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Community participation for an open public administration: Empirical measurements and conceptual framework design

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Abstract: The principle of open public administration is very important in the process of the European public institutions reforms but the implementation of this principle remains a very difficult task and an issue under debate for practitioners and researchers. Moreover, the local public managers are facing important challenges of sustainable development of the communities within the constraints of the resources, but also into the context of the lack of public trust. The value co-creation is a concept developed within the business, but integrated into the practice of public administration within the conceptual nature of citizens' participation and that of open public administration. This study was developed based on the premises that participation is the "catalyst" of the government opening process, and trust represents a key input of the public participation. Using an integrative research methodology, this study was intended to generate new insights for measuring the potential of citizens' participation by introducing a community structure approach in this respect. On the

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PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

Within the European Union, as well as in other parts of the world, the good governance and development of the communities is an important concern of the public administration in order to serve the public interests and to use public resources for public purpose. For many years, different researchers and public practitioners have focused on finding new ways of managing public administration institutions in order to improve their response capacity to the community needs and to consult the community on the strategic issues concerning the development directions and the usage of public resources in this regard. In this study, the collective expertise and public feedback are operationalized under the denomination of public participation. Thus, within our study, we aimed to provide public managers with additional prospects of understanding and putting the public participation concept into practice. In our attempt, we have extended some business principles and models within the practice of public administration.

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other hand, in this study, a conceptual framework of participation was developed, being addressed to the public managers in order to manage the co-creation value process, extending the market orientation concept (business concept) within the practice of public institutions. In order to fulfill the purpose of this study, a citizens' survey was conducted in a community in Romania.

Subjects: Social Sciences; Development Studies; Environment, Social Work, Urban Studies; Communication Studies

Keywords: community participation; public managers; citizens' trust; community structure; conceptual participation framework

1. Introduction

Nowadays, the principle of open government has become a major concern of the public institutions and of the public managers due to the need for modernization and reform of public administration, and also due to the resource constrains and lack of accountability of public institutions.

The principle of open government was introduced by the Treaty of Amsterdam in the European Administrative Law. Article 1 states that all EU institutions should make open decisions close to citizens who should be involved in the government decision-making process. Also, the draft treaty of a Constitution for Europe (European Council, 2004) in Article 47 states that: "The institutions shall, by appropriate means, give citizens and representative associations the opportunity to make known and publicly exchange their views in all areas of Union action, [... and] maintain an open, transparent and regular dialogue with representative associations and civil society". By introducing these principles in the practice of the European public institutions, a new way of approaching the government institution was imposed—the collaborative public administration.

According to Trpin (2003), it is important to note that the principle of open public administration has two distinct components. The first component refers to citizens' access to public information reflected in the principle of transparency. The second component refers to the mechanism and methods of citizens' participation in the decision-making process of the public institutions. That is why, according to the same author, it is important to make a clear distinction between the principle of open administration and that of transparency, the first one being wider than the second one. Thus, from this point of view, transparency can be seen as a first step in opening the local public administration. Hilgers and Ihl (2010) noted that transparency, involvement, and reliability are just some of the advantages of the so-called "open government projects" which aim for high participation of citizens in public problem-solving and value creation. Thus, public management should understand how to put such mechanisms and methods into the practice of public administration in order to enhance citizens' participation for value co-creation, meaning a public agenda that integrates programs and projects with an important support from the community, better targeted and delivered public services, and a better informed and involved community that should be a more supportive one. According to OECD vision, the involvement of citizens in opening public administration has three components: (1) the access to information, understood as a basic essential condition for passive access to information at the request of citizens and active measures to disseminate information to citizens, (2) the consultation, understood as a "two-way feedback relationship between the citizens and the government", (3) the active participation understood as a new frontier, a relationship based on the partnership between the government and the citizens who are actively involved in defining and structuring the policy-making process.

On the other hand, according to the United States Administration vision regarding the open government, this concept also includes three components: (1) the US Government should be transparent by providing information to citizens about what their government does, (2) the US Government

should be participatory, involving citizens in the governing process aiming at a higher efficiency and quality in the decision-making process, and (3) the US Government should be collaborative, that is involve the Americans in the work of their government.

Analyzing these visions regarding the construction of open administration concept, one can notice the fact that between the concept of open public administration and that of citizens' participation, there is a direct relationship, the second one representing the core element of the first concept's implementation. Also, Hutter, Fuller, and Giordano Koch (2011) emphasized the relationship between the openness and participation concepts stating that the open government implementation needs citizens who are motivated and committed to contributing and participating in "open government projects" in order to increase its outcomes.

No matter the vision or the richness of the national legal framework, the openness of local administrative institutions and citizens' participation are still some issues under debate in local public administration practice and among scholars. As Bugaric (2001) underlined, the most effective way to establish the directions of the public administration institutions' actions regarding community involvement is not necessarily represented by a comprehensive legislation (bushy) to regulate these issues, but by professionals (public managers and public servants) with expertise in the field who bring public administration in the public domain. Also, Yetano, Royo, and Acerete (2009) suggested that legislation on its own is not helping promote more advanced citizen participation initiatives. Thus, the open public institution and citizens' participation are not necessary issues of regulations, more likely these seem to be some challenges for developing an institutional taxonomy to match today's complex and multi-centric society (Skelcher & Torfing, 2010), for reforming the public administration, for a better accountability of the public institutions, and a way to oversee the democratic processes. Also, Hood (1991) in the attempt of articulating the NPM paradigm in the early 1990s put a great emphasis on professional management and also on private sector styles of management practices.

According to Vigoda-Gadot (2002), in the community opening process, modern public administration institutions have difficulties in integrating responsiveness into citizens' needs, seen as customers, and effective collaboration with the community, seen as partner. These difficulties, according to the same author, result from the dual perspective of seeing the community—client and partner. While responsiveness is a passive and uni-dimensional behavior of public institutions, collaboration represents a much more active bi-directional behavior, a force unification of two parties—the public institution and the community. Essentially, these difficulties highlighted by Vigoda-Gadot (2002) are related to the transition of the public institution from a reactive behavior to a proactive one. This shift requires, on the one hand, that the public institution provides methods and tools adequate to active information, consultation, and effective participation of citizens in the decision-making process. On the other hand, apart from the public institutions' endeavor, the citizens must be willing to use these tools and methods to be informed, to express their point of view, and to participate effectively in the decision-making process.

The open public administration model is strongly related to the reformation of traditional public administration and involves a bi-dimensional relationship with the citizens, integrating some private sector management practices and concepts. Thus, community participation is an essential element in this model, securing this type of relationship, that can be analyzed in relation to the market orientation concept, developed by two distinctive research teams in the 1990s for the business sector (Kohli & Jaworski, 1990; Narver & Slater, 1990). According to Narver and Slater (1990), market orientation is a business philosophy which finally ensures superior value creation for customers. Over time, marketing and management researchers approached the market orientation concept as: (1) a business philosophy or management mid-set, (2) an organizational culture, and/or (3) an organizational behavior.

