

## PUBLIC RELATIONS & DEVELOPMENT COMMUNICATION IN THE ROMANIAN NATIONAL AND REGIONAL CONTEXT

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**Abstract:** The paper aims to highlight the role of public relations and communication in order to increase the capability of innovation & development. The crisis revealed that communication between research, development and / or innovation organizations and business world, between scientists and society is very important in the promotion of results of research, development and innovation activities as well as their consequences in the community and private life. The concept of “Development communication” is presented and its specific adaptation in the regional context too. The paper presents the society’s benefits provided by public relations & communication and their role played in the improvement of the efficiency of the national / regional development & innovation projects, of the technological transfer and innovation activities and of public information as well.

### 1. Introduction

In the Western countries, the late eighteenth century industrial revolution has correlated progress with economic development and the nineteenth century scientism promoted science as the engine of human progress. Accordingly, up to the middle of the past century, the scientism empowered all the scientific explanations, solutions and accomplishments with an absolute authority beyond any doubt or questioning.

Even if some factors have changed, since the Second World War the concept of development has often been conceived in strictly economic terms. It was thought to follow an evolutionary process that commenced from basic commodity suppliers, through capital accumulation to industrialization, in turn leading to urbanization and “modernization”. Development paradigms of modernization and industrialization have often resulted in the destruction of indigenous peoples’ political, economic, social, cultural, education, health, spiritual and knowledge systems as well as extraction of their natural resources. Specific examples of disconnect between dominant development paradigms and local societies include:

- local societies have often been regarded as “backward, primitive and uncivilized”, where their “development” is understood to be their assimilation into the so-called “civilized world.”
- local cultures and values are seen to be contradictory to the values of the market economy, such as the accumulation of profit, hyper consumption and competitiveness. Indigenous peoples are seen as “obstacles” to progress because their lands and territories are rich in resources and indigenous peoples are not willing to freely dispose of them.

The pursuit of economic growth at all costs is destructive for all humanity and the planet. The focus on GDP as a main measure of progress has distorted the true meaning of progress and wellbeing. For example, damage to ecosystems, irreversible loss in biological diversity and the erosion of cultural and linguistic diversity and indigenous traditional knowledge, are not factored into the balance sheet. Such ecological, cultural, social and spiritual indicators, which provide more comprehensive measurements of national and global situations, are seldom used. [1]

These conditions we may recognize in the Balkan region too. After the Second World War, most of the Balkan countries have been integrated within the Communist area. The scientism and positivism have been kept integrated within the totalitarian atheistic regime ideology. The “primitive” societies had to be integrated in the international Communist system officially considered to be the most progressive in the world. Science was used to back up the political

directives. The only viable truths and solutions, permanently perfectible, might be obtained using the scientific research. The central leadership considered the economic development as a fundamental imperative, within the industrialization represented an essential objective. Local cultures and values were seen to be contradictory to the values of the planned economy. The engineering sciences development was favoured to the detriment of humanities. The economy and society as assembly took over unconditionally the results delivered by the research-design entities. The communication was unilateral because the totalitarian regime didn't predict any feed-back on the behalf of the economic units (state-owned), local authorities, even less a public reaction. National promotion of the results aimed to present the justification and efficiency of the political decisions that determined them. On international scale the participation at different events and meetings was extremely limited, being parts of propagandistic efforts of the political system, sustaining the Communist vision superiority against the Capitalist one.

In the rest of the world, the changes of the world political configuration and soon, the mass-media diversification have generated a communicational explosion. Concurrently, some undesired effects of the technical-scientific revolution such as the problems in nuclear energy use, pollution etc., besides the increase of funds allocated to the research activity, had forced the scientific community to present its achievements, opinions, demands and options more frequent *ad extra*. The communication and its means had to diversify depending on the message, aims and addressees, first the population and local authorities.

The globalizing process in progress and the requirements of the sustainable development have attracted more and more interest for the scientific knowledge and for the innovation from the economic and business environment. Innovations can be in the form of new products or services, or cost-reducing process improvements, or innovative business models and methods. The benefits of innovation occur in all aspects of the profit / loss statement: innovators drive additional sales volume, achieve price premiums and reduce costs through process improvements. In addition to the financial benefits, innovation goes hand-in-hand with sustainable development initiatives, as both require progressive leadership and an appetite for change, combined with a tolerance of experimentation and some risk.

