIL SOCIETY, LOCAL AUTONOMY.

Participatory democracy is aimed at bringing decisions closer to the beneficiaries, who are informed and consulted on the management of public resources and authority. As a result of dialogue between the authorities and the citizens, as far as possible, the suggestions of the latter are integrated into governmental interventions aiming to thus meet the needs of local communities. The principle of consultation of citizens is a basic principle of the Government that the Western democracies put great price such that they have developed a series of studies, reviews and best practices. [1]

The involvement of citizens in the decision-making process allows them to realize the need for self-realization, but the main benefits of participation relate to improving the quality of governance. Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba are among the authors who have brought into focus the concept of participation based on the civic. Civic culture is "a pluralistic culture based on communication and persuasion, a culture of consensus and diversity, a culture which allowed the change." This type of participatory culture is the one being oriented not only on "political input, but there are also positive oriented to the structures and processes of input". The input structures, political parties are to designate groups of interests and communication environments, and the process of input refers to requests that come from the population by politicians and the implementation of such requests in administrative policy. [2]

Local autonomy consists in the power of local Government to take decisions alone regarding the services provided to local communities, namely quality and quantity as well as the cost and method of payment. Art. 3 of the European Charter of local self-government stresses that the rights incumbent upon local government authorities may not limit the exercise of the principle of consultation with citizens. Thus, the decision of the local authorities should take account of the views of their citizens, prior to the adoption of consultation of major decisions. Community resource management Charter framed after the wishes of the local rulers were forcing them to communicate with citizens and recalling that autonomy should have the cutting edge use of satisfy the interests of local communities. [3]

In the European context the concept of local autonomy has been defined for the first time since the European Charter of local self-government. [4]

In Romania, the legislative framework of local autonomy has seen a positive trend in the revolutionary period, beginning with the adoption of a new Constitution, continuing with ratification of the European Charter of local self-government and the adoption and improvement of the specific legislation on local public administration.

Participation shall designate actors in the community involvement in order to shape strategic planning of local development in the light of all existing opinions and also to build a transparent framework that can increase the involvement of various social actors in achieving goals.

Engaging citizens as participants within democracy makes the governance to be increasingly more democratic and efficient, build trust in public institutions. Thanks to the participation of citizens, public policy formulation is more realistic, being based on population needs assessments on policy will improve, and the disagreement between the Administration and individuals will be reduced.

Using any type of participation-information, consultation and involvement of Active-Governments strengthen their relationship with citizens. What are the reasons why Governments must improve the relationship with citizens? There are three main reasons for doing so:

- ▶ Public policy more effective participation of Governments - provides a solid basis for the development of public policies, thereby ensuring better implementation of them.
- ▶ Confidence in public institutions - citizens have the opportunity to learn of the plans of the public authorities, to express their opinions and offered variants of solving the various problems. This involvement creates a greater level of acceptance of the results of the policy. Increasing confidence in the institution gives legitimacy to Governments actions.
- ▶ Strengthening of democracy - information, consultation and participation make Governments more transparent and more accountable. Improving Government-citizen relationship encourages an active involvement of citizens in the public sphere. [5]

The principle of consultation of citizens in resolving the problems local interest is enshrined in the provisions of articles 2 and 3 of Law No. 215/2001, in which it is held that the legal principle of local public administration, stating that the local authorities through which local autonomy is not likely to affect the possibility of having recourse to consultation residents through a referendum or any other form of direct participation of citizens in public affairs.

In the literature it was appreciated that philosophy of comparison local autonomy with the possibility of consulting the citizens in solving local problems of special interest with the statutory prohibition as to prejudice the right of autonomy of inhabitants of be consulted on local

problems of special interest is a way of counterbalancing between direct democracy, participatory and representative. [6]

In the literature there are also opinions according to which concrete modalities for consultation of citizens are: methods, which include the provision of information on its own initiative and upon request by local public administration authorities, direct consultation of citizens that can be made through public debates, attending meetings of the local authority's work and consulted by referendum, and, last but not least, attracting the participation of active citizens by providing the right of legislative initiative.