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In the context described above, the main research questions of this study were established considering new insights on how to put community at the heart of the public administration decision-making process:

What really is the citizens' participation? What do empirical findings show?

How can the participation potential be measured at the community level?

How can the opening principle be implemented by the local administration?

How can participation really work within the practice of the local administration?

Consequently, this study is divided into four major parts interconnected in order to get answers to the research questions. The first part of the study provides an integrative literature review introducing a synthesis of the research agenda on public participation, and some comments regarding certain gaps identified in the public participation literature and it also introduces some hypotheses in order to be tested. The second part displays the methodological aspects of the study. The third part presents the empirical findings in the community where the measurements were performed. The discussions part presents some comments regarding the participation potential and introduces a conceptual framework of citizens' participation developed based on market orientation model principles.

2. Synthesis of the research agenda on public participation and hypotheses

2.1. What really is public participation?
The roots of citizen participation can be traced back to the ancient Greece and Colonial New England. Before the 1960s, the governmental processes and procedures were developed to facilitate "external" participation. Citizen participation was institutionalized in the mid-1960s with President Lyndon Johnson's Great Society programs (Cogan & Sharpe, 1986, p. 283). In 1969, Arnstein defined citizen participation as the redistribution of power that enabled the have-not citizens, presently excluded from the political and economic processes, to be deliberately included in the future. Thus, starting with Arnstein's (1969) Ladder of citizen participation, according to Hutter et al. (2011, p. 2), the research agenda on "open" problem-solving in the public sector has become very important. Since then, a substantial body of literature has emerged and flourished. Over time, researchers have focused on defining the conceptual nature of citizens' participation pursuing different research objectives and adopting different denominations for this concept. Referring to this diversity, Bishop and Davis (2002) argue that the concept has been subject to a range of definitions and Involve (2005) considers that citizen participation is an emerging field involving many players who use varied definitions and have different perspectives. As a result of the diversity, various terms were used to define citizens' participation in the decision-making process of the public administration: "citizen engagement" and "civic engagement", terms used as alternative denominations for "public participation", "public involvement", "citizen participation" or "public engagement". But, no matter the denomination, public participation is identified as the "cornerstone" for democracy and the active interaction between citizens and public administration. However, over the last few decades, demands for direct citizen participation have grown tremendously at the local, state, and national levels around the world (Nabatchi, 2012). Moreover, Jacobi, Klüver, and Rask (2009) stated that citizen consultation often leads to results which are recognized as socially robust and Neshkova and Guo (2012) in an empirical study found that regardless of the way citizen input is operationalized, there is a positive and significant relationship between participation and organizational performance and that citizen participation can generate not only benefit for the participants in the process—both administrators and citizens—but it also has a broader social value. The same idea was underlined by Gaventa (2004) considering participation as an enhancing civic life, deepening democratic participation, and contributing to more effective neighborhood renewal and sustainable development. Therefore, it can be concluded that citizens' participation contributes to the sustainable development of the communities.

Looking from the citizens' side, Vigoda-Gadot (2002) presented an evolutionary continuum of the role of citizens in relation with the administrative institutions and identified different roles that citizens undertake in this relation: subjects, voters, clients or customers, partners, or owners, and he pointed out that the increasing interest in the idea of new public management (NPM) has put serious pressure on state bureaucracies to become more responsive to citizens as clients. On the other hand, Skelcher and Torfing (2010) presenting the distinction between citizens-as-voters and citizens-as-stakeholders argued that this distinction pushed the traditional concept of the citizen as a passive, individual bearer of universal legal entitlements to its limits, taking into consideration that the concept of citizens-as-stakeholders is more collective, less inclusive, more pragmatic, and outcome-oriented and has a clearer emphasis on active engagement than the traditional notion of citizenship. Thus, the concept of citizens' participation should be approached in a collective manner and the implementation of this concept within the practice of the public institution should be community oriented.

Looking from the public institution side, citizens' participation can be seen as a management philosophy or public management mind-set regarding the decision-making process using community expertise through gathering ideas, concepts, solutions, and resources that can be mobilized at the community level in order to respond to the complex community issues (Diduck & Mitchell, 2003; OECD, 2001). Using community expertise and co-created solutions, the decision-makers (public managers) will draw up alternatives that are not necessarily present in their existing political agenda, ensuring fully informed decisions. O'Connor (2014), the Mayor of Santa Monica, California, declared in an interview that: "Our resources are limited. We can funnel them, we can put them toward programs and challenges. But we need to know what those are. We can guess what they are. But if we have data, if we have metrics—if we have an understanding of how people are doing and their well-being and where the need is—we can make better use of our government resources to address those issues going forward". Thus, public participation provides public managers with the possibility to set a sustainable public agenda and make decisions that impact favorably upon the community, making public administration accountable.

A rich research agenda can be found over time behind the debates and the variety of approaching the citizens' participation.

Table 1. The definition of citizens' participation based on the synthesis of the literature review	
Authors	**Definitions**
Roberts (1997)	Authentic participation means that the public is part of the deliberation process from issue framing to decision-making
Goetz and Gaventa (2001)	The concept of citizen "voice" implies an engagement with the state that goes beyond consultation to more direct forms of influence over spending and policy decisions
Cooper (2005)	Civic engagement is related to people participating together for deliberation and collective action within an array of interests, institutions, and networks, developing civic identity and involving people in the governance governing processes
Creighton (2005)	Citizens' participation permits that public concerns, needs, and values to be incorporated into the governmental and corporate decision-making process
Epstein, Coates, Wray, and Swain (2006)	Citizen engagement can go beyond deliberation and advocacy, to citizens collaborating in implementing change by volunteering their efforts or other resources to co-produce solutions or services, and thus citizens have the opportunities to influence decisions and actions that affect the community
Roberts (2007)	Citizens' participation is a process by which the members of society share the power with the public officials in making substantive decisions related to the community
Yetano et al. (2009)	Citizen participation should not be an end in itself, but a tool to achieve a goal
European Institute for Public Participation (EIPP, 2009)	Citizens' participation is the deliberative process by which interested or affected citizens, civic society organizations, and government actors are involved in policy-making before a political decision is taken

Thus, an important topic in the research agenda was the definition of the participation concept. According to the international literature, the conceptual nature of the public participation is rich but also diverse (Table 1).

Considering the variety of definitions, the researchers, following another topic, proposed various constructions of citizens' participation. Thus, over time, there have been introduced different models of participation related to the reformation of traditional public administration (Table 2).