These evolutions have also featured the necessity of communication fluidization, on one hand, between specialists with different professional background and on the other hand, between those first ones and unqualified people, encouraging the appearance of a new interdisciplinary specialization generically denominated science communicators.

## 2. The Romanian Situation

### 2.1. Recent Historical Context

The events occurred in the late 80s of the last century have caused radical transformations in Communist Balkan states as well. The transition towards the market economy, the economic situation and the political options imprinted the development coordination and funding. The new context dictated to science community the communication necessity on both of national and international plan because:

- people without scientific knowledge have nowadays the possibility of influencing the research & development activities. The offer/results as well as the demand/requirements must be presented, sustained and argued in front of politicians, economic agents and business investors, central and local authorities, mass-media and – sometimes - the local communities or the entire population. Therefore, it became necessary for them to get easily and correctly the messages of the scientific community.
- world-wide, scientists communicate between them more fluently, within the same field of activity as well as between the different research areas, due to the continuous evolution of interdisciplinary researches, being obliged to get up to date permanently with the development of communication means.

The lack of ability to present the results and the own problems of the research & development organizations damaged their public image as well as their field of activity, hindering

the communication efficiency and thus, favouring under-funding tendencies and minimizing the role played by sciences in Romanian society and economy.

Moreover the Romanian mass-media (with very few exceptions) don't have qualified science journalists in order to present professional inquiries, reports and interviews in the field.

The latest developments showed off implicitly or explicitly necessity of the science communicators' presence in the area of research services in Romania, in mass-media respectively

## 2.2 Regional Policy. National Romanian Aspects

Once the introduction of communism, in 1950, the territory of Romania was reorganized from the administrative point of view. The 58 counties have been replaced with 28 regions. In 1968 it was returned to traditional form of organization, this time comprising 39 counties and, separately, municipality Bucharest. At the same time, totalitarian regime has imposed "democratic centralism" principle according to which local institutions are located (in any problem) under central institutions and working after their orders. Therefore, regional development was directed by the central authorities, the local ones being only performers.

The issue came into focus after 1989. In 1995, the strategy for Romania's accession to the European Union highlighted the importance of the regional policies *The Green Paper. Regional Development Policy in Romania*, Government of Romania and the European Commission was elaborated in 1997 and *The Law 151 on regional development in Romania* was adopted in 1998. So there were established the 8 development regions. The most competitive regions are in central and western country, with higher development level even between the two world wars. They are also physically closer to the markets in Western Europe, quickly assimilating European spirit (tolerance, decentralization, competition, etc against a more expressive ethnic diversity compared to other regions).

*Regional development* is a new concept (1999) that aims at stimulating and diversifying economic activities, stimulating investments in the private sector, contributing to decreasing unemployment and, last but not least, a concept that would lead to an improvement in the living standards. In order to apply the regional development strategy, eight development regions were set up, spreading throughout the whole territory of Romania. Each development region comprises several counties. Development regions are not territorial-administrative entities, do not have legal personality, being the result of an agreement between the county and the local boards.

*Regional development policy* is an ensemble of measures planned and promoted by the local and central public administration authorities, having as partners different actors (private, public, volunteers) in order to ensure a dynamic and lasting economic growth, through the effective use of the local and regional potential, in order to improve living conditions. The main areas regarded by the regional policies are: development of enterprises, the labour market, attracting investments, development of the SMEs sector, improvement of infrastructure, the quality of the environment, rural development, health, education, culture.

*The main objectives of the regional development policies* are as follows:

- to reduce the existing regional disparities, especially by stimulating the well-balanced development and the revitalization of the disadvantaged areas (lagging behind in development) and by preventing the emergence of new imbalances;
- to prepare the institutional framework in order to comply with the integration criteria into the EU structures and to ensure access to the financial assistance instruments (the Structural Funds and the Cohesion Fund of the EU);
- to correlate the governmental sector development policies and activities at the level of regions by stimulating the inter-regional, internal and international, cross-border cooperation which contributes to the economic development and is in accordance with the legal provisions and with the international agreements to which Romania is a party;

*The principles* that the elaboration and the application of the *development policies* are based on:

- decentralization of the decision making process, from the central/governmental level to the level of regional communities;
- partnership among all those involved in the area of regional development;

- planning – utilization process of resources (through programs and projects) in view of attaining the established objectives;
- co-financing – the financial contribution of the different actors involved in the accomplishment of the regional development programs and projects [2]

### 2.3. Regional Policy. Trans-national Aspects

As a result of enlargement of the European Union, there has been a substantial widening of regional disparities within the Union. The Cohesion policy therefore focuses on promoting a balanced and sustainable development of the territory of the Union, by involving regional and local actors as well as social partners particularly, in areas where greater proximity is essential: investment in innovation, the knowledge economy, the new information and communication technologies, employment, human capital, entrepreneurship, support for Small to Medium Enterprises and access to risk capital financing.

