
SHORTEST PATHS TO SUCCEED IN ACHIEVING PUBLIC INTEGRITY IN ROMANIA

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Abstract: Public integrity is the value of the public sector that is most difficult to achieve, having its foundation on the other values identified in this paper – legality, transparency, impartiality and responsibility - and summing all the fundamental aspects of the public sector when the discussion is about the ethics of the public sphere. In other words, public integrity is the value of the values in the public domain and it is adequate to investigate the most important public values that faster conduct to a public sphere of integrity from a country. Reasoning in this way, the aim of this paper is to find out the values that play a fundamental role in the Romanian public integrity achievement.

Keywords: *Public integrity, Public values, Legality, Transparency, Impartiality, Responsibility.*

Introduction

The specific values for the public sector represent its foundation and every nation must have well established its own set of ethical values (Bertok, 2000, p. 31). This kind of values are, generally, homogenous as OECD's report, „Trust in Government. Ethics Measures in OECD Countries” shows. It identifies eight principal public values: impartiality (24%); legality (22%), integrity (18%); transparency (14%); efficiency (14%); equality (11%); responsibility (11%); justice (10%) (Ibidem, p. 32). In this context, a clear apology of the needed faces to achieve the integrity value of the Romanian public sector is desired to be offered in this paper.

Excepting the efficiency for the reason that it is automatically acquired in the condition of respecting all the selected values and, also, considering that equality is almost the same value with impartiality, that is a more specific value for the public sector, the public values considered to be the most important ones are chosen: impartiality, legality, integrity, transparency and responsibility.

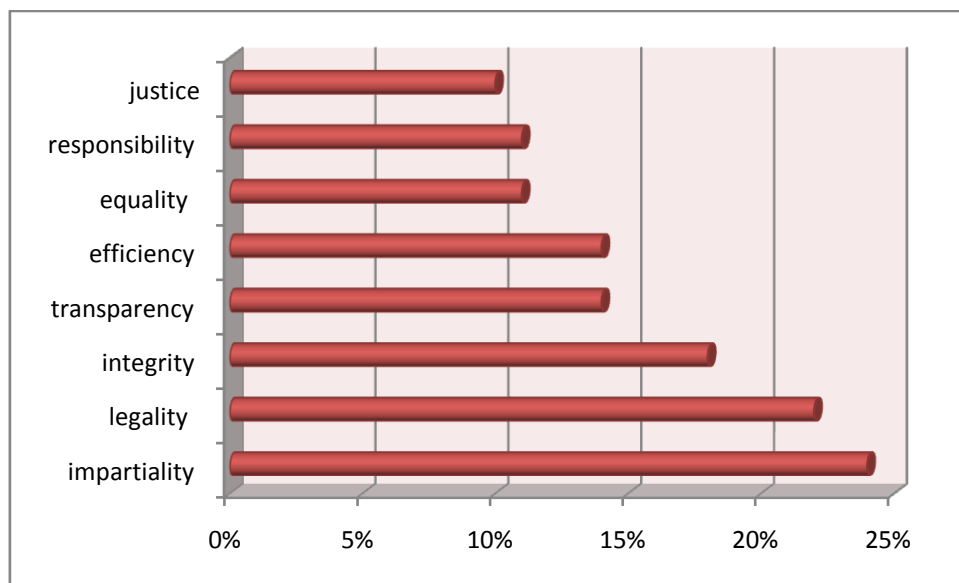


Figure1 – The most important public values for the OECD countries („Trust in Government. Ethics measures in OECD countries”, 2000, p. 32)

Public integrity and its determinant public values

Transparency International – Romania and Pro Democracy Association (2004), in their report, „Local Public Administration Integrity and Transparency”, borders the term of public integrity among the processes of taking decisions, of their implementation, of public money inventory and the public employees’ integrity. In this study, the first level of public integrity is proven through:

- the information about the discussed processes and procedures which are available and accessible to the large public;
- the control and check mechanisms of these processes with the citizens’ participation, citizens/ONGs/business environment/media accession on the national, regional or local regulations; and
- the promotion, check and control mechanisms for public money inventory (Transparency International – Romania, Pro-Democracy Association, 2004, p. 8).

