

## The Practical Value of the Discipline of Public Relations in Society

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### Abstract

**Hypothesis** - Public Relations is the discipline that deals with the way of communicating the message to public opinion in order to influence the opinions, thoughts and attitudes of the before mentioned, in order to achieve high results for the object of the field for which it is being worked. Based on this definition, we have to underline the practical value of this discipline in many directions, in the society of a given country, mainly in Albania.

**The purpose of the work** - is that through evidence, mainly of theoretical analysis, but in many cases also practical observations in Albanian, to prove the hypothesis raised.

**Methodology:** The work will be based on several study methods. Inductive methods will be used the most, going from specific facts to general conclusions, but also the use of deductive methods, starting from general conclusions to deduct conclusions on special problems and consequences, through the analysis of special cases in Albania, which have addressed specific issues with great importance on the continuation of the work in question.

**Keywords:** Citizens - Right to Information - Communication - Public Relations – Governance.

### Introduction

This work is carried out to validate the hypothesis raised in which the field of public relations, which is a discipline that is essentially the way of relaying a message to public opinion in order to influence the opinions, thoughts and attitudes of the before mentioned, in order to achieve great results on the object of the field for which it is being worked on. What is required to be proven is that this discipline has values that influence the development of society primarily in enhancing the reputation of the organization, government, business, which also results in increased profits or improved image of public entities. Another valued topic is the effective relationship built between citizens and the public institution, all of this is in the function of development in general. All these values are very well alternated and have a linear development curve when the staff of the institution is prepared, using techniques and development tools. Relationship with the public is also closely linked to the right of information, which is explicitly provided in Article 23 of the Constitution. It is specifically stated that everyone has the right to be informed about the documents of government institutions. Public relations also has value as a profession that brings significant practical value to institutions in society.

### Historical Overview

During World War I, a new profession would be born which would be named “Public Relations”. This humanitarian discipline has as its main contributing representatives

Ivy Lee and Eduard Bernays.

Ivy Lee (1877-1934) on the historical origins of this field is known as the main founder of the public relations we know today. Lee is an economics graduate at Princeton University. In his career he co-operated with a man named George Parker who started the public relations firm in the US. This firm acted based on the principles and values of authenticity, transparency, public interest and accuracy of information. The applicability of these values meant that the information provided by the firm was real and objective. The firm's main objective was to keep the public involved through the information they provided. The aim was to create an alternating relationship between public opinion and development organizations that could be businesses, public authorities, government institutions, etc.

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Under the veil of history Ivy Lee is presented in the media with a declaration that he would then call the "Declaration of Principles". The Declaration had in its focus the obligations that public sector practitioners should be two main media and public elements. Here Lee puts great importance to extensively explain the activities of various media organizations in order to improve the relationship between the two elements. The importance of this declaration through its principles paved the way for the development of public relations in the coming years in the so-called modern theories of this social discipline.

Eduard Bernays (1891-1995) is considered as the "father of public relations" by the contemporary opinion. Bernays was influenced by his uncle Professor Sigmund Freud on the development of the concepts of public relations. He made a series of books on P.R.'s field, such as "Public Opinion Consciousness", "Propaganda Engineering", "The Engineering of Consent", The P.R. is an applied social science that manages and manipulates the public use of sociology, psychology for the most part and similar disciplines as well.

The two founders of the M.P field through their contribution played an important role for the modern P.R. They constantly lobbied for a close alignment of this profession with propaganda. In the book Propaganda, Bernays would say that "Conscious and intelligent manipulation of public opinion is an important element in a democratic society." (Miller, 2008), "Those who manipulate the hidden mechanisms of society constitute an invisible government, which in our country which hold the true power.

### **Following the history of Public Relations in Albania**

Year 2008 would mark the year of creation for the idea to establish the Ministry of Information. The reason why this institutional initiative was taken was to inform the public about all the activities that the government carried out with all its connections. This ministry had a structure consisting of the Cabinet of the Minister, Directorate of Public Relations, Directorate of Services, Directorate of Internet and Translation.

The activity of the **Public Relations Directorate** consisted on summarising information and publication of government activities. This directorate was intended to initiate the coordination of the works carried out by the Prime Minister and the Council of Ministers on various governmental issues which are an essential factor in the

development of Albania's internal policies and external sphere. A dominant element in the pursuit of the public's intention in this ministry was the press spokesman. In this way the press gang kept constant, regular, public contacts with the public. The tools used to disseminate the information were by email, various bulletins or third party requests.

Another directory that was important for the distribution of information was the service directory. This directorate aimed to make the communication with a broader audience through ministry official website. So all government activity was like an open window on the web site.

Following is the translation department which was intended to carry out the activities of the Prime Minister and the Council of Ministers on the web in two foreign languages. The official information was translated into English and French.