The following countries stated Cohesion Policy as one of their priorities for 2014 - 2020 (50% are Balkan countries) [3]:

- *Croatia*
- Czech Republic
- Estonia
- Lithuania
- *Romania*
- *Slovenia*

In Romania, The Ministry of Regional Development and Public Administration (MRDPA) provides financial and technical management of regional development programs and projects, cross-border and transnational cooperation, administrative capacity development, urban rehabilitation, including urban transport, European spatial planning, of those financed by the European Regional Development Fund, under the Regional Operational Program, by the European Social Fund, under the Operational Program Administrative Capacity Development, of programs and projects financed under the European Territorial Cooperation objective, by the ERDF, of the European Neighborhood and Partnership Instrument – the cross-border cooperation component, as well as other European financing instruments specific to its areas of activity, in accordance with the legislation in force, financed by PHARE funds, in the extended decentralized system.

The important place of innovation in the regional development (Figure 1) led to the situation that many cross-border cooperation development projects are run by innovation entities – members of The National Technology Transfer & Innovation Network or RDI organizations.

How regional investment is used



Source: European Commission

Figure 1 [4]

### 3. Innovation in the Romanian context

In the Romanian economic context and under the actual global conditions but also on perspective, the getting out of crisis demands a more fluent and accessible communication between the scientific community, the economic and business environments and the society.

In full accordance with the current orientations of world and European research, development & innovation policies, Romania's Government recognizes the strategic importance of the scientific research and technological development domains for obtaining and maintaining a sustainable competitive advantage for our country, at both European and global level. In this respect, one of the strategic objectives for the policies in the field of research, technological development and innovation is a more close correlation of research & development activities with the industrial policy of Romania and the reinforcement of long term connections between the research & development sector and the economic environment, achieved by the development of mechanisms that ensure technology transfer to economy and encouraging the participation of the private sector in research, development and innovation activities.

The infrastructure development at was promoted at national scale in the fields of services for innovation and technology transfer by implementing the program „INFRATECH” (2004 – 2008), launched and coordinated by the Direction for Innovation & Infrastructures of the former National Authority for Scientific Research, approved by the Government Decision 128 / 2004. The projects were aiming to settle technology and business incubators, technology transfer centres, technology information centres, science & technology parks, technology & business incubators as well as offices matching the industry demand with the technological research supply. While the Government Decision 406 / 2003 provides the legal basis for methodology that enforces the assessment, evaluation and operation of the innovation and technology transfer institutions, the Government Ordinance 14 / 2002 (approved by the Law 50 / 2003) enforces the existence of science & technology parks.

The National Technology Transfer & Innovation Network is an initiative of the former National Authority for Scientific Research as a result of the application of the program „INFRATECH”. The providers of services in the area of innovation and technology transfer are grouped in the specialized network containing 54 accredited entities: 14 technology transfer centres, 20 technology information centres, 16 technology & business incubators and 4 science & technology parks. All these 54 entities are operating under the Government Decision 406 / 2003. Besides, there are more science & technology parks under development, set-up on the basis of Government Ordinance 14 / 2002 approved by Law 50 / 2003. The National Technology Transfer & Innovation Network is evenly covering the national area with important nodes in Bucharest, Craiova, Arad, Cluj-Napoca, Deva, Iași, Râmnicu-Vâlcea, Timisoara, Tulcea, Brasov and Sf. Gheorghe.

The National Technology Transfer & Innovation Network is a national reference point for the principal stakeholders in the transfer of knowledge and technology in order to:

- support the socioeconomic development, stimulating the innovation and the technological transfer, attracting investments in order to turn to advantage the research, development & innovation activities and the human resources in the field;
- increase the visibility of the research, development & innovation units and the exploitation of the research, development & innovation results;
- improve the competitiveness of the small & medium enterprises and their innovation processes through the development of supply services for transfer of knowledge and technology;
- promote a market for the research, development & innovation results in all sectors of the Romanian economy;
- promote the national exchange of information, expertise, methodologies and best practice;
- stimulate partnerships and networking.