The public employees’ integrity is defined as being the totality of legal regulations, practices, procedures like public actors’ selection, control, promotion or sanction instruments. The integrity indicators given here as examples are: interest conflicts, and incompatibilities (Idem). The decision and implementation processes, nearby the public money inventory, are realised and concrete through the basis till the top public actors’ actions. In conclusion, their integrity is the determinant aspect for the integrity of public ways of action. Hence, in this paper, integrity targets the implementation of those norms and values that are generally accepted on the day by day practice of the public sector’s actors, as it is defined in „Towards a Sound Integrity Framework: Instruments, Processes, Structures and Conditions for Implementation”, realised by OECD (Maesschalck, Beltok, 2009, p. 9). The institutionalization of integrity by means of agencies, laws, practices and ethical codes is generally recognised as being the best option for the corruption limitation in many societies (Sampford et. Al., 2005, p. 96).

Integrity became one of the fundamental conditions for the public sphere to transform into a trustworthy space and to offer an efficient economic and social environment for its citizens; also, the institutions and the mechanisms that promote integrity are more and more considered basis components of a good governance, which is known as having great impact on the macroeconomic performance. Integrity assurance, as it is sustained in „Trust in Government. Ethics Measures in OECD Countries”, realised by OECD (2000), assumes:

- the behaviour of the public actors is consonant with their organizational aims;
- the quotidian business public services are trustworthy;
- the citizens are treated equally on the legality and justice principles;
- the public resources are used correctly, efficiently and effectively; and
- the procedures of taking decisions are transparent to the public, and the implemented measures permit the attentive evaluation and rectification.

Taking all these aspects into consideration, the conclusion that can be resumed is that public integrity is the public value that is more difficult to achieve, having its foundation on the other values identified here – legality, transparency, impartiality and responsibility and summing all the fundamental aspects of the public sector when the discussion is about the ethics of the public sphere. With other words, public integrity is the value of the values in the public domain. Rationing in this way, it is adequate to investigate the most important public values that faster conduct to a public sphere of integrity from a country.

These values are inserted into rules and regulations that function as a legal frame or can become informal instruments with the aim of putting into practice the principles of an ethical public environment. The formal government instruments represents a guardian concreted in the legal obligations (Verhezen, 2010, p. 188). As it was above explained, it exists an homogeneity of the mentioned public values by the OECD countries (Bertok, 2000, p. 34). The countries that include in their public documents the five selected values are presented in the next tabel (Table 1). As a perspective and discussing about the chosen public values, it can be observed that the values of legality, transparency, impartiality, responsibility and integrity are concretely and directly named in the public documents. In this way, from the 25 countries of the OECD report, 22 speak about legality, 14 about transparency, 24 about impartiality, 11 about responsibility and 18 about integrity.

Table 1 – The five selected public values in the OECD countries public documents

Public value	Countries
<i>Legality</i>	Austria, Belgium, Canada, Czech Republic, Denmark, Germany, Spain, UK, Greece, Hungary, Japan, Ireland, Island, Italy, Korea, Mexico, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Sweden, Turkey, USA.
<i>Transparency</i>	Canada, Finland, Island, UK, Greece, Ireland, Luxemburg, Mexico, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, Sweden, USA.
<i>Impartiality</i>	Australia, Austria, Canada, Czech Republic, Denmark, Germany, Spain, Finland, UK, Greece, Hungary, Japan, Ireland, Island, Italy, Korea, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Sweden, Turkey, USA.
<i>Responsibility</i>	Austria, Germany, France, Finland, UK, Hungary, Island, Mexico,

	Netherlands, Portugal, Sweden.
Integrity	Austria, Belgium, Canada, Germany, Denmark, UK, Greece, Japan, Korea, Mexico, Netherlands, New Zealand, Poland, Portugal, Sweden, Turkey, USA.

Source: „Trust in Government. Ethics Measures in OECD Countries”, OECD (Bertok, 2000, p. 33)

In Romania, in 188/1999 law about the status of the public actors, hardened in 2009, 4 values are taken into discussion: legality, transparency, impartiality and responsibility.