However, in the course of the years, mainly in 2000, the Ministry of Information was transformed into an Information Department that itself had its own sectors such as the Information Sector, the Analysis and Monitoring Sector and the Sector of Translation. In daily work, the Information Sector had the same goal, about informing the public about government activities.

The Analysis and Monitoring sector was involved in receiving information and processing them before coming to public opinion through the press spokesman. The monitoring process consisted on observing how the media interpreted the information relayed to them from the Directorate of Information, as well as from the press spokesman of the Prime Minister's office. Thus, if problems with the transparency of media news on government activity would arise, the sector was obliged to take measures. As a result of having an accurate, objective, truthful coverage of the news, the sector maintained constant contact with the various media outlets in the country. The Translation Sector was involved with the translation of information coming from the Directorate. Types of information were usually press releases, meetings, speeches by the Prime Minister, etc.

With the passing of the years exactly in 2002 by the decision-makers of the time found it reasonable that the Department of Information changed its name to Directorate of Information and Public Relations. In addition to the primary purpose of information as explained above, another concept is added to the sector's work. This time it had to do with public relations mostly in works submitted by the people. So in addition to the before mentioned functions of this directory they now started taking into account various public letters that had all the structural links of the government. This sector came to the task of listening to the citizens and solve the various problems that they had by implementing the legislation in force.

The Directorate of Public Relations at the Prime Minister's office has continued to hold this institutional designation for years by respecting and implementing its functional purpose.

But in 2013, the government of that period proposed a new public communication work according to a new model of information, and this time it was about an international information model.

So if ever, any government of the past reflected the information gathered by the ministries and institutions of the country through the model of the directorate of

public relations in the Prime Minister's office, the year 2013 brought a novelty in changing the information model. Consequently, the Prime Minister would work with the model that in each institution will be assigned a special communication advisor who will report to the minister and the director of communication.

The reason for this change comes from the government's initiative to come to the public opinion in the most unified and centralized way in tracking the strategic messages of ministries and the government as a whole.

This new governance model would follow the international model of information transmission to the general public.

Public Relations is the discipline that deals with the way of communicating the message to public opinion in order to influence the opinions and attitudes of the latter in order to achieve high results for the subject of the field for which it is being worked.

Like any other discipline, this discipline has its functional values as well. The functions of this field are wide.

### **Functional Value of Public Relations**

"Public relations are related to reputation - the outcome of what you do, what others say about you."

"Sincere and open information from public institutions, governments, political parties, business companies, associations that provide the press and public with accurate information about the terms of public opinion."

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#### *1) Increasing reputation*

Every company, business, organisation, institution, different government agencies are built for a specific purpose. In this way they have an objective direction in which they carry out their activity. The latter work hard through different strategies to achieve these goals, hence the role of the public relations field. So its role is to build and enhance the reputation of creative organisms.

#### *2) Effective Citizens-Institutions Relationship*

It is important for any institution or company to have its structure in the Public Relations Office. The reception of citizens in the institution gives a positive impact on the latter, which brings about the strengthening of civil-institution relations. From this relationship, promotional effects are created for companies, such as the motivation to work with transparency, objectivity, truthfulness, sincerity, principles and universal value in order to achieve profits for institutional goals.

#### *3) Profitability Effectiveness*

Following the building of the relationship of the two above mentioned parties, institutions present important developments in their creative processes. In order to serve as many citizens as possible, this makes it possible to magnify the means of

conducting their procedures as much as possible, all this would bring an easier path to mutual profit.

#### *4) Interpersonal preparation brings profit growth*

Individuals who deal with the field of public relations should be well-informed in different disciplines. To be equipped with a general knowledge in communications sciences, psychology, sociology, journalism, periodic training of staff in obtaining the latest techniques and in their implementation would increase the level of overall profitability in terms of reputation institutional as well as in profit direction.

### **The right to information, a constitutional and legal right**

The constitution of Albania adopted in 1998 has sanctioned in its Article 23 one of the fundamental human rights concerns the right of information. This provision clearly states that:

- 1) The right to information is guaranteed;
- 2) Everyone has the right, in accordance with the law, to obtain information on the activities of state bodies as well as persons exercising state functions;<sup>1</sup>
- 3) Everyone is given the opportunity to follow the observations of the elected collective bodies. In a legal state, this right is an important principle for the institutional system. In addition to this constitutional provision, there is Law no. 8503 adopted on 30.06.1999 on the "Right to Information on Official Documents" Information may be requested in any public authority that is an administrative body. Article 6 of the aforementioned law states that government bodies are obliged to designate a person or entity responsible for receiving and considering requests about information. While Article 3 clearly defines the forms through which information is taken. They are: verbally, in writing, it is generally not necessary to provide explanations for the reasons to make a request. Every citizen receives a reply to the request made in writing, verbally, electronically.