The beneficiaries of The National Technology Transfer & Innovation Network are economic agents, research, development & innovation units and innovative small & medium enterprises.

The entities of the National Technology Transfer & Innovation Network Romanian also are members of the Romanian Association for Technology Transfer and Innovation – ARoTT – a professional, non-governmental and non-profit organization of the technological transfer and innovation profile units. Its first purpose is promoting and protecting business environment of the technological transfer entities and innovative business from Romania in order to improve the activity of the members.

Besides the activities concerning scientific research and technological development, international research, development & innovation collaboration and development of institutions, human resources and infrastructures, the area of responsibilities of the former National Authority for Scientific Research included several activities that are further achieved by the entities of The National Technology Transfer & Innovation Network: innovation and technology transfer; diffusion and dissemination of research, development & innovation results; public promotion and awareness of research, development & innovation activities.

As far as you can notice, among these objectives there are science communication activities which can help to:

- increase the visibility of the research, development & innovation units;
- increase the capitalization of the research, development & innovation results;
- improve the relationships between the research, development & innovation organizations, economic agents and society,

in correlation with the attendance and/or organizing of exhibitions and dissemination actions, both internally and internationally.

In our country, the authorities for scientific research has initiated different events on national and regional scale in order to improve visibility of the results of the Romanian research, to multiply the contacts between the entities involved in the technological transfer and innovation activities - Romanian and foreign organizations.

Yearly, during the International Technical Fair from Bucharest, The Romanian Research Salon and The International Salon of Inventions, Research and New Technologies INVENTIKA have been organized ever since 2007.

The National Technology Transfer & Innovation Network entities attend to these events by:

- specific presentations;
- presentations concerning the organizations that include them;
- accomplishment of: technological brokerage events, symposia, round tables, workshops, partnerships enhancing etc.

The technological brokerage events organized by IPA CIFATT Craiova and the workshops titled „Social-economical interferences on the edge of innovation” accomplished by CIT IRECSO Bucharest have become known and awaited. For some years, technological brokerage sessions became trans-national due to the organizers’ efforts to promote the trans-boundary, inter-regional and European collaborations. The seminars became turning points for the debating of problems of the entities involved in technological transfer and innovation on national scale, for their professional development.

On national regional scale, yearly, the Regional Research Salons are held in order to promote the local specific connections and they are included by wider actions favoring the meeting between the technological transfer and innovation entities, the stakeholders of the regional economic & business media, the local authorities and the scientific community.

Another event (since 2003) – with international attendance - is the annual Open Forum for Innovation and Technological Transfer, as an instrument meant to link the actors on the research, development & innovation scene, the offer and the demand, the strategies and the ministerial policy to the concrete needs of the small & medium enterprises, meanwhile trying to facilitate contacts to foreign partners, of the European Union in particular. The Open Forum combines both a virtual internet platform and a real space for communication and interaction (conferences and events).

Also the state authorities for scientific research organized Romanian research, development & innovation results promotion activities especially in the European Union. Every time, in the last few



years, Romania was one of the first three countries rewarded as far as the receiving prizes were concerned. Romania has also been internationally appreciated and the participants' number and their consistency has constantly been increasing.

The contribution of the science communicators to the success of these events may consist in:

- the appropriate promotion of the image of the research, development & innovation organizations and their activities to the interested parts' demands;
- the improvement of the presentation means of the research, development & innovation activities results in order to enhance partnerships and new connections;
- the communication, knowledge and technologies transfer enhancement in order to inform the economic agents and society on the research, development & innovation activities.

Also science communicators' activity feedback may be an extremely important source of information for both research, development & innovation units and the technological transfer and innovation entities aiming for a more consistent, accurate and rapid correlation of their activities with the immediate and actual problems of the economy and society. Therefore the entities of The National Technology Transfer & Innovation Network provide the optimal conditions for science communicators activity in the benefit of the scientific community, economy and society.

#### 4. Development Communication

Communication sciences were firmly imposed in the area of humanities, providing a field of research whose reserves seem inexhaustible. Evidence is, in this respect, the impressive number of subordinate works in this field and hence the growing number of researchers who approach it from different perspectives. The emergence and expansion of this autonomous field merely followed the trends of modern society, where communication has become one of the key concepts. Besides this and in immediate connection with the same weight may be included concepts like: identity, image, relationship, mediation or significance.

