

MARKETING AS SUPPORT TOOL FOR PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

Abstract. *The reality of public administration system in Romania shows that, in addition to normal and fair activities, negative aspects are to be noticed. Whatever the degree of truth in these assessments, the process of public administration in our country should be continuously adjusted and improved. As the debates on the role of marketing in society have increased in recent years, the tendency to extend its application areas seems to be evident; one of these is the public administration, where the reform requires mechanisms and modern methods of approach, the marketing field being included. The idea of introducing marketing in public administration represents the major theme of our paper, from theoretical and methodological aspects to practical approaches.*

Keywords: citizens, public administration, SWOT analysis, urban marketing.

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1. Introduction

The reality of public administration system in Romania shows that, in addition to normal and fair activities, negative aspects are to be noticed, which start from the misconduct of civil servants and end with a very slow or no progress solving of the encountered problems. A cause of these deficiencies was identified in the monopoly position of the authorities, in the inefficiency and the lack of flexibility.

The unfavorable image created is supported by the media and the civil society – as opinion makers, but also by each and every citizen, who, we must admit, do not always judge with full objectivity (Nedelea, 2006, p. 25).

Whatever the degree of truth in these assessments, the process of public administration in our country should be continuously adjusted and improved. The citizen has rights and the first among these is his positioning in the local or central government focus. So modernization, system reform is required. The key role in confidence-building in national administrations and of public officials is distributed to the National Agency of Civil Servants (NACS). It seeks to apply new and modern methods, to ensure that the reform will be possible.

As the debates on the role of marketing in society have increased in recent years, the tendency to extend its application areas seems to be evident; one of these is the public administration, where the reform requires mechanisms and modern methods of approach, the marketing field being included.

1. Theoretical approaches

„Marketing in public administration is an ensemble of processes and marketing relationship, well determined between the components of the administrative system, through which, as a public power, carried out are the laws and/or the activities involved in the development of services are planned, organized, coordinated, managed and controlled to meet the public interest” (Florescu, Malcomete et al, 2003, p. 415). As it can be seen, it is a complex and consistent definition, seeking to cover as best as it can, the area of marketing activities designed to meet the great consumer from the administrative point of view: the people.

We can say that the public administration marketing is a process of „market” research, which leads finally, to its knowledge in connection with all factors relating to the citizens' needs and preferences, the way to meet them, to the elements which accelerate or hinder the public administration process (Petrescu and Muscalu, 2003, p. 376).

The father of the modern marketing, Ph. Kotler, said: *“Those responsible for management and future planning of a place should take a innovative vision on the assumed task. The old formulae of specific measures or „early intervention” to attract businesses or by building stadiums and conference centers or increase advertising spending on tourism usually fail to reach the root causes of difficult situations through which the communities are passing today”* (Kotler, Haider et al, 2001, p. 327).

Generally speaking, public administration marketing examines the uncertain attitudes of some beneficiaries situated in different geographical areas, under imperfect information conditions, hard to be controllable, which means taking risk in formulating marketing objectives in government programs. Therefore, it is obvious that the marketing orientation of the public administration institutions should be concerned by the research of citizens-customers requirements to align the supply of public services (volume, structure, quality level) to the demands manifested on the market (Kotler, Haider et al, 2001, p. 327). Moreover, by analyzing the specific reference range, we can identify marketing principles which can be applied in public administration, such as: public administration is serving the citizen, it is necessary that the public institutions activity be adapted to the environment in which they operate, the public authorities will take into account the knowledge of the social trends and foresee the following ones.

Providing quality public services is required in the localities of the country. This is essential for public administration to continuously receive information from the civil society, which it serves, to which it has duties. Information must be consistent, arriving in real time, relevant, clear and with efficient costs. The developing of an information system of the public administration has the role of an operation that will simplify the rules, procedures, providing non-discriminatory opportunities for public support services. The desire to create an information system was wanted before Romania's accession, being in fact a requirement of the European Union.

Once completed, the system will reduce tariffs, operating costs and even staff. This is not the only line of action. We could include: establishing of identification elements (logo, motto and portals), organizing the day of civil servants (stated in public relations domain), organizing of public debates, developing skills for working with the public etc.

Practically, every public employee or servant uses or should use the marketing function, because each contact which the citizens have with the institution activities will affect the way they will report to the future government. As a principle, all public servants should use marketing instruments: the secretary who answers the phone or does not, the clerks who are polite or aggressive, the staff from „Public relations”, public guardians, doorman etc. If these officials are adequately informed, friendly, eager and motivated to help people, then they become important in the marketing communication effort.

2. Premises of an efficient urban marketing

It is assumed that, if it is possible in the A area it is also possible in B area. It is an approach that is solved by scattered, unexpected measures and, unfortunately, these circumstance investments generate more expenses than incomes.