As it can be noticed, the approaches of the participation model design vary on a certain extent at international level. As Rapoport (1985) argued, those models describe how things work. Thus, scholars adopted different manners for explaining how participation can really work. For instance, King, Feltey, and Susel (1998) argue that genuine participation represents the deep involvement and continues in the administrative processes. Also, in a similar approach, Innes and Booher (2004) claim that effective participation involves collaboration, dialog, and interaction and the three components combine themselves in a relationship. On the other hand, Fung (2006) underlines that the participation process is designed of three dimensions that form an area in which the particular participation mechanism is integrated and developed. In their turn, Cooper, Bryer, and Meek (2006) introduced a model which contains five dimensions among which the effective participation is developed. Also, Lowndes, Pratchett, and Stoker (2006) proposed the CLEAR model that was operationalized for international use at the request of the Council of Europe Steering Committee on Local Regional Democracy (CDLR), being designed using the same approach taking into account that authors introduced five factors of citizens' participation. An alternative approach is the one presented by The International Association for Public Participation [IAPP], 2007) that introduced seven core values of the participation process focusing on culture development and a Spectrum of Public Participation that is a five-point continuum frequently used as the typology for understanding shared decision authority. Also, the EIPP (2009) approached public participation as a culture of learning among those who commission and facilitate participation and recommend three principles for a successful public participation. Having an organizational culture approach, Cuthill and Fien (2005) identified three areas where institutional capacity can be built to implement a participatory philosophy.

Irrespective of the construction of the participation model, it can be noticed that the common point in framing participation is the continuous involvement and interactions between the two important parties in the process—the public administration and the citizens (community). On the other hand, without underestimating the importance of the proposed constructions of participation, the issue of community participation implementation within local public administration is still under development. The same idea was emphasized by Stewart and Sinclair (2007) underlining that the design and implementation of specific public participation programs remain contentious, or by O'Faircheallaigh (2010) who points out that the issue for scholars and practitioners is to find ways of making participation more effective. Thus, the question of designing public participation into the practice of local public administration remains an open topic in the research agenda.

2.2. Do citizens really want to be involved?

Another important topic into the research agenda was the measurement of the participation potential and community willingness regarding the involvement. Many studies have underlined a relatively low potential of citizens' participation and pointed out some inhibitors of the process. For instance, Kweit and Kweit (1984) presented that citizens' lack of technical expertise, unfamiliarity with bureaucratic routines, and emotional involvement in issues rather being detached and rational are reasons of a low involvement. Yetano et al. (2009) pointed out that the lack of citizen interest is the most important difficulty in implementing participation initiatives, and also Neshkova and Guo (2012) underlined that citizens are often reluctant to devote time and effort to understand the intricacies of public issues, as indicated by the chronically low attendance of public hearings.

In an alternative approach, Box (1998) identified three types of citizens, depending on the willingness to get involved in the process of participation: (1) *free riders* are considered consumers of public

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Table 2. The construction of public participation model based on the synthesis of the literature review	
Authors	**Constructions (components)**
King et al. (1998)	(1) The problem or situation
	(2) The processes, systems, and administrative structures within which participation occurs
	(3) The public managers (administrators)
	(4) The citizens
Innes and Booher (2004)	(1) Collaboration
	(2) Dialog
	(3) Interaction
Cuthill and Fien (2005)	(1) The collection and provision of relevant empirical data describing the local community
	(2) Establishing equitable, accountable, and transparent participatory **policy** and processes
	(3) The development of a supportive organizational culture
Fung (2006)	(1) Who participates in the process (the process is open to everyone who wants to get involved or is open to groups of stakeholders)
	(2) How information is exchanged between participants and how joint decisions are made
	(3) How outcomes are integrated into government policies or public actions
Cooper et al. (2006)	(1) Who gets involved
	(2) Who initiates the involvement
	(3) Why citizens get involved—motivation
	(4) Where does participation take place
	(5) How are the citizens involved effectively
Lowndes et al. (2006)	(1) CAN DO—have the resources and knowledge to participate
	(2) LIKE TO—have a sense of attachment that reinforces participation
	(3) ENABLED TO—are provided with the opportunity for participation
	(4) ASKED TO—are mobilized through public agencies and civic channels
	(5) RESPONDED TO—see evidence that their views have been considered
IAPP (2007)	(1) INFORM—To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities, and/or solutions
	(2) CONSULT—To obtain feedback on analysis, alternatives, and/or decisions
	(3) INVOLVE—To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered
	(4) COLLABORATE—To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision, including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution
	(5) EMPOWER—To place final decision-making in the hands of the public
EIPP (2009)	(1) A clearly defined constitutional framework for public participation. Only through an explicit, shared understanding between politicians and citizens can confidence be developed and public participation realize its democratizing potential
	(2) A systematic approach to public participation methods to help organizers of public participation processes choose the most suitable and effective methods
	(3) Rigorous and challenging evaluation of public participation in practice to develop a culture of learning about participation and advance the systematization of participatory methods

services who receive free public goods and who let others get involved, (2) *activists* are citizens who are deeply involved in the public life and are active at the community level, and (3) *watchdogs* is a category of citizens placed between the first two categories, from the engagement point of view, clustering those citizens who are usually involved only in certain aspects of community life, aspects that are relevant to them. He suggests that public administration should make efforts to appeal to the first category and probably the third one in the process of collaboration and effective participation. However, Vigoda-Gadot (2002) emphasizes the fact that even the most optimistic researches in the participatory democracy field argue that the percentage of those who are effectively and actively involved in participation is less than 10% of the total population, and Williams et al. (2001) draw attention to the fact that even though community members express their intention to participate, the effective participation is very low. The reasons for non-participation are multiple and, as Lowndes, Pratchett, and Stoker (2001) point out, it is important that the institutions of public administration and elected officials (public managers) should understand the reasons behind the lack of citizens' participation in order to reduce resistance to involvement and to build effective participation. In various studies, the reasons for non-participation were identified and these can be considered as factors inhibiting the involvement process (antecedents of community participation) (Table 3).

Apart from the enthusiasm built around the idea of public participation, there are several studies whose results indicate no notable positive effects of the participation process. For example, Irvine and Stansbury (2004) point out that this process cannot be achieved without resources (time, effort, money) and that its results are not necessarily positive. Although community participation is ascertained as something that must be done, this process can lead to significant delays and wrong decisions. If elected officials/public managers lose contact with the community and its collective expertise, citizens may lose contact with economic and political realities (Innes & Booher, 2004), and they may not consider the long-term development of the community, their view reflecting a short-term vision that can affect the long-term sustainability.

This study is grounded on the fact that effective participation is designed and implemented not only by the public institution; it is continuously developed within the framework of permanent interaction between public administration and community through active information, consultation, and participation. This interaction will not necessarily be achieved through regulations, but through a proactive involvement and the will of the both parties—community and public institution. Moreover, this kind of relationships and interactions cannot be developed without citizens' trust.