Mentioned trends have generated interest not only to scientists on the area in question. Another consequence, equally important, is the profession of communicator (PR specialist, PR manager, science communicator or image counselor). Today, in the developed countries, it is well understood that creation and promotion of the own identity, interest, both to promote the own performances critical conditions the professional success of an individual or the economic success of an organization.

In recent decades, a new communication branch has emerged: development communication. Development communication has been defined in several ways by economic development experts, sociologists and communication experts. The terminology development communication originated in Asia, the definitions given by the communication experts of this region gained currency. Definitions differ depending on the definers view of development. Nora Quebral (1975) defined development communication as the art and science of human communication applied to the speedy transformation of a country from poverty to a dynamic state of economic growth and makes possible greater economic and social equality and the larger fulfilment of human potential. Quebral describes the genesis of the term Development Communication and its parameters which grew out of the field of agricultural communication. The term was coined to include under it apart from agricultural development, areas of national development such as population, nutrition, health education housing and employment etc. Development communication was considered an appropriate term to describe the scope, direction and structure of the discipline. [5]

Three main ideas which define the philosophy of development communication and make it different from general communication are: Development communication is purposive communication, it is value-laden; and it is pragmatic. In the development context, a tacit positive value is attached to what one communicates about, which shall motivate the people for social change. Development communication is goal-oriented. The ultimate goal of development communication is a higher quality of life for the people of a society by social and political change. We should not view the goal of development communication purely in economic terms, but also in terms of social, political, cultural, and moral values that make a person's life whole, and that enable a person to attain his or

her full potential. The goal of development communication in a specific society will be influenced by the ends and values of that society.

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Development communication has to deal with two types of audience: i) the communicators comprising development bureaucracy, media practitioners and professionals, and ii) the people i.e. the audience who can be informed or uninformed; educated or semi-literate or literate.

Wilbur Schramm (1964) was the first to recognize that communication could play an important role in the national development of the third world countries. He believed that mass media could better the lives of people by supplementing the information resources and exposing people for learning opportunities. Schramm's conceptualization of the interaction between mass communication and development became the focus of many development programs. He was occupied with the practical problems of using mass communication to promote economic growth and social development in third world countries. He conceptualized a relationship between development communication and economic growth, which has been the main guiding paradigm for development programs. He suggested that as economic activity spreads, knowledge must be gathered more broadly, information shared widely and transferred swiftly. For this the developing nations must be prepared to support enormous increase in the day-to-day communication within the system.

The specific concept of development communication identifies information, education and communication (identified by the acronym IEC) about development plans. Development theorists and practitioners realized that merely disseminating information about development plans would not result in development as UNESCO termed it, nations needed communication (IEC) for development within the cultural matrix. Later it was realized that the original formula of information, education and communication for development programs was itself insufficient to achieve the desired results. In addition, people need motivation to accept development. Development motivation and Development Awareness are essential aspects of development communication (Narula Uma, 1994).

The aims of the EU *regional policy*:

- help each region achieve its full potential
- improve competitiveness and employment by investing at regional level in areas of high growth potential, with an added value for the EU as a whole
- bring living standards in the countries that have joined the EU since 2004 up to the EU average as quickly as possible.

Regional inequalities can be due to many factors, including:

- longstanding handicaps imposed by *geographic remoteness or sparse population*
- more recent *social and economic change*
- the *legacy* of formerly centrally-planned economic systems
- combinations of these and other things.

The impact of these disadvantages is frequently evident in:

- social deprivation
- poor-quality schools
- higher levels of unemployment
- inadequate infrastructure.

Relating to these considerations, we can see the similarity with the Asian situation that determined the apparition of development communication.

Regional policy is about investing in people. The idea is for regional policy to dovetail with the EU's agenda to promote growth and jobs by:



- *making countries and regions more attractive for investments* by improving accessibility, providing quality services (such as high-speed internet) and preserving environmental potential
- encouraging innovation, entrepreneurship and the knowledge economy, pushing regions to capitalize on their strengths and make a more effective and better combined use of European national and regional public funds, developing 'smart specialisation' strategies for growth
- *creating more and better jobs* by attracting more people into employment, reversing the 'brain-drain', improving workers' adaptability and increasing investment in human capital.

## 5. Conclusions

Even if the terminology & study of development communication were originated in Asia, these can be extended and customized for the Balkan region in European Union today. The EU may be one of the richest parts of the world, but there are large differences both between countries and inside individual countries. However, the dynamic effects of EU membership, coupled with a vigorous and targeted investment policy, can bring results.

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