First, it is necessary to diagnose these issues from a systematic perspective. After that, we need URBAN MARKETING. Communities think that they develop marketing programs, but they are just promotional programs (based on communication efforts and building a positive image, by circulating some optimistic issues, by preventing the dissemination of negative news about the difficulties they face).

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Promotion is only one part of marketing. A strategic planning is necessary, made by a competent group of people, in a public-private partnership; specially created with this role and which can transform the community in an import-export center.

Urban Strategic Marketing of a city will follow:

- a. to design the right combinations of features and community services;
- b. to establish attractive incentives for the buyers and users of goods and services;
- c. to offer all those goods and services as efficient and accessible as possible;
- d. to promote the values and the image of the place so that those who receive

them to be fully aware of the distinctive advantages of the place.

These are the „general strategic objectives”, proposes by Ph. Kotler:

- The establishment of target markets;
- The audit of the place and the strategic marketing planning process;
- Strategies for improving the human settlement;
- Design the place image;
- Dissemination of the image and its message to the world;
- Attracting tourism and hospitality markets;
- Attracting, keeping, expanding and starting new business;
- Increasing exports and foreign investment incentives;
- Attracting permanent and temporary inhabitants;
- Organized preparation for change.

These do not come by themselves but they will attract „actors” with main or secondary roles, by case. Who are they?

At first we are talking about remote actors, whose role is at international level (embassies and consulates, international chambers of commerce), at national level (country's political leadership, the various ministries, national unions) or at regional level (regional agencies for economic development, regional tourism committees, local or central public administration officials, professional associations, schools etc).

But the most involved are the local actors, both from public sector (the city mayor, the mayor directors, urban planning department, developing business department, public information office, directors of infrastructure services – transport, education, sanitation) and private sectors (financial institutions – commercial banks, pension funds, promoters and estate agents etc, chamber of commerce and other local business organizations, the hospitality, tourism and trade services, unions, taxi companies).

To convince the public opinion that the steps taken by them have good results, it is necessary a continuous activity, being in the same time responsible for success or failure, of creating some strong public-private partnerships as sustainable future solutions. The local economic development is within the general process of decentralization, giving substance to the local autonomy, because it cannot spread to the local level only the request to ensure the administrative work, keeping the leverage at the center (<http://modernizare.mai.gov.ro>, accessed February 3rd, 2010).

The specialty literature provides us the main elements of the public management reform (Lambru, 2009). These are: strategic approach, focus on results, improved financial

management and flexibility in addressing staff problems, organizational flexibility, competition items placing, contractualism, and changes in the relationship with politicians, public-relations. For a specialist in marketing it is no doubt that these items involve marketing activities, or even identify with it. For an unknown it seems that marketing is not found anywhere. That is why, the effort to identify, individualize and highlight the support from the government marketing is great and just the beginning.

3. National and local experience

4.1. An extended Romanian's approach

In our country, for example, at the most unpleasant, there are extreme zones or localities in chronic depression, where the necessary resources to renewal revitalization miss. They lost their main industry or company and can not escape the acute unemployment, poor miss stores or properties in ruins. People and businesses move into better regions, reducing the tax base of taxpayers fund schools, hospitals and other public services. Crime can accelerate the decline. Such images can be seen today in the Jiu Valley, and the Danube Delta area.

There are areas situated in acute depression which have some potential for regeneration. They have historical, cultural and social political values that could support the return, if the right leaders and a proper vision of the future would appear. The adverse party is that there are necessary significant financial and human resources to be identified.

There are settlements or areas with oscillating characteristics. They are very sensitive to business cycle evolutions, i.e. some industries disappear, but others are born, with a potential for rapid growth.

The happy case is the areas that have undergone positive changes. Here it was invested a lot to create new conditions that make them attractive, investments targeted on „strengths” of the area and possibly they also have national and international resonance.

In Romania, for example, Braila can become „the capital of lyrical music” by the International Festival „Haricleea Darclee”, Brasov „the capital light music” by the International Festival „Golden Stag” Deva – “Romanian gymnastics capital” etc.

Finally, there are areas called the privileged few, with financial tourist and demographical strength, and enviable business: Bucharest - the administrative, economic and cultural capital, Sibiu – which has already impressive status as European Capital of Culture, or Timisoara – which candidates to this title for 2021, Constanta – large seaport.

Most of the settlements of our country could be included on the second and third levels, from acute depression to positive changes.

No matter in which above category they fit, they inevitably evolve to new situations.

Forces that are focuses them are:

- internal forces of growth or decline;
- external forces that can not be controlled.