2.3. Trust—The input of the participation process

According to the results of The European Social Survey (2006), there is a low trust of the European citizens in the elected politicians, and, according to the Eurobarometer (2008), only a quarter of the citizens in Europe consider that, on European issues, their voice is listened by the European Parliament or their national government. Also, trust in government is at record lows in the developed world, according to the 2014 Edelman Trust Barometer. Trust in the US Government now is in the mid-30s. That's the lowest we've seen (Richard Edelman on how leaders can regain the public's trust, Interview, April, 2014, http://www.mckinsey.com/global-themes/leadership/richard-edelman-on-how-leaders-can-regain-the-publics-trust). Thus, today, there is a clear challenge for public administration institutions to develop public trust for effective citizens' participation. Regarding the relationship between citizens' trust and participation process, Cooper et al. (2006) argued that the decline of public trust in governments has increased interest in finding out more about the role of civic engagement as a central component of a vital democracy. Vigoda-Gadot and Mizrahi (2014) acknowledge the potential role of citizen participation in influencing public trust in government and underlined that trust is an essentially important ingredient for building the contact between citizens and government. In another view, referring to the public administration reforms, OECD (2013) underlines that trust is an input to public sector reforms. Still, it is important to note that the relationship between public participation and public trust is very complex, being a bi-directional one,

Table 3. The inhibiting factors of citizens' participation based on the synthesis of the literature review	
Authors	**Antecedents**
Lowndes et al. (2001) and Bryson et al. (2006)	The existence of a negative citizen perception with regard to the public administration institution and with regard to the elected officials
	• A low level of trust in public institution and low perception regarding the internal groups: elected officials, civil servants
	• Dissatisfaction regarding the activities of public institution
King et al. (1998), Devans and Grant (2003), Yetano et al. (2009), and Neshkova and Guo (2012)	The reality of daily life
	• Lifestyle characteristics of contemporary society (make people get involved in the participation process only on a limited or inexistent scale)
	• Social dynamics
	• Lack of citizen interest
Lowndes et al. (2001)	The lack of awareness about the participation opportunities
	• Not knowing the mechanisms developed by the public institutions to allow participation and low awareness of how this mechanism works, inhibit the participation process
Arnstein (1969), King et al. (1998), and Lowndes et al. (2001)	The lack of response
	• Citizens' feedback integration into the public administration's decision-making process
	• Citizens' trust regarding the effective integration of their feedback
King et al. (1998), Cooper et al. (2006), Yetano et al. (2009), and Pandelică, Diaconu, and Pandelică (2012)	The public institution engagement in the process of participation
	• Elected officials' engagement and will to start the process
	• The desire of the elected officials to trigger the participation process
	• Resistance to change
	• Public managers and politicians' commitment
Kweit and Kweit (1984) and Peled (2001)	The mechanisms and techniques of participation
	• Lack of knowledge and skills in the fields of participation (active citizenship culture) (both sides— public administration and community)
	• Lack of participation culture (both sides—public administration and community)

according to the international research. Bryson, Crosby, and Stone (2006) and Edwards, Halligan, Horrigan, and Nicoll (2012) described the trusting relationships as both the lubricant and the glue of the public participation—that is, they facilitate the work of collaboration and they hold the collaboration together. Thus, public trust was identified as both—antecedent and consequence of public participation. If we look at the participation process as a tool in the opening process and public reforms, then trust represents the core value of community involvement.

Consequently, trust matters on a higher extent for public participation, but according to Vigoda-Gadot and Mizrahi (2014), a key question is to determine the factors that create the conditions for trust. Within this study, citizens' trust was considered as "catalyst" of participation; therefore, a number of hypotheses have been established to be tested within our research. The purpose of testing the hypotheses was to identify the factors statistically associated to trust and, thus, can contribute to the stimulating process of citizens' participation. Also, it is important to note that in this study, trust is approached and measured at public administration institution, elected officials (public managers), and public servants' levels.

2.4. Information and awareness

Many studies identify transparency as an important factor that influences public trust in government. Public information dissemination and sharing is an important concern in the European Union for making informed and "joined-up" policy making decisions (European Commission, 1998, 2001, 2003). Moreover, according to Vigoda-Gadot and Mizrahi (2014), transparency is a good strategy for building commitment among citizens. The ready availability and accessibility of relevant information from diverse sources is a bedrock condition for effective citizens' participation (Holmes, 2011). The recent literature on public administration suggested that e-government, which increased public access to information, led to an increase in the public trust in the government (Chadwick & May, 2003; Ho, 2002; Taewoo, 2012; West Darell, 2005). Engaging citizens in the policy-making process is a core element of good governance, and contributes to building public trust in government. For achieving such goals, citizens should be informed and become aware of the issues of their community and how to participate in the decision-making process. Yetano et al. (2009) argued that the discloser of information to citizens is a pre-condition to achieving meaningful citizen participation through the consultation and cooperation mechanism, the information covering all the areas of the public administration activity. Therefore, we can assume that as citizens are better informed, they will become more aware of the issues of their community, having higher trust in the public administration, and, thus, will become more involved in the decision-making process.

> H1: As the citizens' level of information is higher, the awareness degree is higher and the degree of trust in public institution and its representatives is also higher

> H1.1: There is a statistically significant association between the citizens' level of information and the level of trust in the public institution.

> H1.2: There is a statistically significant association between the citizens' level of information and the level of trust in the elected officials.

> H1.3: There is a statistically significant association between the citizens' awareness regarding the projects developed by the public administration and the trust in the public institution.

> H1.4: There is a statistically significant association between the citizens' awareness regarding the projects developed by the public administration and the trust in the elected officials.

2.5. Expectations

According to Dudley, Lin, Mancini, and Ng (2015), citizens today expect more transparent, accessible, and responsive services from the public sector; and those expectations are rising. Vigoda-Gadot and Mizrahi (2014) argued that trust is intimately linked to expectations. The same authors underlined that if there are no expectations, the measurements or usage of trust is meaningless. On the other hand, according to OECD (2013), citizen expectations are connected to their trust in government. As citizens become more educated (informed and aware), their expectations of government performance rise. According to Bugaric (2001), public dissatisfaction within public administration is particularly important, being the basic driver force behind public administration reforms. Public dissatisfaction is not only a response to good or bad efficiency of the administration activities. It is linked to citizens' expectations regarding the functioning of the public administration. Bourgon (2007) explained that good governance and trust may be related but "there is something else at

play, something really fundamental that goes to the core of the issue of trust, and relationship of trust between citizens and government that we have not yet either fully understood or tackled adequately". The same author suggests that it may have to do with changing citizen expectations. If trust is connected to expectations, therefore, we can expect to find a significant relationship between citizens' trust in public institutions and their representatives and the citizens' expectations regarding the participatory behavior of public administration institution.

> H2: As the level of citizens' trust in the public institution and its representatives is higher, the citizens' expectations regarding public institution involvement in consultation and participation are higher.

