

DISCUSSIONS REGARDING THE RELATION BETWEEN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION AND CITIZENS - ACTORS INVOLVED IN THE PROCESS OF ELABORATION AND ADOPTION OF THE PUBLIC DECISION

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Abstract

Explaining the relation between public administration and citizens in the decision-making process is not exempt from controversial discussions, in this partnership civil society and decision-makers in the administrative system contribute to real cooperation to adopt decision-making models appropriate to real needs. In this context, this paper aims to achieve the following goal: analysis of theories and various opinions expressed in the literature on the relation between public administration and citizens, to identify their role in the process of elaborating and making public decisions. Through the approach we identified criteria for classifying the categories of participants in the decision-making process in public administration - how to involve them and the administrative level on which the participant is located; we highlighted the way in which the public administration staff contributes to the substantiation of the public decision, in the sense that the quality of the decision act depends on the quality, training and knowledge of the decision maker; we explained the importance of citizen participation in the decision-making process at this level, proving to be a true proof of democracy in society; we presented the forms of citizen participation in the phases of the decision-making process - informing citizens, consulting them and actively participating; we clarified the relation of mutual partnership between public administration - citizens in the process of solving community problems by adopting public decisions appropriate to real social needs.

Key words: *public decision; decision making process; public administration; decision-making authorities; citizens; way of involvement; administrative level; public issues; local community; consultation; participation*

JEL Classification: *D73, H83*

I. INTRODUCTION

There is a growing recognition by administrators that decision-making without public participation is inefficient. (King et al., p. 319) Citizen involvement is a powerful democratic tool to increase accountability and transparency, citizens who participate in the implementation of public projects have more confidence in policies and civil servants. (Citizen Engagement in Public Administration)

Increased community participation in public decision-making produces many important benefits, making it difficult to imagine anything but positive results when citizens join the policy process, collaborate with others and reach a consensus to bring about positive change. (Irvin, Stansbury, p. 55)

In such a direction, this paper aims *to analyze the theories and various opinions expressed in the literature on the relationship between public administration and citizens, to identify the role of the latter in the process of elaborating and adopting public decisions.*

In order to achieve the previously formulated goal, we aim to achieve the following specific objectives:

O1 - identification of the criteria for classifying the categories of participants in the decision-making process in the public administration;

O2 - highlighting the way in which the public administration staff contributes to the substantiation of the public decision

O3 - explaining the importance of citizen participation in the decision-making process of public administration

O4 - presentation of the forms of participation of the citizens within the phases of the decision-making process in the public administration

O5 - clarification of the administration-citizen relationship in the process of solving community problems by adopting public decisions.

II. CATEGORIES OF PARTICIPANTS IN THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

Although the administrative decision is signed by a relatively small number of people, it is, in fact, a consequence of the actions taken by several people. In the context of initiating the procedure for adopting a public decision, each person taking part in this process has his role, thus contributing to gathering the necessary information, analyzing, substantiating and designating decision alternatives and implicitly to adopting the optimal option chosen. The decision-making models are outlined in the form of the image of rigorous cooperation of the various compartments within a state administration body, of the various state administration bodies or between public administration bodies, on the one hand, and of other state bodies, non-state organizations or citizens, on the other hand. In the process of substantiating administrative decisions, the main purpose of the participants is to optimize the decision and, at the same time, the entire activity of public administration. (Nedelcu, 2009, pp. 336-337)

University professor Armenia Androniceanu highlights the existence of two categories of participants in the decision-making process, taking into account two criteria, as follows:

A. A special criterion for delimiting the participants is the way in which they are involved in the decision-making process (see Figure no. 1):

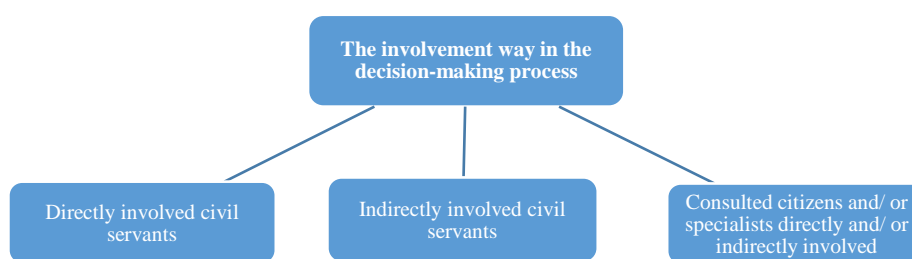


Figure no. 1. Categories of participants according to the way of involvement in the decision-making process
 Source: own processing after Armenia Androniceanu, *Noutăți în managementul public*, University Publishing House, Bucharest, 2005, p. 136