Table 2 – The selected public values in 188/1999 law about the status of the public officials from Romania

Public value	From 188/1999 law
Legality	3rd Art. The fundamental principles of the public function are: a) legality (...) 43rd Art. (1) The public officials must achieve their public duties (...) with the respect of law (...)
Transparency	3rd Art. The fundamental principles of the public function are: (...) b) transparency (...)
Impartiality	3rd Art. The fundamental principles of the public function are: (...) impartiality (...) 43rd Art. (1) The public officials must achieve their public duties (...) with impartiality (...)
Responsibility	3rd Art. The fundamental principles of the public function are: (...) d) responsibility conformed to the legal aspects (...) 45th Art. (1) The public officials are responsible , according to the law, for the achievement of their public obligations, and also for the delegated tasks (...)

Buchanon and Tullock (2010) apprise that the country ambassadors are not neutral referee, but persons like all the people - inclined to put their own interest on the first level. So, the divergence from the citizens democratic rights is possible to happen. In this situation, the economic individualism is present in the public sphere in the same manner as it appears in the business case.

The public integrity and the divergence from it are complex facts because their roots are also connected to the bureaucratic political institutions and their effects on the general development vary depending on the national characteristics. All the countries must seriously concentrate over the divergence from the public integrity problem taking into consideration the negative effects of it on the next facts: standard of living, productivity, commercial equilibrium, national attractiveness, ability of objective implementation, efficiency of the

politics, capacity of sustaining growth. As the literature reveals, all these elements can be unified into a single variable: national competitiveness (Subarna and Rajib, 2010). It also reveals that the national institutional frame is fundamental for the macroeconomic politics and that the low quality institutions affect not only the implementation of the fiscal politics, but also the design of the monetary ones (Huang and Wei, 2006).

In terms of macroeconomic indicators, a decline of the level of national public integrity conducts to a deterioration of these indicators, and the poverty index becomes an ascendant one. In other words, the advancement of public integrity divergence materializes in the negative effect on the macroeconomic level (Bigdai, 2002, p. 2). This effect refers especially to: deceleration of economic growth; decline of investments and productivity; inequity in income distribution; inefficiency of resources allocation; decline of public income; advance of inflation rate; reduction of governmental credibility (Konar, 2009, p. 89) and hardening of economic development barriers (Transparency International, 2009, p. 4).

„All the actions which compound the public administration and all organizational forms of the system must be founded on law. In this context, this is the expression of the law and its instrument” (Negoiță, 1993, p. 21). The legality principle is, also, well-known as named „the domination of law”, being one of the principal pillars on which the public sphere from a democratic state rests on. In another words, „legality represents the objectivity of judicial system pyramid’s respect, that has on its top the Constitution” (Lazăr, 2004, p. 44).

Discussing about transparency, it must be emphasized that the enhancement of this public value level brings to the elusory growth of the number of divergences from the public rule. In reality, the higher level of transparency makes more visible the ethical abnormalities, that are correlated with transparency’s growth. „(...) when the actions of public servants are more visible, so are their mistakes and misdemeanours. It could be argued that the apparent increase in wrongdoing is a more function of greater transparency and scrutiny than an actual increase in cases. What was before hidden in bureaucratic secrecy is now open to public and media scrutiny” (Bertok, 2000, p. 73). On the European Central Bank’s site, accessed on <http://www.ecb.europa.eu/ecb/orga/transparency/html/index.ro.html>, transparency is seen as meaning that „the central bank provides the general public and the markets with all relevant information on its strategy, assessments and policy decisions as well as its procedures in an open, clear and timely manner”. Adapting this point of view on our paper, the public transparency means that the public sphere provides to citizens all relevant information on its strategies, assessments and policy decisions and procedures in an open, clear and timely manner. Therefore, transparency represents an extremely important element of the public sector and its detaining of this value confers higher understanding and trust to citizens, and more discipline to public actors. Also, in „Local Public Administration Integrity and Transparency”, realised by Transparency International – Romania (2004, p. 7), transparency is defined as being „the set of instruments whereby the administration (local public administration’s institutions and authorities) gives account to the citizens about the activity implemented in their service”.