> H2.1: There is a statistically significant relationship between the level of trust in the public institution and citizens' expectations regarding the involvement of the public institution in the process of informing.

> H2.2: There is a statistically significant relationship between the level of trust in the public institution and the citizens' expectations regarding the public institution involvement in the consultation process.

> H2.3: There is a statistically significant relationship between the level of trust in the public institution and citizens' expectations regarding the direct interaction between the elected official and the citizens in public meetings.

2.6. Satisfaction

The existence of a negative citizens' perception on the activities of the public administration and of the elected officials (public managers) is directly mirrored by a low level of trust in the public administration in general and in its representatives. All these perceptions inhibit the participation process (Lowndes et al., 2001); the group of citizens, who mentioned this factor as a reason for non-participation, stated the following point: "They have appealing logos during election campaigns, but they do not do anything after". Also, the relationship between satisfaction and trust was emphasized by Vigoda-Gadot, Shoham, Schwabsky, and Ruvio (2008) in one of their study claiming that dissatisfaction with services led to a decline in trust in administrative agencies and political organizations as well as little trust in politicians and public administrators. Several studies have suggested that citizens' evaluation of government performance is positively associated with trust in government (Chang & Chu, 2006; Kim, 2010; Mishler & Rose, 2001). Thus, it is more likely for those citizens satisfied with the activities of the public administration to present a higher degree of trust in administrative public institution and its representatives and be better involved in the participation process.

> H3: As the degree of satisfaction with the activities of the public institution and elected officials is higher, the degree of citizens' trust is higher.

> H3.1: There is a statistically significant relationship between the degree of citizens' satisfaction regarding public institution and the trust in the public institution.

> H3.2: There is a statistically significant relationship between the degree of citizens' satisfaction regarding public institution and the level of trust in the elected official.

> H3.3: There is a statistically significant relationship between the degree of citizens' satisfaction regarding the public institution and the level of trust in the public servants.

2.7. The research design and methods

Using an integrative research methodology, this study was intended to bring additional insights regarding the citizens' participation model, approaching the two important parties underlined by international research—community and public institution. Starting from the premise that public trust is one of the most important enhancer of the participation process, this study is aimed at determining

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to what extent citizens want to get involved in the consultation and participation process, establishing and empirically testing some hypotheses regarding the relationships between trust and different potential determinants of public involvement. Using clustering methods for citizens' profiling, one can establish the structure of the community in order to measure the potential of participation in different groups of citizens.

The empirical data were collected by conducting a citizens' survey in a rural community in Romania, an administrative-territorial unit with six administrative areas and a total of over 8,000 citizens. The data were collected from a sample consisting of 481 respondents. For measurement purpose, a 23-item scale was used and the variables within the study were measured using a five-step scale, where step 1—To a very small extent, step 3—In-between, and/or step 5—To a very great extent. The validity of the measurement scale developed was provided in the context of literature review and Cronbach's alpha assessed for a total of 17 items achieved a value of 0.846 that confirmed the internal consistency of the measurement scale.

Starting from the empirical findings, a conceptual framework of participation was developed, taking into consideration three core elements into the framing process: (1) adopting an open system approach, (2) extending the market orientation, a business concept, into the practice of public administration institutions, and (3) linking the antecedents of trust to the community structure and to the process of participation.

3. Statistical analysis of the data

Taking into consideration the three components of open government—information and awareness, consultation, and participation— and also the large dimension of the database, we have decided to use the *K-Means clusters analysis* in order to identify the structure of a community using two variables—the desire of being informed and the desire of being consulted. This approach allowed us to identify which part of a community is more likely to be involved through participation. Also, using the crosstabs, we took into consideration creating a profile for each and every cluster regarding trust, information, awareness, satisfaction, and expectations, and also measuring the potential of participation in each part of the community. The final convergent value was achieved after three reiterations, the result being reflected in Table 4.

3.1. Community structure—Clusters profiles

3.1.1. Open citizens (informed and consulted)

This cluster groups the citizens who want to be informed about the main activities and projects developed by the public institution and who wish to be consulted regarding the directions of the community evolution and development. Looking at the expectations of this group regarding the participatory behavior of the public institution, "open" citizens have highest expectations, on the one hand, regarding increased transparency through an active information process (M = 4.26), and community consultation (M = 4.35), on the other. As the results of the bi-variate analysis emphasized, the level of the expectations is higher compared with the level of personal implication intention. Thus, at the level of this group, it is considered that the public institution should start the entire process.

Table 4. The centroids of the final clusters generated by SPSS			
Desire for information mean value	Desire for consulting mean value	Clusters dimensions (%)	Profile
4	4	73.3	Open citizens
2	2	21.3	Closed citizens
4	1	5.4	Silent citizens
Total	–	100	–

Source: Authors.

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3.1.2. Closed citizens (uninformed and uninvolved)

This group of citizens declines participation. These citizens are not interested in being informed on the main activities and projects of the public institution and they do not wish to be consulted regarding community evolution and development. Looking at this group through the expectations related to the behavior of the public institution, one can notice the low values recorded in both—implication of public institution in active information (M = 1.58), and also the implication of the public institution in the consultation process (M = 2.05). Thus, it can be concluded that, within this group, the participation process is blocked on both sides—the trust in the capacity of public institution to start the process and community involvement within the process.

3.1.3. Silent citizens (informed but not necessarily consulted)

This cluster concentrates on the citizens who have a high desire of being informed by the public institution, but they do not wish to be involved in the consultation process regarding the establishment of the community developing directions. The members of this group tend to consider that the development of the community is a political and administrative issue, and thus a matter of the public institution. Generally, within this group, the perception is that the elected officials were voted based on an economic and social program and thus, the citizens were consulted once through election participation. At the level of expectations, in this group, a high value was recorded regarding the adoption of increasing transparency behavior (M = 3.84) by the public institution, but the value of the expectation regarding consultation is the lowest compared to other clusters (M = 1.44). Thus, it can be concluded that, within this group, the participation process is seen as a tool of increased public administration transparency.

3.2. Trust assessed within community structure

In this study, three directions were used for measuring citizens' trust: (1) public institution, (2) public managers (elected officials), and (3) public servants (Table 5).

According to the results, *Open* citizens recorded the highest trust in all the directions of measurement among all clusters, recording the highest value for public managers, while *Closed* citizens recorded the lowest trust values in this respect among all clusters. The Silent citizens have the highest trust in public institution, an average trust in public managers, and a low trust in public servants.

3.3. Information and awareness assessed within community structure

As it can be noticed, citizens, irrespective of the cluster, appreciated that they were informed about the activities and projects developed by the public institution to a lesser extent. The highest value was recorded for *open citizens* and the lowest value for *closed citizens*. Still, the mean values do not vary significantly from one cluster to another. Also, the awareness was measured as the degree of knowing about the projects developed by public institution over the last 6 months. As it can be noticed, the degree of awareness is also low and it is correlated with the degree of being informed (Table 6).

