

## APPROACHES TO PUBLIC INTEGRITY

Simona-Roxana ULMAN\*

**Abstract:** *Both concepts, integrity and public integrity, are always asked qualities in the social and economic environment, but they are never well defined. In this context, finding precise definitions and offering an ample explanation of the concepts are desired and useful for both economic theoretical and practical levels and become the aim of the present paper. Without a good understanding of a concept, no one is capable to attain it. In this context, it is impossible to ask for a public sector of integrity if both public actors and the citizens do not know what it really means. Therefore, the public actors first have to understand what integrity really supposes, and, then, to be capable to respect its principles. Taking into consideration the effects of public integrity or, on its opposite, of the divergence from it, especially represented by the phenomenon of corruption, on the economy at the macro, but also, on the micro level, public integrity in itself becomes a real economic problem that is aimed to be extensively analyzed through our interdisciplinary approach.*

**Keywords:** public integrity; public values; public management

**JEL Classification:** Z1; H00

### Introduction

Different theories about the determinant factors of the ethical or unethical behaviours did exist over time. The divergence from the ethical ones was first explained as being caused by the human nature deficiencies. This theory was sustained by Platon, who considered that cupidity is the source of the unethical behaviours and concretises in the corruption phenomenon that erodes the moral values of the society and its common objectives (Radu and Gulyas, 2010), or, in other words, taking into consideration the present integrity glossary, erodes the national integrity system. So, corruption appears when persons having a bad character attain powerful positions. This perception was reconsidered when big differences in the levels of national corruption were observed. These differences could not be explained only by the variations of the human nature.

Punch (1994) considers that the individualistic approach, studying the fact that vulnerable persons are tempted to abate from the ethical way, is the matter of psychological studies. The economic field is more interested in the macro level, in the context consideration, revealing the interaction between individual and social context. In this way, the divergence from the moral standards and norms means the dissipation of public integrity and the infection of public actors' behavior that do not come under public ethics. So, the actual theories of the public integrity domain emphasize the encouraging context for the appearance of such unethical behaviours. The main encouraging causes are: the lack of efficiency in public institutions and, as a consequence, the

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\* PhD Student, "Alexandru-Ioan Cuza" University, Romania, e-mail: [simonaulman@yahoo.com](mailto:simonaulman@yahoo.com)

diminishing of their authority; the abasement of people's standard of living; the absence of moral values and the alteration of existing morale principles; the lack of conformation of the institutional-legislative reforms to the national context (Dobrescu and Sima, 2010, p. 261). In other words, the public values are not only the result of the different human nature, specifically for each individual, but a sum of factors including it. So, legality, for example, as a public value derived from the duty as a general ethical value is determined by public actor's psychological construction, but also, by the historic, cultural, legal, etc. context of the society that includes this individual. Near the personal way of being, the environment helps or not him to tend to integrity or to be corrupt. Much more, the economic, political, social context influences the general ethical values in the same way as the public sector context impacts on its members' public values. The conclusion is that the general ethical values and, then, the public values are the starting point for all the discussions about public integrity and corruption. As a consolidation of this idea, Bertok (2000, p. 37) sustains that the core values give the fundamental directions for the activities of the public service. However, public servants need to know more precisely the standards they are expected to apply in their daily work and where the boundaries of acceptable behaviour lie.

### **1. The pyramid of the public values**

The values represent the foundation of the public sector, every country having well established the own principle set of ethical values (Bertok, 2000, p. 31). Their homogeneity is proven by the OECD's report, „Trust in Government. Ethics Measures in OECD Countries”, in which eight principal public values were identified: impartiality (24%); legality (22%), integrity (18%); transparency (14%); efficiency (14%); equality (11%); responsibility (11%); justice (10%) (Bertok, 2000, p. 32).