Impartiality is added to the values of legality and transparency. The impartial point of view of the public actors is very important for the objectivity and equity that are reflected by this public value. In other words, not the bias, but contrary, the conviction that every citizen

counts equal, that anyone, including the own person, is not more important or significant than other, indifferent of its social status or position, is what is desired to be the ethical value here discussed. The connection between impartiality and equality is, so, a certain important one, being almost equivalent (Jollimore, 2011). But, impartiality is the value that can be better and more specifically given to the public sphere. Its matter is proven by the report of OECD (2000), „Trust in Government. Ethics Measures in OECD Countries”, where it is the top chosen public value (24%) in OECD countries.

Also, the public responsibility, as detached by the social one, is conscious and wanted self-deployment in a public action, having at its basis a choice from a list of options made especially taking into consideration the objective tasks of the public office. So, even if another option offers more personal benefits, a public actor does not chose it if this option does not respect the permissive limits of well behaviour or commitments and obligations that the public status requires. Through public responsibility, similar to moral one, the public actors admit themselves as authors of their own acts and are ready to respond for them in front of their interior ego, but, also, in front of their superiors and citizens.

Comparative analysis of the public values levels in Romania between 2006-2014

The variables identified as being important for this paper are analysed for the full period of time in which data are available in the *Global Competitiveness Report*. So, the period taken into discussion is 2006-2014, exception being made for *Irregular Payments and Bribes*, that provides information only for the last five years. The above graph reveals that the variables have a kind of uniformity, but a negative one if their levels are analysed. So, in average, these are positioned between 2,5 and 3 points, with the exception of the up named variable – *Irregular Payments and Bribes*, that offers higher levels aproximately equal with 4 points. Even in this case, a quite consistent decline can be observed between 2010 and 2014 (0,5 points). In other words, compared with the other cases, bribes are still quite well represented in the Romanian respondents' perception. The more pessimistic perceived variable is *Favoritism in decisions of government officials*, nearby the *Wastefulness of government spending* and *Ethics and corruption* of the Romanian public sector. In this condition, the greatest problem of it is the lack of impartiality and of public responsibility that are reflected in the implemented ethical principles from the public level. Progress can be identified in the level of *Transparency of government policymaking*, but, also, in the level of *Ethics and corruption*, although it represents one of the weaknesses of the Romanian system. Unfortunately, rationing in the cross-countries context, and taking in consideration that the maximum level of the measured variables from the *Global Competitiveness Report* is 7, it must be assumed that the Romanian public sector really confronts with big problems of quality that reverberates to the entire economy. Furthermore, these weaknesses of the system correlate one with the other and, in this way, the complex negative effects, the difficulty of finding proper solutions and the forming of a vicious circle are inevitable.