Analyzing the above figure, it is necessary to distinguish between those civil servants who take the action to decide and those officials who are exclusively consulted in order to adopt a public decision. Given that decision-makers cannot know all the aspects related to decision-making, it is necessary to consult other individuals, whether they are citizens or specialists in the field. The indirect participation of these persons in the complex decision-making process entails the responsibility for the administrative decisions in question, the degree of responsibility depending on the contribution of each person to the final decision model adopted.

Against the background of evolution of democracy within the state, cooperation with citizens and their consultation on public decision-making have become a factor that favors the existence of the necessary conditions for the approval of qualitative decisions and that correspond to the interests of society. This ensures a simplified implementation of the decision taken, as the beneficiaries have freely expressed their consent to the content of that decision and there is certainty that it will meet the needs of citizens. By consulting a wider range of people, state administration bodies obtain concrete information about the problems that citizens face and important aspects of the needs and objectives of society, whether they are manifested now or in the future. (Androniceanu, 1999, p. 146)

In the sphere of decision-making political authorities, the following entities are highlighted: (Parlagi, p. 10)

- *The President*, as that public authority of the state which, together with the Government, performs the executive function in the state.
- *The Government*, which presents itself as that supreme authority of the state administration and which can develop binding public policies for other public institutions and services.
- *The Parliament*, which exercises the legislative function within the state and which can adopt organic or ordinary laws, with supreme legal force.

Within the public authorities with competencies in the sphere of decision are the following: (Parlagi, pp. 11)

- *Ministries and Government Agencies*, which can draft public decisions in certain sectors of activity, such as trade, economy, transport, etc.
- *Ministers and prefects*, who can issue binding decisions, orders for subordinate institutions.
- *County and local councils*, which have a deliberative character and can adopt decisions with the vote of the majority of their members.

- *Presidents of county councils, mayors or heads of decentralized or decentralized public services, who have a unipersonal character and issue decisions in accordance with it.*

There are also a number of authorities, either with jurisdictional power (Constitutional Court) or autonomous public authorities (National Defense Council), national regulatory authorities (National Energy Regulatory Authority).

Last but not least, another category of participants in the substantiation of the public decision is represented by the citizens. Even if this is sometimes questioned, every citizen can participate directly in the decision-making process. It is, however, about certain situations expressly provided by law, such as the referendum, but also any debate that takes place before a decision is taken.

Consultation of citizens on issues of particular interest is a requirement imposed by the need to ensure a balance between the prerogatives of local public authorities and the power of oversight of the communities that elected them and gave them the mission to exercise a mandate. From this point of view, the principle of consultation also means the control of civil society over eligible local authorities, especially through the effective participation of citizens in the decision-making process on those issues that have a particular impact on the life of local communities. (Manda, Manda, pp. 166- 167)

B. Another specific criterion for delimiting the participants is the administrative level on which the participant is located (see Figure no. 2):

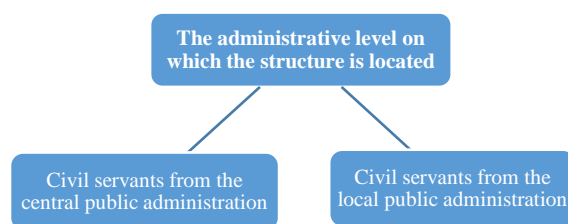


Figure nr. 2. Categories of participants according to the administrative level on which they are located in the structure
 Source: own processing after Armenia Androniceanu, op. cit., 2005, pp. 137

Therefore, one of the categories of participants in the process of substantiating public decisions is represented by the heads of the institutions, the respective administrative authorities, as well as other persons who hold management positions in the structure at this level. Those persons have the right to decide and actually take an administrative decision. However, the involvement of the mentioned persons is not enough, but it is necessary to consult specialists or people who hold a management position or a position at a medium level of administration. However, they do not have the right to decide, they carry out activities prior to the adoption of decisions, respectively the examination of existing problems and the proposal of solutions to solve them.