### **Public Relations as a Profession**

In the world market Public Relations is considered one of the most interesting and most sought after professions in the labour market. Even in Albania, this phenomenon has been positive. This means that this discipline 10 years ago did not have as much importance as it has in recent years. Albanian universities began to be part of the curriculum this field of great importance.

A professor at a western university decided to find the "why" asking his students to answer only with a phrase "why the P.R. should be studying and their answers were fantastic, as there were different reasons why everyone found themselves in this branch. Here are some of them:

*"Find me a business or a person who does not need P.R. and I'll tell you why I should not study Public Relations"*

*"It's an interesting field related to an exciting industry, which is expanding, most likely for university graduates..."*

<sup>1</sup> Article 23 of the Albanian Constitution. 4

*"The world is changing, so I have a lot of desire to study the change..."*

*"PR gives me the opportunity to be creative and use my writing skills with more opportunities for a job and a diploma, which is a bit more than a journalist..."*

*"The world will never run smoothly, and therefore always will need PR..."*

*"PR is a nonlinear, open subject, which includes psychology, maths, writing ... What other school do you offer so much?"*

*"PR is the core function of any modern business. This can affect all aspects of the company's function and therefore, without acknowledging its importance, we address the risk..."*

## **The practical importance of this field in society**

### **1. Interpersonal Skills Abilitation**

Given these personal perceptions and studies that are made for this discipline with such great benefits to institutions, it should be said that it really has practical significance in society. In this context, a discipline that has a diversity of knowledge in other areas that affect a positive outcome in the labour market. It is called a contemporary branch to be able to cope with a large variety of jobs. This is why the world of information and communication has taken an unprecedented development. A branch that gives you the ability to face challenges that require interpersonal skills capability, professional and human integrity to train in different social areas.

### **2. Lack of true professionals of P.R.**

In the Albanian labour market there is a gap in the way of perceiving the importance that needs to be given to genuine professionals in this field. This means that state and private institutions have introduced individuals who come from different academic backgrounds. So, from the arguments that have been made so far in this work, this area is of great value to the state and private organizations, this is in its core the demand for profit or increase of reputation of the institution in general. Under these conditions, true professionals should be affirmed and periodically trained in this broader field that with their interpersonal skills and their potential they can help to maximize profit and reputation in general. On the other hand, we should take international models as is the Code of Ethics of P.R.S.A. This code can be considered as a public relations Bible for many professionals. Although not a model followed by Albanian, it can serve as a guide for Albanian public relations practitioners what are the standards they should follow in their daily work. The main obligations of public relations professionals are related to "ethics, standard of truth, accuracy, justice and accountability to the public".

### **3. Increase transparency in society**

Given the practice, it should be noted that in Albania the level of transparency for the realization of the procedures for implementation of the objectives of the institutions remains low. Under these rigorous implementation conditions, the assessment of P.R.'s field in society is an essential factor for increasing the level of transparency in institutional environments. This would bring quality services, responsibility, and correctness. As a result public opinion will take a new model in the way of serving the citizens.

### **4. Alternate fields with P.R.**

P.R.'s field is related to many other social disciplines, psychology, sociology, journalism,

and so on. But there is a close link between P.R. and marketing. Both help each other in their development. So both have a purpose to influence public opinion to buy goods and services. The marketing tool is advertising, while P.R.'s tool is propaganda, lobbying for a specific goal. Both aim at the audience's attention to maximize profit and reputation of the organization. This clearly sign of a more harmonious work between disciplines. Making developments on these theories on these fields and the different tools for their realization. All this brings about a harmonization of the sciences. In conclusion, it brings an intellectual development of public opinion.

### Conclusions

At the end of the work we conclude the hypothesis that public relations is a discipline that essentially has the message transmitted to public opinion in order to influence the opinions, opinions, and attitudes of the latter in order to achieve high results for the field object for which it is being worked. This discipline has a practical value in society in these aspects: enhancing the reputation of the institution, the effectiveness of public relations and citizens, which have positive effects on profitability or on the image of the institution. Public relations have a proper connection with the right to information. Thus, according to Article 23 of the Constitution of the Republic of Albania, the right to information is sanctioned according to which every citizen has the right to obtain information about official documents in Albanian institutions. In recent years, public relations has become a profession that is in the trend of practical value that is mainly interested in the growth of interpersonal skills, increasing transparency in the relationship between the citizen and the institution or the impact on the harmonization of other areas with this discipline.

### Recommendations

1. Re-conceptualizing Public Relations in the Structural, Functional Aspects, in Albanian Institutions.
2. Evaluation, promotion, motivation of the individuals who have studied in the field of Public Relations.
3. Strengthening the Importance of Public Relations in Institutions.
4. Applying the P.R.S.A. Code of Ethics on institutions.
5. Institutions should be more flexible to provide information according to the law on "the right to information on official documents".

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