Table 5. Descriptive statistics—The mean value of the citizens' trust and satisfaction regarding public institution assessed at the level of clusters						
Variables	**Clusters**					
	Open		**Closed**		**Silent**	
	Mean value	**Standard deviation**	**Mean value**	**Standard deviation**	**Mean value**	**Standard deviation**
The extent to which citizens have trust in public institution	3.68	1.072	2.76	1.351	3.60	1.190
The extent to which citizens have trust in public institutions manager (elected official)	3.79	1.054	2.79	1.508	3.17	1.337
The extent to which citizens have trust in public servants	3.44	1.116	2.63	1.431	2.73	1.486

Source: Authors.

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Table 6. Descriptive statistics—The mean values of the citizens' perception regarding access to information and awareness assessed at the level of clusters

Variables	Clusters					
	Open		Closed		Silent	
	Mean value	Standard deviation	Mean value	Standard deviation	Mean value	Standard deviation
The extent to which citizens considered themselves informed about the activities of the public institution	2.85	1.297	2.07	1.272	2.29	1.429
The extent to which citizens considered that they knew about the projects developed by public institution over the last 6 months	2.73	1.309	2.00	1.233	2.50	1.504

Source: Authors.

3.4. Satisfaction assessed within community structure

In Table 7, we can see that, surprisingly, *silent citizens* are those who have the highest satisfaction regarding the activities of the public institution and consider to the highest extent that their community evolves in a positive direction. On the contrary, *closed citizens* are dissatisfied with the activities implemented by the public institutions, and they have the lowest perception about a good evolution of their community. Still, the mean value of the perception over the present evolution of community is over 3 (medium perception). Considering citizens' satisfaction as a spectrum, the extremes of this spectrum could be represented by the two clusters—*silent citizens* and *closed citizens.* Between these extremes, *open citizens* can be found. They are distributed on a large part of the spectrum and have a relatively high degree of satisfaction and a relatively high perception that their community evolves in a positive direction. Interestingly, the extreme values in the satisfaction spectrum are occupied by the clusters with the lowest desire of consultation/participation. Thus, it is more likely that those citizens with the highest, but also the lowest degree of satisfaction will not participate in the consultation process. Still, the reasons for non-consultation are very different. At one extreme (the highest value), the citizens think that the development of their community is the job of the elected officials and public institutions and they have a high degree of trust in the public institutions. At the other extreme (the lowest value of satisfaction), the non-consultation reasons are the low degree of trust in public institutions and the perception that the public institutions do not have the capacity to be engaged in a real consultation process. Between the extremes of the spectrum, one can find the highest potential of consultation and the highest trust in elected officials. In the process of opening, the public institution should focus on the middle part of the satisfaction spectrum where it will find the highest potential of involvement.

Table 7. Descriptive statistics—The mean value of the citizens' satisfaction regarding public institution assessed at the level of clusters

Variables	Clusters					
	Open		Closed		Silent	
	Mean value	Standard deviation	Mean value	Standard deviation	Mean value	Standard deviation
The extent to which the citizens are satisfied with the activities of public institution	3.55	1.063	2.43	1.237	3.60	1.225
The extent to which citizens appreciated that their community evolves in a good direction at present	3.84	0.929	3.29	1.195	4.00	0.798

Source: Authors.

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3.5. Potential of citizens' participation assessed within community structure

In order to assess citizens' intention to participate in the decision-making process, we used two forms of public participation, presented in the specialized literature as being more common in accordance with the Romanian legal framework—public debates and participation in the City Council meetings. According to the bi-variate analysis, in all clusters, the recorded mean values display medium to relatively high intentions to participate in public debates, and medium to low intentions related to participating in City Council meetings. Thus, the mean values of the intentions related to information and consultation are higher than the mean values of effective participation in the case of *open citizens* and *closed citizens*. Taking into account that in this research participation was measured as citizen's intentions, it can be expected that in a real participation situation, the effective participation to be lower. An interesting result is related to the mean values recorded at the level of *silent citizens*, which indicate relatively high intentions to participate in public debates and a medium intention to participate in City Council meetings. Thus, even if these citizens do not have the intention to participate in the consultation process, they have an average to relatively high intention to engage in some forms of participation. We can presume that in the case of this group, intention is linked to information, not necessarily for the purpose of consultation (Table 8).

3.6. Hypothesis testing—The correlation analysis

According to correlation coefficients, between the level of information and level of trust, there is a significant statistical relation. A similar relation is between the level of awareness regarding the projects developed by the public institutions and the level of trust. Thus, H1 was accepted. This hypothesis is also supported by the K-means analysis results. Consequently, the citizens' group self-considered as being the most informed (open citizens) recorded the highest mean values of trust level in the public institution and its representatives. Also, it is important to mention the fact that this group has a high participation potential, registering mean values over 3 in the case of both forms of participation that were being considered here (Table 9).

According to the correlation coefficients, between citizens' expectations regarding the participatory behavior of the public institution and citizens' trust (reflected by the three variables—public institution, elected officials, and public servants), there is a significant statistical association. In these conditions, H2 was accepted. Also, in the case of this hypothesis, the results of the K-means analysis supported the fact that the highest trust and expectations mean values were recorded at the level of *open citizens* (Table 10).

The correlation coefficients emphasized that between citizens' satisfaction regarding the public institution activities and the trust level (reflected by the three variables—public institution, elected officials, and public servants), there is a significant statistical association. Thus, H3 was accepted. Still, the results of K-means analysis showed the fact that even if citizens' satisfaction is linked with trust, the relationship between satisfaction and consultation is more complex, the former being both an enhancer and also an inhibitor of the latter (Table 11).

Table 8. Descriptive statistics—The mean value of the citizens' effective participation intentions assessed at the level of clusters

Variables	Clusters					
	Open		Closed		Silent	
	Mean value	Standard deviation	Mean value	Standard deviation	Mean value	Standard deviation
The extent to which citizens want to participate in the public debates initiated by the public institution	3.62	1.429	3.56	1.630	3.80	1.555
The extent to which citizens want to participate in City Council meetings	3.14	1.538	2.79	1.737	3.04	1.805

Source: Authors.

Table 9. Pearson's correlation coefficients analysis

Variables	DI	DA	PIT	EOT	PST
DI	1	.657*	.248*	.275*	.222*
DA		1	.265*	.256*	.223*
PIT			1	.744*	.517*
EOT				1	.446*

Acronyms: DI—Degree of information, DA—Degree of awareness regarding the projects developed by the public administration, PIT—Public institutions degree of trust, EOT—Elected officials degree of trust, and PST—Public servants degree of trust.

*The correlation is significant at the level 0.01.