It is necessary that both persons with decision-making right and holding a public office at the middle level of the administration, as well as those persons who do not have the right to decide to possess a wealth of expertise to make it more efficient to perform public relations tasks. . An important role is played by the manifestation of realism and objectivity in the selection of ways to solve public difficulties. Depending on the quality of the work performed by civil servants at the middle or higher level of public administration and the training they have in the decision-making field, training aimed at documenting, analyzing, developing possible decision-making options and steps to substantiate a public decision, the activity of the public administration proves to be efficient or not. (Androniceanu, 2005, pp.137-138)

III. PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION STAFF AND THEIR ROLE IN THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

An administrative decision can be taken either by a single person or by several members of a group. A distinction needs to be made between those who actually decide and those who are consulted in the decision-making process. However, although the participants differ in their contribution to the substantiation of a decision, they are obliged to fulfill a number of functions and roles, thus contributing to the implementation of a quality decision-making model. (Guță, pp. 37-38)

Author and professor in the field of management, Henry Mintzberg highlights a set of roles that a manager has, roles that are also valid for a leader in public administration. Brought together in the form of three categories, these roles aim at the activity that those in the public administration carry out. There are, therefore, interpersonal, informational and decision-making roles (see Table 1):

Table no. 1. The role of public administration staff in the decision-making process

INTERPERSONAL ROLE	INFORMATION ROLE	DECISION-MAKING ROLE
A. Central figure (for performing the tasks of representing the organization by signing documents with legal value, participating in ceremonies or social events)	A. Monitor (through which the manager obtains information about his organization and environment, becoming a kind of "nerve center" in terms of information)	A. Entrepreneur/ planner (by carrying out activities to look for opportunities, to guide the organization's progress in fulfilling its mission and to supervise the most important projects).
B. Leader (for motivating and activating subordinates through recruitment actions, instruction, distribution of works, promotion and encouragement)	B. Disseminator of information acquired (in raw form or interpreted and processed) to subordinates	B. Disruption compensator/ coordinator (by taking corrective measures so that the organization can successfully cope with the occurrence of unexpected events).
C. Contact person (by building a network of relations with people in the environment in which the organization operates)	C. Spokesperson (addressing the organization's environment) and expert in the field of activity of the organization	C. Resource allocator/ organizer and negotiator (in situations of major importance for the organization).

Source: own processing after Mintzberg H., *The nature of managerial work*, Englewood Cliffs, NJ, Prentice-Hall, 1980 apud Anca- Jarmila Guță, *op. cit.*, 2016, pp. 39

Given that their will and thinking influence the decision to be taken, it is necessary that the people involved in this process show organization, discernment and responsibility. The value and quality of the final decision depends on how public administration staff leverages skills in the field and acts to implement an optimal solution. (Guță, pp. 39-40)

IV. CITIZENS 'PARTICIPATION IN PUBLIC DECISION MAKING

Establishing the role of the public in public administration has been an active process, in continuous investigation, experimentation and controversy. Due to the concerns expressed by citizens regarding their participation in the decision-making process, it was necessary to examine their role in the decision-making sphere. (King et al., p. 317)

Not being a new concept, the participation of citizens was born in the democratic society of antiquity, experiencing an improvement and a revival lately, determined by the dynamics of consolidated democracies. Today, more and more organizations, be they political, administrative, governmental or economic, believe that the public benefiting from this decision should also be involved in the adoption of the administrative decision. In this way, the main beneficiaries of the decision-making models can contribute to the choice of an appropriate variant and to its implementation, the final solution achieving the objectives more efficiently and producing the expected effects. (Pricopie, p. 23)

Democracy is that system of government with and for the people. Thus, it must take the form of a partnership between elected representatives and citizens, based on a combination of elements such as information, communication and involvement in the relation established. Citizen participation is the process by which the concerns, needs and values of citizens are incorporated into the decision-making process of local public administration. (Matei, Dincă, pp. 18-19)

The American specialist D. H. Rosenbloom highlights a number of positive and negative aspects of the involvement of citizens in the process of adopting an administrative decision. Thus, it is stated that the lack of involvement of citizens in the decision-making process contributes to reducing the receptivity of the authorities to the problems of the community. Lack of participation also degrades citizenship in a democratic society by reducing the importance given to the political obligation to take part in government.