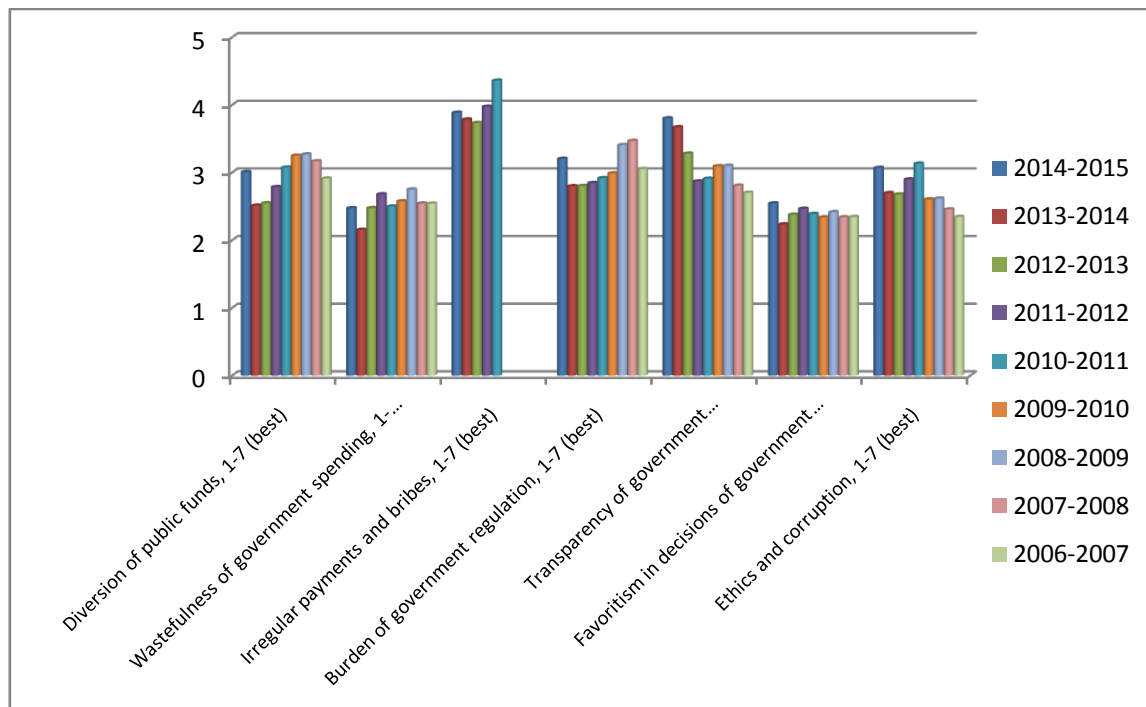


Figure 2 – Levels of public values between 2006-2014

Shortest Paths to Succeed in Achieving Public Integrity in Romania

Taking into consideration the aspects mentioned above, the more facile and sure ways to improve the Romanian public system that must exceed its profound and persistent crisis are recommended to be identified using a mathematical method that finds the shortest paths to arrive at a source. Considering that the public ethics is the synthesis of all the public system's values, this paper aims to empirically observe and identify the main sources of the public system enforcement.

In this analytical approach, a quantitative analysis of the indicators used for the explanation and the comprehension of the Romanian public integrity dynamics is made using a correlational mathematical model by the instrumentality of some oriented graphs associated with the Romanian public system. The nodes of the graph that it used to describe the public integrity value, $G(X,U)$, meaning $X=\{X_1, X_2, \dots, X_n\}$, is represented by a set of seven variables that reflects the legality, the transparency, the impartiality, the responsibility and the ethics of the public system from the national level. So, the dependent variable is the *public integrity* measured by the *Ethics and corruption* indicator from the Global Competitiveness Report. The other variables that are potential correlated with the dependent one and used in this analysis are: X_1 : *Irregular payments and bribes*, X_2 : *Burden of government regulation*, X_3 : *Transparency of government policymaking*, X_4 : *Favoritism in decisions of government officials*, X_5 : *Wastefulness of government spending*, X_6 : *Diversion of public funds*. Also, referring to $U = \{u_1, u_2, \dots, u_n\}$, it represents the totality of the logical connections and correlations between the analyzed variables. Starting from the statistical correlations between them, one of our goals is to explicate if the independent variables that were selected as being representative for the dependent variable really contribute to the consolidation of the public

integrity level in Romania. From this point of view, at the level of the graph made here, the shortest paths are estimated to observe what variables are the most important and crucial for the enhancement of the dependent variable in Romania. The endeavor described here is realized using SPSS and UCINET software.

The analysis is a longitudinal one, trying to discover how public integrity can be enhanced in Romania. The statistical repartition of the variables values is made between 2006 – considered the input of the public integrity value because it is the starting year of our analysis and 2014, the most recent year that has available data. Also, from the point of view of statistical correlation, there are taken into consideration only the ones with $r > 0,4$. So, only the relevant statistical correlations between nodes are preset for the graph $G(X,U)$ and the edges between the nodes are evaluated through the correlation coefficients. In this way, the dimension of every arc from the graph is quantified depending by the intensity of statistical correlation for $r > 0,4$. Starting from these methodological clarifications, the correlation matrix of the public values taken into discussion for the Romanian public space can be hereunder observed:

Tabel 3 - Romanian Public Values between 2006-2014 – The correlation matrix

	0 Input Integrity	1 Irr_paym_bribe	2 Burden_reg	3 Transp	4 Favorit_dec	5 Waste_public_sp	6 Div_public_fund	7 Public_integrity
0 Input Integrity	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0
1 Irr_paym_bribe	0	1	0	0	0	0	0,786	0,802
2 Burden_re	0	0	1	0	0	0,458	0,737	0
3 Transparency	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0,407
4 Favorit_dec	0	0	0	0	1	0,544	0	0,565
5 Waste_public_sp	0	0	0,458	0	0,544	1	0,640	0
6 Div_public_fund	0	0,786	0,737	0	0	0,640	1	0
7 Ethics_corrup	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1

After the correlations estimation, using the UCINET software, it can be observed that there are identified three shortest paths that are necessary for the public integrity consolidation from the Romanian public space:

Type of paths: Shortest paths

3 paths found.

Selected Paths from 0 Input to 7 Publ integr

1: 0 Input -> 1 Irr paym -> 7 Publ integr

2: 0 Input -> 3 Transparency -> 7 Publ integr

3: 0 Input -> 4 Favorit -> 7 Publ integr

So, the minimal condition for the enhancement of the Romanian public integrity is to improve the level of: X1: *Irregular payments and bribes variable*, X3: *Transparency of*

government policymaking and X4: *Favoritism in decisions of government officials*. The analysis demonstrates that, if one of the political goals is to increase the Romanian public integrity, the ways of action are given by the actions against irregular payments and bribes, against the habitude of showing favoritism in decisions of government officials and by the actions that encourages and enhances the transparency of the government policymaking.