Other authors argue, however, that in addition to the principle of consultation of citizens in resolving local interest is shaping up as a matter of principle, the principle of citizen participation in the decision making process highlighted by the power provided citizens of the law on local public administration to propose draft decisions local councils. [7]

Informing citizens requesting the lowest degree of involvement of citizens who are kept up to date about the activity of the public institutions. Although citizens remain outside the administrative processes, bystander or analyst-commentator, information is all a way of passive participation that underlies learning and informing citizens about acts of governance.

Consulting citizens involves a high degree of involvement of citizens who not only read and inform, but have the opportunity to express their views within the framework of the consultations. Consultation is seen as a process of promoting their achievements including through the involvement of marginalized groups in the decision-making process. [8]

Active participation means an upper stage, which allows citizens to become partners in decision-making in public policy. It is a dialogue of cooperation between positions public institution and the public. Active participation means that citizens should be involved in setting public policy objectives, they can express their opinion in connection with the various alternatives, to propose implementation strategies.

To get to the democratic society in which all citizens have the civic spirit and manifests, we believe that the four main ingredients are needed: a favorable legislative framework, a culture of participation through which the individual should be oriented to community and to collective action in cases of need, political will on the part of Government and a good management of public participation processes. [9]

A more recent research refines the definition of the good citizen, pointing out that there are three types [10]:

- ▶ Personally responsible citizen (personally responsible citizen) is acting responsibly in the community by, for instance, blood donations, waste recycling actions, etc. Is one who respects the laws and pays taxes.
- ▶ Citizen participation (participatory citizen) is the one who actively participate in public affairs and the life of the community, at the local or national. Know State institutions and decision-making process, participating in the consultations organized by the authorities and is familiar with his rights of citizenship.
- ▶ The citizen oriented toward social justice (justice oriented citizen) is the citizen who focuses attention on the injustices of society and causes that they generate. He analyzes the structures of social, economic and political, and consider strategies for collective action to cause changes in the situations considered to be unfair and to operate at the level of the question. The citizen

oriented to social justice shares the vision of citizen participation, but emphasizes the idea of collective action.

With regard to the notion of "local issues of interest" some authors consider that the lack of a recital of the Act, should be considered local issues of special interest to those relating to the areas for which the local Council decides by majority absolute or qualified, as well as any other issues in the community which are of particular interest. [11]

Some authors consider that both the principle of eligibility of local public administration authorities, and consultation of citizens in resolving local interest are contained in the scope of the principle of local autonomy and would not be been nominated by the law on local public administration as distinct because the principles are nothing more than a set of rules designed to express local autonomy.

In their thesis, they use the argument that the provisions of article 3 of the European Charter of local self-government which States that local autonomy cannot be made to affect in any way the possibility of resorting to a referendum or civic gatherings, any other form of direct participation of citizens, where this is provided for in law.

Without being so radical in terms of the existence of the principle of consultation of citizens in resolving local interest, other authors are only considered that this principle flows from the local autonomy, because the Organization the referendum is a feature of local autonomy, without supports his consecration it desirable to express in the text of the law on local public administration. [12]

A true democracy, at both central and local levels, is today unthinkable without the implementation of new techniques of information and communication-highlights the underlying theory and practice of public relations. Putting into operation of new information and communication techniques shall be recorded in the character of the reformer of the changes currently taking place in the public administration. This manifests itself particularly in the relationship between elected and electors. More and more local authorities are aware of the role of information and communication, administrative transparency and involvement, on this basis, the public in the decision-making process. [13] The need and desire of the public local problems fall deeper and deeper into the advertising strategy of the activity of local public administration bodies. [14]

From the perspective of local public administration, the advantages of stakeholder involvement in public decision making would consist of: better understanding of problems and real needs, making decisions that best meets the expectations of citizens, efficiency, transparency and involvement. The disadvantages would be the burden of the decision-making process, a great diversity of perspectives or emergence of group interests. [15]

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