Dacă cetățenii nu participă se promovează ignorarea față de ceea ce comunitatea lor are nevoie. Dacă se implică, cetățenii cooperează cu autoritățile și înțeleg situațiile dificile cu care se confruntă acestea. Fără participare, cetățenii nu au sentimente de responsabilitate față de comunitatea în care trăiesc sau față de acțiunile autorităților. În mod ideal, participarea face ca cetățenii să manifeste înțelegere și respect față de opiniile și percepțiile celorlalți. În acest mod, participarea favorizează promovarea unei cooperări între cetățeni și autoritățile administrative. (Rosenbloom, p. 409)

Among the advantages of participating in the decision-making process is the fact that, through participation, citizens can enjoy the right to discuss, reject or criticize certain claims, as a result that allows them to promote the public interest, to the detriment of restricted or subjective interests. A detailed knowledge of the most important issues and the identification of the most urgent needs of the community is possible only through participation. (Pohoată, p. 122)

The aim is to increase the level of participation in the community, the efficiency of administrative decisions being conditioned by a detailed knowledge of the needs, requirements of citizens, this being possible as long as the public is actively involved in the decision-making process. In communities where there is no dialogue between citizens and those they have chosen to represent their interests or in situations where the actions of the

representatives do not correspond to the interests of society, mobilization in the form of protest is possible. (Nimu, pp. 201-202)

V. FORMS OF CITIZEN PARTICIPATION IN THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

An important aspect of the decision-making process is the ability to effectively organize the participation of civil society in the life of territorial administrative units. The aim is thus to improve public decision-making and the provision of local services.

The public administration currently has a variety of means that allow citizens to rule on existing issues, this being possible due to the particularities of the democratic system of which it is part. It has been found that, within democratic systems, representative democracy is strengthened by direct democracy. Thus, in order to implement optimal decisions, there is a need to strengthen a representative democracy, especially at the local level. Through such a democracy, civil society is as close as possible to the decision-making process, participating in the management of local business. Every citizen has the opportunity to choose those who are to represent him in the administrative structures and, at the same time, to contribute to finding solutions to the difficulties encountered by the community to which he belongs. (Oprean, 2004, pp. 272-273)

The following forms of citizen participation can be distinguished, depending on certain phases of the decision-making process (see Figure no. 3):

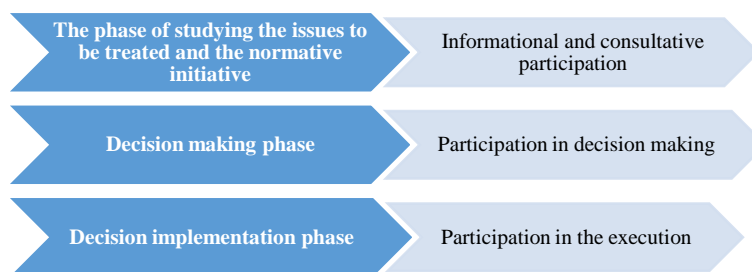


Figure no. 3. Forms of citizen participation in the life of local communities
Source: own processing after Constantin Oprean, 2004, *op. cit.*, pp. 272-273

Involving citizens in the process of making public decisions can make it possible to meet their own needs, but also to improve the quality of governance. Through its participation, the citizen builds a cooperative relation with public institutions, a relation that has as a point of support the trust of civil society in these entities. This favors the acceptance of public policies, even those that sometimes have disadvantages. (Petrescu, p. 356)

The main ways of consulting citizens in the process of substantiating administrative decisions are the following (see Table 2):

Table no. 2. Forms of consultation of citizens according to their degree of involvement

DEGREE OF CITIZEN INVOLVEMENT	CLASSIFICATION	FORMS OF REALIZATION
Small / Not at all	Informing citizens	<i>Ex officio information</i>
		<i>Information on request</i>
Medium and large	Consultation of citizens	<i>Public debates</i>
		<i>Public meetings</i>
		<i>Referendum</i>
Very large	Active participation	<i>Legislative initiative</i>
		<i>Partnerships</i>

Source: own processing after Mădălina Voican, *The principle of consulting citizens in solving problems of special interest*, Revista de Drept Public, no. 4/2006, Universul Juridic Publishing House, 2006, pp. 166-167