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What can happen? What situations might arise? What should be avoided or, on the contrary, capitalized? For example:

- the city should not depend on a single income source. If it is consumed, people will migrate after graduating high school;
- increased taxes and duties and can chase both the people, and the economic agents. It is known that most companies established in a city have centers in other areas, where they go much better;
- the administration must have a permanent positive attitude, regardless the difficulties it faces up. Initiatives must not be rejected;
- the image of the area should be maintained;
- the rapid technological change, the impact of technological progress are felt beginning with the working conditions, then the communication system, the transport, the way of garbage collection etc;
- the competition, to worldwide (national, regional, local economies are slowly transformed into an integrated world economy). There is a great risk to become sellers of others' products and services, forgetting their own local and national products and values. In addition, the companies have total freedom of movement and are better able than ever to seek the best places;
- the level of authority of the local public administration, may be restricted or open, may or may not use budgets as desired, but it is forced to respect the laws of the country.

With such forces in action, most regions seek resources, considering that the money represents the key to all problems. Many communities conduct aggressive programs to attract economic agents, investors, tourists. The local Chambers of Commerce and the economic development agencies „hunt” any business that may be attracted by not negligible incentives. There are sent forces to attract, but also to „spy”. It requires state help in various forms, beginning to issue bonds, to increase taxes, public sector workers are fired, the public services are privatized, arguing that savings are made etc. Communities strive to keep in their midst the existing business. Then, there are created events, there are sustained commercial type projects (ex. „malls” in the center or margin of the cities) etc.

4.2. Public administration marketing in Braila City – a study case (research)

After being addressed in theoretical and methodological terms, a series of aspects referring to the marketing in the public administration, we considered necessary a pragmatic approach to this subject. Therefore, we work on a study case about the activity of Braila City Hall over the past two years, namely to the last local elections. The choice of this example is motivated by the fact that Braila is a large city, with about 200 thousand inhabitants, it is also the capital of Braila county and has been a mayor at his first mandate, but who has also acquired an important experience in administration and policy out of the position of President of County Council or Senator of the Romanian Parliament. This is

doubled by his personal training in management and marketing as a senior lecturer at the local university.

Braila means history and tradition over 640 years. The position of the city on the Danube bank has attracted here people from all around the world: Greeks, Lippovans, Turks, Armenians, Bulgarians, Hebrews, Serbians and Italians. They all arrived in Braila because of the opening to development which has always occurred on this territory. These were the beautiful times of glory of Braila, but today, due to everything that is manifested at international and national level, Braila faces many problems and people's expectations for a better activity of those of local administrative apparatus are great.

Submitted to the City Council decrees, the current activity is complex, held by seven Directions and thirteen Offices all coordinated by the mayor, the two deputy mayors and town hall secretary. In the same structure there are inserted six decentralized directions, five autonomous administrations or public companies, two theaters, five centers for retired persons to pension or other disadvantaged categories, a sports club, those demonstrating the complexity to which we refer above.

Strengths:

- the institution works based on strategies and programs being possible to be viewed on the site nor less than 15 such documents, some linked to similar national plans;
- in the establishment of the institution there are employees with experience in communication and promotion, and the mayor has the quality of senior lecturer PhD., teaching students marketing and management disciplines;
- creation of their own items of identification, communication and institutional promotion: its logo, website, custom promotional items (shirts, caps, pens, bags, etc.);
- its own site: www.primariabraila.ro, which can be considered as active and updated;
- promoting the city days and other days devoted to some local, national or international events, both traditional and the recent, organized in urban agglomeration areas;
- transparency and receptivity, provided by the website, press conferences, and audiences;
- concern for creating the computer system. The purchase of IT equipment ensures the computerization of the activities, allows a better activity with the public, a more effective collaboration between departments and the creation of a unique data base;
- identification of some new sources of revenues for the local budget and the collection in a high proportion; the collection of taxes from individuals and legal entities have a good fluency, the role of sanctions, attachments or forced executions being gradually taken by voluntary payments;
- increasing the number and the rhythm of investments based on programs and priorities. Among these sources we can mention the European or national funds recovered by Programs (Administrative Capacity Development Operational Program, Regional Operational Program, Romanian Social Development Fund, Sector Operational Program for Economic Competitiveness Growth etc);

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- thermal rehabilitation works performed until today, demonstrates that savings can be achieved both at the budget of the city hall and at the citizens;
- carrying out steps to achieve the Urban Area Plan;
- public Garden redevelopment, there are a zoo and a skating rink, mall spaces valued for promenade and the organization of events;
 - extension of green areas;
 - building of houses and putting them into use, in a satisfactory rhythm, which exceeds those registered in other urban districts;
 - rehabilitation of facilities, buildings, monuments, schools etc.;
 - certain buildings in which specific mayors services operated were claimed, that is why there were identified and refurbished others, because of their activity depends the civilized life of the city (ex. Marriage House);
 - concern for cleaning, street lighting, heating, traffic flow, safety of citizens, public passenger transport and others;
 - extension of water and sewage;
 - monthly events are held on various topics: culture, entertainment, sports, public debates;
 - from the events that passed the border city we illustrate: Days and Nights of European Theater Festival, the International Vocal Festival „Haricleea Darcee”, International Light Music Festival „George Grigoriu” -(together with the County Council) etc;
 - twinning with eight cities from France, Bulgaria, Macedonia, Turkey, Greece, determines the transfer of know-how and increasingly diverse cooperation;
 - positive feedback from citizens on the work of Directions and Services, ex.: Community Public Service Records of Persons, Culture Institutions subordinated (Theaters), Community Service of Public Utilities etc.