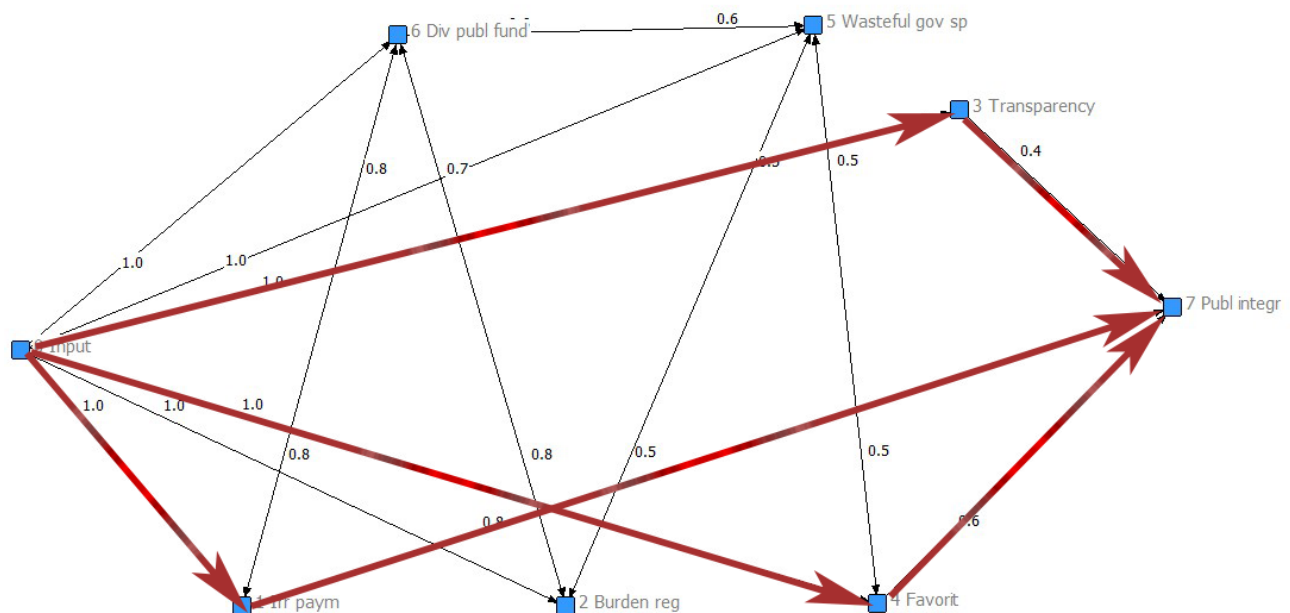


Figure 3 - Shortest paths to succeed in achieving public integrity in Romania

The analysis also reveals that, although these three variables are the most important, ways of improving them are given by the other variables taken into discussion. So, as the below graph reveals, *Irregular payments and bribes* is correlated with *Diversion of public funds*, that, in its turn, is correlated with *Burden of government regulation* ($r=0,7$) and *Wastefulness of government spending* ($r=0,6$). In the same way, *Favoritism in decisions of government officials* is related to *Wastefulness of government spending* ($r=0,5$), showing that the Romanian public system must emphasize all these six important public characteristics as to improve its public integrity level.

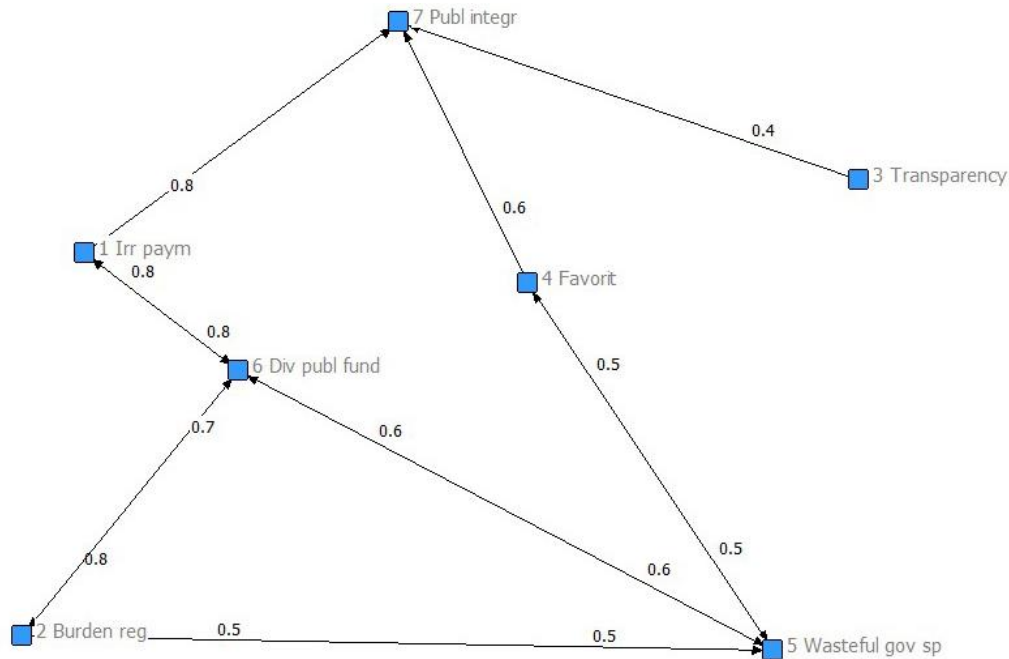


Figure 4 – The determinant values of the Romanian public integrity

Conclusions

The paper sustains that legality, transparency, impartiality and public responsibility, as values specifically named for the public sphere, nearby a high professional competence, are obligatory to be attained by a public sector that is beneficiary of integrity. As Andrei Plesu sustains, the real moral competence starts with an un-hypochondriac experience of guilt, with the feeling of moral incompetence, of self excommunication (Pleșu, 2008, p. 19). Therefore, a profound understanding of the value of integrity conducts to the feeling of the necessity to implicate more the ethical part in the day by day practice of the public sphere. This, in its turn, determines the aspiration to tend to the accession on the discussed value, helping theoretical integrity, in this way, when the needed resources and efforts are implied, to concrete into a correct practical behaviour in the public space. This proper way of public action conducts to the performance of the public sector that directly impacts the macroeconomic performance of a nation.

The analysis demonstrates that the principle ways to improve Romanian public integrity are given by the fight against irregular payments and bribes, against the habitude of showing favoritism in decisions of government officials and by the actions that encourages and enhances the transparency of the government policymaking. In addition to these values, the Romanian public system must emphasize on improving the levels of responsibility regarding the administration of the public funds as to enhance its public integrity level.

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