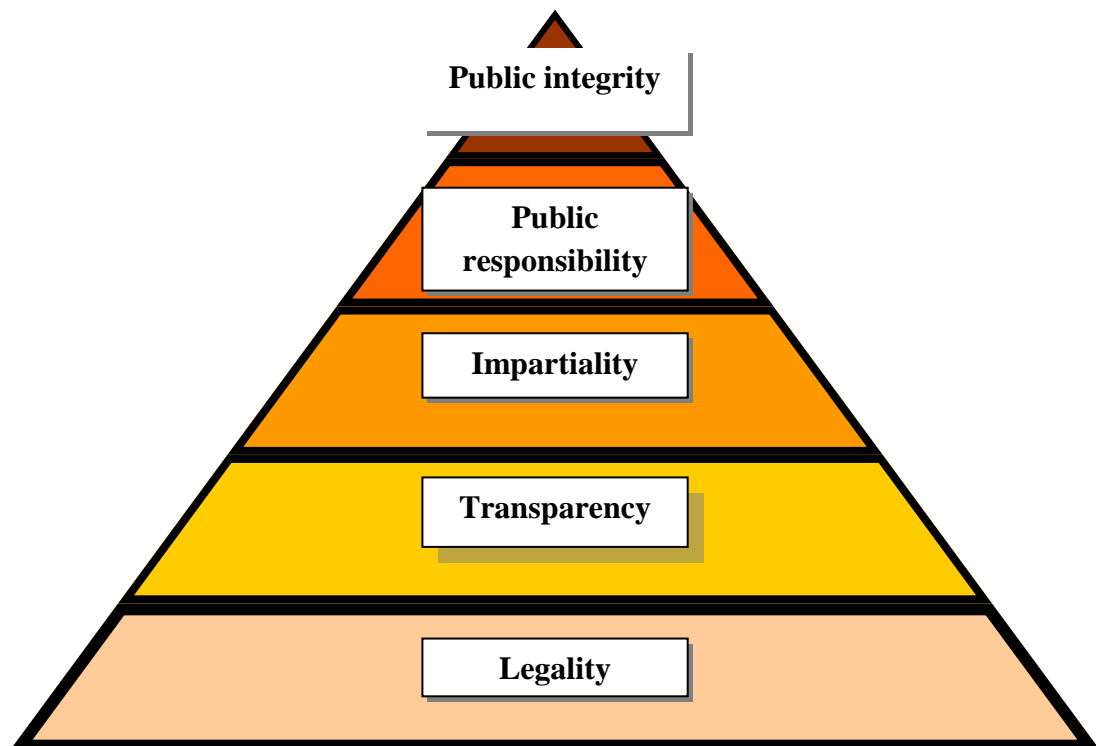
Between these values, considering them a synthesis of these values and of the others that were not up mentioned, five values are kept in attention: legality, transparency, impartiality, responsibility and public integrity. These values constitute the pyramid of public values. The start is given by legality as foundation and without which the public actor may not pass to the next levels of the pyramid, here referring to transparency, impartiality, responsibility and public integrity, because, in the public sphere, any system may pretend as being transparent, impartial, responsible or characterised by integrity without respecting, first of all, the law.

Similarly with Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs or with the pyramid of general ethical values for the actors implied in reports of labour (Ulman, 2015), passing to the top of the hierarchy is

progressive, the gaining of one level is impossible without the achievement of the value of the anterior level. So:

- transparency cannot exist without legality;
- impartiality cannot be achieved without respecting the principles of legality and transparency;
- public responsibility is not able to be put into practice if the public actor does not respect the legality and the transparency of his acts from the public sphere and is not impartial with all society's members who relate to him in his public work; and
- public integrity does not exist without legality, transparency, impartiality and public responsibility.

**Figure 1 – The Pyramid of the public values**



Source: author's representation

In the opposite way, the divergence from the public integrity means: first, the contravention of the principle of the law; second, lack of transparency; then, failing in offering the proper impartiality; and lately, deficiency in the public responsibility.

### *1.1. The prerequisites of the public integrity – the first levels of the public pyramid*

The values that were retained for analysis and considered to be the most important are in high affinity with the values from the pyramid of the general ethical values, premises for the social actors to have efficient reports of labour (Ulman, 2015). In this context, the duty forms the basis of the first pyramid, is equivalent to legality from the second pyramid, as basis value for the public actor who is obliged to respect the law, to be aware of the importance of the judicial norms from its space of labour.

“All the actions that 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” (Negoita, 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” (Lazar, 2004, p. 44).

To reach the second level of the pyramid, the public actors must do their work and its results in a transparent manner, being conscious of their mission, without creating speculations or doubts. So, dignity, as a human general value, finds its equivalent on the public frame in the value of transparency. A person with public role and that is dignified day by day in his personal life is open to transparency and assures the citizens’ information and involving through the direct access to the public documents. Besides some restrictions in this area, it is proven that when the public acts and activities are made on sight, the errors and the infractions can, also, be easier identified. The development of transparency’s 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 correlate with transparency’s growth. “(...) when the actions of public servants are more visible, so are their mistakes and misdemeanours. 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, 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 the citizens with all relevant information on its strategies, assessments and policy decisions and procedures in an