Table 10. Pearson's correlation coefficients analysis

Variables	EI	EC	EDI	PST
EI	1	.737*	.635*	.347*
EC		1	.656*	.289*
EDI			1	.351*
PST				1

Acronyms: EI—Expectations regarding information, EC—Expectations regarding consultation, EDI—Expectations regarding direct interactions between public official and citizens, and PIT—Public institutions degree of trust.
*The correlation is significant at the level 0.01.

Table 11. Pearson's correlation coefficients analysis

Variables	SD	PIT	EOT	PST
SD	1	.676*	.650*	.470*
PIT		1	.744*	.571*
EOT			1	.446*
PST				1

Acronyms: SD—Satisfaction degree, PIT—Public institution trust degree, EOT—Elected officials degree of trust, and PST—Public servants degree of trust.

*The correlation is significant at the level 0.01.

4. Discussions and proposition for a public participation conceptual framework

The empirical findings of the study show that in a community we can find three types of citizens: *open, closed, and silent*. In the process of public institution openness, the public management should focus on *open citizens*, who are more likely to be participative and involved in consultation, etc. In this category, the public institution will find activists, those who will continuously and effectively participate in public and administrative issues. Still, despite of the considerable dimension of this group, determined in the community in which the study was conducted, we can expect that only a part of this cluster to be engaged in a real participation situation. In this particular community, where the measurement was performed, we identified a high potential of citizen participation in the processes of opening the public institution.

The absolute non-participation attitude was identified in the community at the level of *closed citizens*. The reasons of non-participation and non-consultation can be found in the lack of trust in the public institution and its representatives (elected officials, public servants, etc.). The lack of trust is fueled by the dissatisfaction with the activities of the public institution, according to the testing results of the respective hypothesis. In this part of the community, adversity against public institutions and a gloomy sentiment can be detected. The third part in a community is the *silent one* that presents an average potential of participation. In the *silent zone* of the community, we can find citizens

with a high desire of being informed, but with a low participation intention in administrative processes. In this group, we can find a high level of trust in the public institution and the highest level of satisfaction regarding the public institution activity. Consequently, we can conclude that this part of the community which trusts the state institutions to a higher extent and has a higher level of satisfaction does not wish to interfere in the administrative affairs, also considering that public institutions work well.

Thus, knowing the participation potential and the antecedents of trust, the "catalyst" of public participation, the further key question of public administration institutions is the development of the public participation framework as a key driver of openness.

According to the review of the participation models introduced by different researchers and institutions, the question of designing public participation into the practice of local public administration remains an open topic in the research agenda and a challenge for public managers.

In order to design the proposition of the conceptual participation framework, we used the models of market orientation introduced by Narver and Slater (1990) and Kohli and Jaworski (1990) for private companies. Over the last 20 years, several perspectives of approaching market orientation have been introduced by different researches. The various approach perspectives point out the complex nature of the market orientation phenomenon that is seen at the same time as: a business philosophy, an organizational culture, an organizational behavior, a competitive strategy, a set of managerial practices, a resource, or a capability. Approaching market orientation from a cultural point of view, Narver and Slater (1990) defined this concept as a business philosophy which ensures superior value creation for the customers. Approaching the concept from a behavioral point of view, Kholi, Jawroski, and Kumar (1993) defined market orientation as the process of gathering information about the consumers' needs, desires, and demands, the dissemination of information gathered within the organization; and the response of the organization based on the information gathered. In a more detailed analysis, it can be seen that the two models are complementary rather than alternative. That is why, in order to design the conceptual framework of participation, we have adopted some principles and components from both models of market orientation integrating them in an open system approach. Thus, in our view, such a framework should be approached as an open system containing many interfering subsystems which ensures a two-way relationship between community and public institution. This open system is a mix of various components, practices, methods, instruments, and competences in public institutions in order to gather information through citizens' consultation about current and future needs, interests, and opinions to ensure the flow of this information across functional areas within public institutions, to analyze and take joint decisions (integrating the result of consultation in the decision-making process), and to disseminate the outputs of the entire process represented by the response of the local public administration institutions.

According to this approach, the open system of participation is based on three major subsystems (Figure 1).

4.1. Consultation subsystem (C-subsystem) of the public institution

Gathering external information by adopting various methods and tools (citizens' surveys, public meetings, citizens' committees, City Council meetings, community planning meetings, etc.) for external consultation providing the inputs in the IF-subsystem. C-subsystem is complex and refers to gathering information through citizens' consultation in order to identify the perceptions, points of view, and opinions regarding the services delivered, the activities, the programs, and projects included or which should be included in the local agenda. The C-subsystem should be seen as a "communication loop". Thus, on the one hand, citizens can provide opinions and views on the development needs in the community, and the public administration defines issues of consultation based on these views, establishes forms, methods, and appropriate tools to manage the consultation process, and involves mainly the *open* part of the community in the process, these citizens having a further contribution in designing and prioritizing the local agenda. On the other hand, the programs and

Figure 1. Conceptual framework of citizens' participation.