Weaknesses:

- public servants apparatus is composed of persons who do not always demonstrate the necessary qualities for their jobs and they would not register the performance indicators;
 - Braila city budget can not meet all current requirements during a calendar year, its development failed to meet the desired level for all categories of expenditure;
 - green spaces are under the applicable standards, amounting to only 278 ha; the Danube cliff suffering redevelopment works, but there are extremely expensive because many years have passed since it any intervention about it was done;
 - rhythm and typical rehabilitation funds are insufficient, the city has many historic buildings and monuments, with various private owners, who, after they have claimed their properties they let them in an advanced state of degradation, which affects the whole environment, some of them showing danger of collapse;
 - recording of delay interventions or other shortcomings about the city cleaning, street lighting, public transport etc, which, although not dominant, are likely to affect the public image of the mayor, reflected in the local and central media (ex. snow removing work, community dogs, failure to various facilities, roads, cleaning);

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- cadastral issues, perpetuated by an administration to another, arrived to maturity, because, some works, like the Urban Area Plan, depend on them;
- the main green space, Monument Park, is not up to the level of such locations, but will enter in a redevelopment program, also costly, for the same reason, of being left on degradation over time;
- although achievements in transport are noticed, the fact that some routes are managed by private operators which are not complying with the regulations relating to routes, stations, issuing tickets, traffic rules, result in a negative image;
- local owners associations are managed in many cases by persons who break the law, existing many complaints that are not part of the City Hall functions, but in one way or another should be involved in rectifying that problems;
- the cooperation with institutions, cities, associations, etc. have mainly cultural, artistic character, and the citizens expects the involvement of city hall in solving the economic problems, related to employment;
- events are poorly reflected in the media, more important areas being given to policy, crime and other areas, citizens are not sufficiently informed. Thus, they tend to criticize the administration's lack of sufficient involvement to improve their lives;
- some Directions or public Services are not well appreciated and strongly criticized by the citizens, such as Community Police, Guidance and Control Department, Administration and Management of the Local Public Works Direction, Local Public Finance Division etc. It should be noticed that some of these critics are directed to persons, employed in the previous mentioned places, but especially to their leaders.

Opportunities:

- possibility to access funds from various national or international sources, allows the development of human resources, materials, logistics etc. of City Hall;
- cooperation and collaboration with various institutions developing partnerships, complex teams, whose efficiency is higher;
- twinning with eight settlements from five countries, which can lead to joint projects and gain experience;
- the existence of two universities in Braila, one with economic, administrative and communication specialization and the other with technical profile, whose potential can be harnessed;
- Braila is an attraction for the people from the less developed areas and no prospects, which may replace some of the locals who leave temporarily or permanently the city;
- the appearance of literature, studies, analysis etc., which highlight new theories and administrative practices that can become an ally of the public management in taking right decisions.

Risks:

- because of serious economic problems, Braila has a small number of economic agents and risks not to have enough jobs, which means unemployment, low potential, low consumer etc, a vicious circle which does not allow the real development;

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- the city hall due to economic difficulties is associated with the inability to provide jobs;
- the civil servants law does not allow to achieve the necessary changes easily, so the performances of administrative machinery depend on the same employees;
- the global economic and financial crisis is felt in the area examined;
- the temporarily or permanently leave of the city by the young segment of the population;
- the public sector is dominated by the political logics and the independence of the administrative decisions to the political elements, remains a goal.
- We mention that the information used for this analysis is the result of an empirical research based on public sources, reports, opinions of the citizens obtained by interviewing a random a number of 200 people, then checked to eliminate subjectivity and on data from the local and central media. As there were information available to the authors or they had it in a transparent manner, it is understandable why, more and more, the marketing science turns into an important support in the mayoral activities.

5. Conclusions

We can not conclude that everything was done, but on the contrary, that there are reserves of progress, new paths which should be approached. The results of the research can be permanently completed and updated to generate a SWOT analysis which can be the basis for decisions in the urban management and marketing. This will happen if the governors will introduce planning marketing activities in the public administration. Developing a marketing plan is a systematic process that begins with analyzing the situation and the current environment (which we proposed earlier in our example), continues with the setting of marketing objectives, identifying the target audience, determining the desired position on the market and designing a strategic mix of marketing and ending with the evaluation plan, of the budget and implementation plan.

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