Regarding the participation of citizens in the field of public administration, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) outlined the existence of three levels, taking into account the type of interaction between public authorities and citizens: *information, consultation and active participation*. (OECD Public Management Policy Brief, p. 2001)

The first stage of the decision-making process, the information activity consists in the fact that the citizens are communicated information regarding the activity of the public institution, without them showing a high degree of involvement. It reflects the transparency of the decision-making process, as citizens can obtain information that allows them to carry out an analysis of the various sectors of public policy and an assessment of the possible consequences of these policies on those sectors. At the same time, citizens are being told whether the promises made by the Government are being kept. The information thus becomes a norm derived from the democratic system. (Preda et al., p. 17)

By *consulting* the citizens, they are much more involved, as this stage allows them to express their opinions on certain issues in the community, in addition to simply informing. The public's reaction to the proposed public solutions or decisions is taken into account, the communication between it and the public institution being in the form of a two-way street (the public institution requests information and the public provides this information on a public issue).

Active participation is at a higher level and involves the citizens to adopt an attitude that reflects maturity, initiative and dedication to the decision-making process. The dominant feature of active participation is the shaping of a partnership between citizens and the public institution. Preda et al., p. 18)

The methods of consultation and participation can be divided into two categories - deliberative and non-deliberative (see Table no. 3):

Table no. 3. Methods of consultation and participation of citizens in the decision-making process

DELIBERATIVE METHODS	NON-DELIBERATIVE METHODS
Screenwriting workshops	Public hearings
Seminars, conferences	Hearings at the institution's headquarters
Brainstorming	Advisory committees
The public cafe	Focus groups
Public debates	Online message boards
Joint working groups	Open hours
Citizens' symposium	Opinion polls
Citizens' Summit	Written suggestions from the citizen
Deliberative forums	The local referendum

Source: own processing after Alina Inayeh et al., *Public decision in the 21st century. Practical guide for citizen involvement in the public decision-making process*, Resource Center for public participation - CeRe, Bucharest, 2008, p. 45

The deliberative methods favor the discussions between the participants in the public decision-making, the holding of debates on certain topics or subjects that interest both parties. The advantage of these methods is that at the end of the discussions on the issues a consensus can be reached.

Non-deliberative methods make it possible to collect information from the public, allowing a careful examination of issues. However, they do not support the debates and do not aim to reach a consensus. (Inayeh et al., p. 45)

VI. PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION - CITIZENS RELATION

In any field there is an audience in favor of which certain activities are carried out. The relation with this public involves a constant effort to achieve and maintain a mutual understanding between the organization and those with whom it comes into contact. (Şuta, Nicolae, p. 128)

Being considered an instrument of concrete law enforcement, the local public administration has now become an organizational structure that actively participates in the lives of citizens and is interested in solving the problems they face. The administration has as a fundamental duty the realization of inter-human communication, it cannot limit this obligation to the simple transmission of information or to the promotion of a policy that aims only at the image. The interests of the citizen must be understood, the administration being obliged to identify various ways to respond to its main needs. In this context, civil servants acquire, in addition to the quality of specialists in the field, a series of skills that facilitate the understanding of the problems that citizens have. (Oprean, 2001, p. 251)

The image that citizens form of public organizations is a very important topic for managers, for the media, for politicians, but also for people interested in the performance of public institutions. Often, people's perception of a public institution is not a positive one.

Most of the time, public institutions are cataloged in an unfavorable way. Citizens have suspicions about the way in which civil servants exercise their function, considering that they only pursue their own interests and want to obtain certain benefits at the expense of others. Public institutions and, implicitly, their image, is associated with the political dimension, for this reason being considered less fair and ethical.

There are several variables that influence the perception of civil society towards public administration, among them: the quality of services provided, the ethical behavior of officials, the influence of the media, organizational policies and the promotion of citizen participation. (Hosu et al., pp. 74-75)

Decision-making must be seen in the form of a partnership with the citizen, who is the main beneficiary of the solutions adopted. This process, carried out by the officials and applied by the executive, must represent the interests of the people in the community above the own interests of the civil servants, thus contributing to the understanding of the purpose that the public administration has through its mission.