Source: Authors.
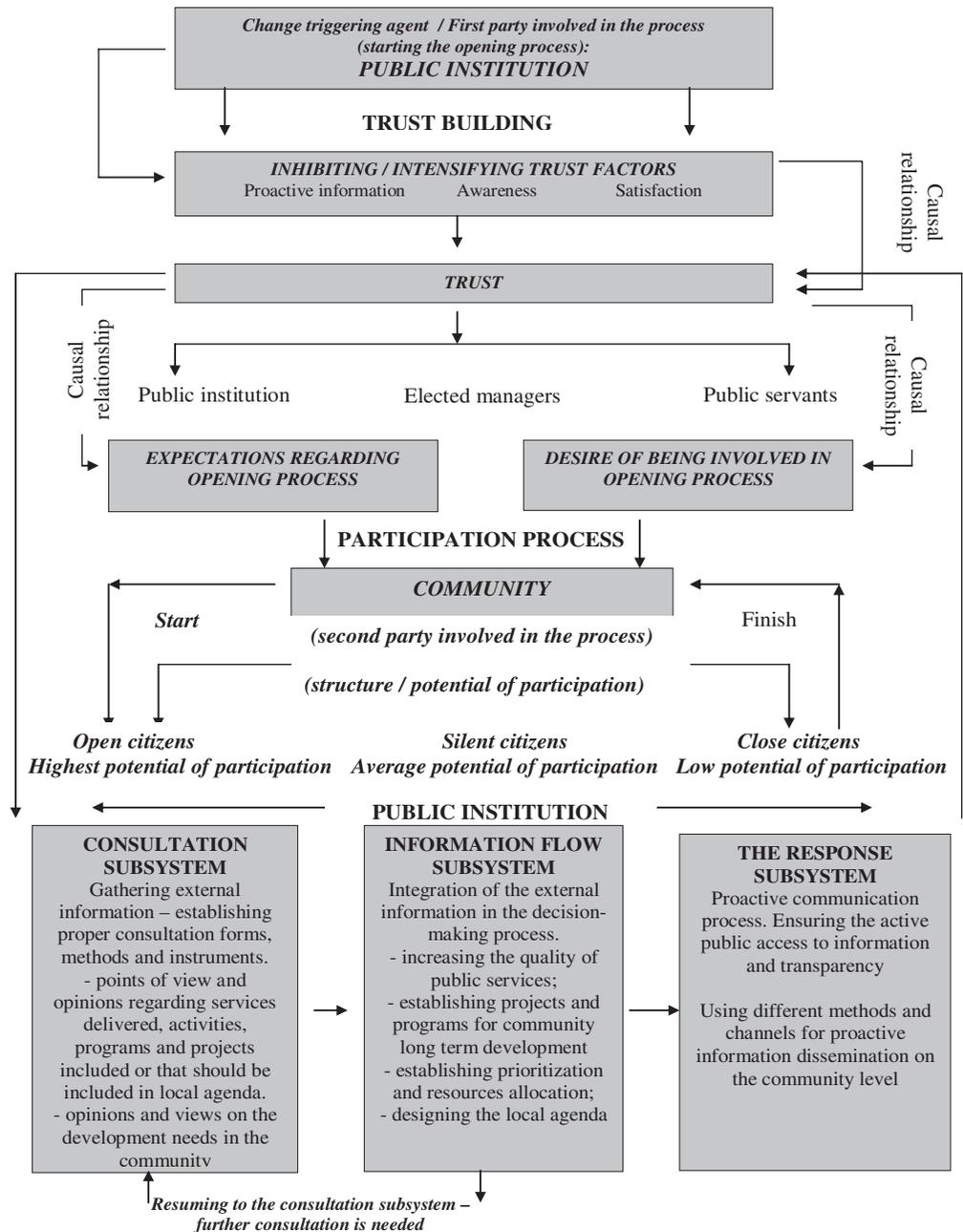
projects as initiatives of the public administration (for instance, the economic and social development programs of the elected officials) represent the base of the consultation process through appropriate forms, methods, and tools for collecting feedback, the community actively participating and validating the final forms of the programs and projects. Thus, the C-subsystem supports a communication "loop" that starts and ends within the community, as an ongoing process for value co-creation input, being a *two-way relationship*.

Information flow subsystem (IF-subsystem) within the public institution: disseminating external information in an internal environment using internal cross-functional communication channels which ensure the information flow across functional areas within the public institution. The IF-subsystem should sustain joint decisions and value co-creation by integrating the external information gathered through citizens' consultation in the decision-making process, increasing the quality

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of the public services, and it should also identify the strategic development domains in the community according to the joint short- and long-term decisions. The IF-subsystem will ensure the balance between the current community needs without compromising the coverage of needs for the future generations. Thus, the integration of this information into the decision-making process will lead to the creation of consultation-based programs and projects in the strategic domains, to the prioritization of these programs and projects, and the budget allocation according to this prioritization, and thus designing the local agenda in the long term.

4.2. The response subsystem (R-subsystem)
The dissemination of information in the community ensuring the outputs of the system (a local agenda built through consultation, quality public services, and better targeted projects and programs for developing the community). Thus, the response of the public institution in this framework represents an effective and efficient agenda, integrating programs and projects with an important support from the community, better targeted and delivered public services, and a better informed community that should be more supportive. The R-subsystem is based on different methods and channels for dissemination of the public institution response at the community level—the outputs of the participation process. This subsystem ensures the active public access to information and transparency which is related to building trust and satisfaction according to the results of the study.

The conceptual framework, proposed in this in this study, can be realistic and effective, even if its usage in the practice of public institutions depends on certain conditions:

4.3. A proactive communication process with the community
Generally, the communication process of the local administration in order to ensure the transparency principle framed in the Romanian legal framework, for instance, is rather a reactive one. This means that the public institutions release public information based on the request of different stakeholders, or according to legal regulation. In the proposed framework, the public administrative institution is rather proactive than reactive in the communication process, actively disseminating public information.

4.4. Communication is a "loop" or a "two-way relationship"
In the proposed framework, the communication process is about "listening and talking". In this respect, the public institution adopts and uses innovative methods and tools in order to actively communicate and also to listen to "the voice of the community" and to the other stakeholders.

4.5. Long-term and innovative thinking of public managers
A new mind-set of the public management is needed which will lead to the development of a new culture and of a new behavior of the local public administration, which will allow a comprehensive community planning as a holistic process undertaken with broad community participation in the long run.

5. Conclusions
According to the empirical findings of this study, there is a part of any community with a high potential of participation—*open citizens*. In the process of opening the public institution, public managers should focus on this part of the community in order to construct a two-way relationship, and we can assume that activists can be traced in this part of a community as they are citizens who are ready to actively and effectively involve. At the same time, in any community, there is a *closed part* that concentrates those citizens that are adverse to public institutions, and do not wish to be engaged in consultation and participation processes. Finally, the results of our study indicate the existence of a *silent part* in any community. It is represented by those citizens that have a medium potential of participation. The reasons of non-consultation in this group are linked to the high level of trust in public institution and the highest level of satisfaction regarding its activities. Even if any community can be structured in the three clusters, yet, the dimensions of the segments vary from one

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community to another according to the factors identified within this study—information, awareness, satisfaction, and also other contextual factors that were not considered and analyzed here.

Within our study, we have identified significant relationships between trust and active information, awareness, expectations, and satisfaction. Taking into account that trust was considered the "catalyst" of participation within this study, all the other variables influence citizens' participation. Still, an interesting result of our study is that the highest level of satisfaction can inhibit the consultation process, but not active information dissemination and public participation. Actually, the empirical findings supported the fact that satisfaction can be both an enhancer and an inhibitor of participation.

In the process of public administration reformation, in the sense of a better efficiency, effectiveness, and accountability, the principle of openness is more and more important. Still, the effective implementation of this principle or model is a great challenge for public managers. Moreover, even if this study approached the community as the citizens, being considered as the most important stakeholder for public administration, in practice, there are other groups that should also be engaged in the participation process— private companies and NGOs.

Over time, researchers have tried to find the answers to many questions: How can public administration be opened? Which is the right model of effective participation? Who should participate? In spite of providing some answers, it is not quite clear how this principle really works and how it should be developed within public institutions. We should also point out that the implementation of this principle should be rather seen as an organizational behavior and organizational culture and less as a legal regulation framework.

The limits of the study are related to the fact that the data were gathered only a few months after the local elections, the values of trust and expectations being at a higher level. On the other hand, participation and consultation were measured as intentions. Besides, further empirical investigations are necessary in other communities in order to extend the results of the study. In spite of these limits, by reading the results of this study, having in mind these limits, public managers and members of the academic community can discover valuable findings for their work.

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