The citizen-public administration relation should be governed by attributes such as: honesty, fairness, kindness, high level of training of officials.

In the specialized works, the citizen is considered as the most important person in relation to a public institution, a person who is the very mission of the activity of public administration and who must be part of that activity. This is also the reason why at the level of public institutions there must be an effective communication between officials, executive and citizens, within the administration process.

Collaboration between citizens and public administration can be extended by involving non-governmental organizations in the process of solving community problems. Local public administrations that really respond to the concerns and interests of citizens, maintain relations with NGOs and initiate partnerships with them, in order to achieve certain community goals. In addition to such collaborations, there are a number of actions that facilitate relations between citizens and civil servants, such as: receiving the public, communicating with them, informing and guiding them, as well as recognizing the importance that every citizen has, all these being key elements of the public administration-citizen relationship. Providing efficient services, proper relation with the public, but also adopting the right behavior contributes to building a cooperative relation between the mentioned entities. (Oprean, 2001, pp. 252-254)

Information is vital for democracy, which is inconceivable if the public did not have free access to information. An obstacle for democratic societies is precisely the lack of transparency in political life and the act of governing. This is one of the reasons why citizens are reluctant to trust politicians and rulers. (Pohoată, p.121)

To overcome this shortcoming, a series of principles are recommended that should govern the public administration-citizen relation: (Mendel, pp. 2-4)

- The principle of access to information held by public authorities (exceptions must be established) so that it can be easily obtained by citizens;
- The principle of publishing information of public interest, being necessary that the authorities do not provide this information only when it is requested by citizens;
- The principle of open government or administrative transparency, which aims to promote the strengthening of civic education and open governance, based on transparency, but also to inform the public about its rights.

VII. CONCLUSIONS

Against the background of the above, we can conclude that the investigation of various studies and doctrinal sources in the field of public management and public administration has made it possible to conduct a comprehensive analysis of the relationship between public administration and citizens, identifying the significant role of the latter in the process of drafting and adopting public decisions.

First of all, analyzing the doctrinal opinions expressed in the field, we found the existence of two criteria for delimiting the participants in the decision-making process - how to involve them and the administrative level on which the participant is located. According to the first criterion, we identified that there are participants in the decision-making process in the public administration directly involved civil servants, indirectly involved civil servants and consulted citizens and / or specialists directly and / or indirectly involved. Then, according to the second classification criterion, a distinction is made between civil servants from the central public administration and civil servants from the local public administration, as participants in the decision-making process.

Regarding the way in which the personnel from the public administration contributes to the substantiation of the public decision, the carried out study allowed to identify its role. At the level of the administrative apparatus, in the decision-making process participate both the leaders of the administrative structures and other persons who hold management positions within them having decision-making attributions, but also persons who do not have the right to decide but have specialized training in the field of the decision to be elaborated. The quality of the decision-making process depends on the qualities, training and knowledge of decision-makers, which denotes the fundamental role they play in developing a quality decision-making model.

With regard to citizen participation in the substantiation of public decisions, it should be noted that this is a true proof of democracy in society. Knowing exactly the real social needs, the citizens, as the main beneficiaries of the decision, contribute, through participation, to the choice of that appropriate decision-making variant for solving public problems. This justifies the need for active participation in the decision-making process in public administration, in the absence of citizen involvement the receptivity of public system decision-makers to social requirements being low.

We found out about the forms of citizen participation that they differ depending on the phases of the decision-making process, namely informational and consultative participation, participation in decision-making and participation in execution. Depending on their degree of involvement, the main ways of involving citizens in the process of substantiating public decisions are represented by informing citizens, consulting them and actively participating. The *information* activity consists in the fact that the citizens are communicated information regarding the activity of the public institution, without them showing a high degree of involvement. By *consulting* the citizens, the public's reaction to the proposed public solutions or decisions is taken into account, the communication

between it and the public institution being constituted in the aspect of a double meaning (the public institution requests information and the public provides this information on a public problem). *Active participation* involves citizens adopting an attitude that reflects maturity, initiative and dedication to the decision-making process, shaping a partnership between citizens and the public institution.

Overall, we can conclude that the public administration-citizen relation requires a constant effort to achieve and maintain a mutual understanding, requiring it to be governed by attributes such as: honesty, fairness, kindness, high level of training of civil servants.

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