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\* For further details see <https://www.ecb.europa.eu/ecb/orga/transparency/html/index.en.html>

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 of 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, as a value from an equivalent level with the level of co-operation from the first pyramid, is added to the values of legality and transparency. Co-operation promotes an inoculation of personal interests with the others’ ones from the reports of labour, translating into the abdication of focusing on own person and interest and taking into account the interests of the others so that the final objective to be materialized in the general welfare, and not only in the personal one. In this context, the idea proclaiming that impartiality, as a public value, detaches from co-operation, as general ethical value, is logically argued. The public space is different from the citizens’ one, but the two spheres interfere and reciprocally influence each other. Therefore, if co-operation is the specific value for almost equal reports of labor (Ulman, 2015) in the relation between the public sphere and the citizens, the reports are not from similar positions. In this context, the impartial point of view of the public actors is very important for the objectivity and equity which is proposed by this public value. In other words, not the bias, but contrary, the conviction that every citizen counts equally, that anyone, including the own person, is not more important or significant than other, indifferent of its social status or position, is the central meaning of 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 reports of OECD (2000), „Trust in Government. Ethics Measures in OECD Countries”, where it is the top chosen public value (24%) in OECD countries.

Moral responsibility, as a general ethical value for the social actors implied in reports of labor (Ulman, 2015), is similar with public responsibility from the public value pyramid. So, the public responsibility, as detached from the social one, is conscious and wanted self-deployment in a public action, having as its basis a choice from a list of options made especially taking into consideration the objective tasks of the public office. So, even though another option gives more personal benefits, a public actor does not choose it if this option does not respect the permissive limits of good behaviour or commitments and obligations that the public status requires. Through public responsibility, similar

to moral responsibility, 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.

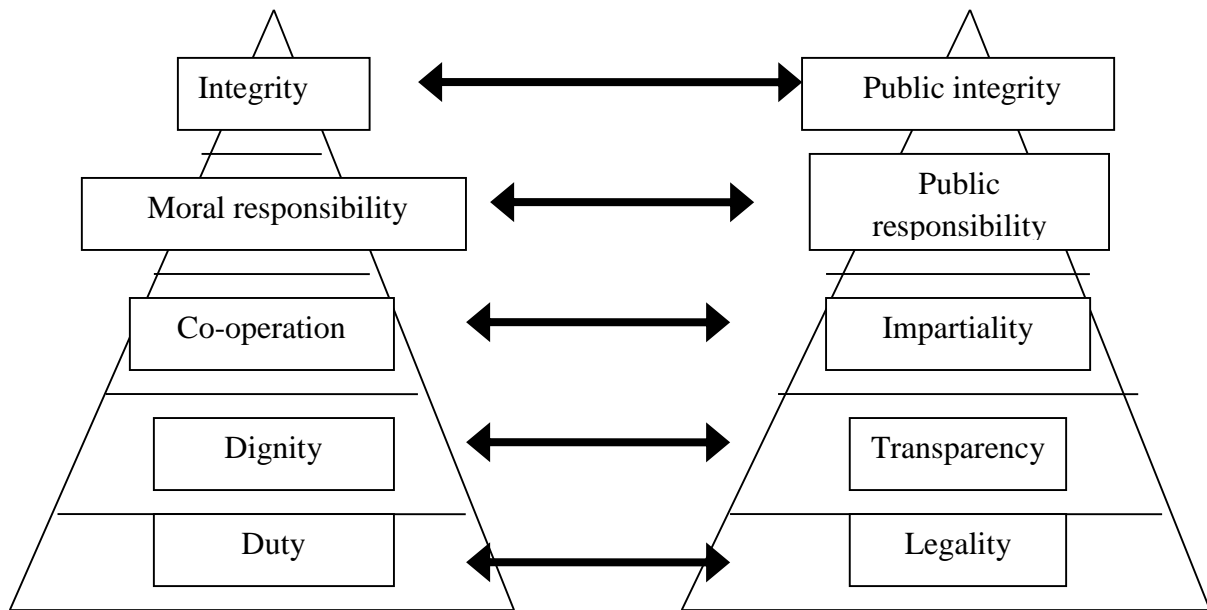
### ***1.2. The public integrity***

The integrity from the general ethical pyramid (Ulman, 2015) is named here public integrity, meaning the integrity of the public actors or of the public sector. 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 the present paper context, 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 and 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 stability. 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.

**Figure 2 – The pyramid of the general ethical values versus The pyramid of the public values**

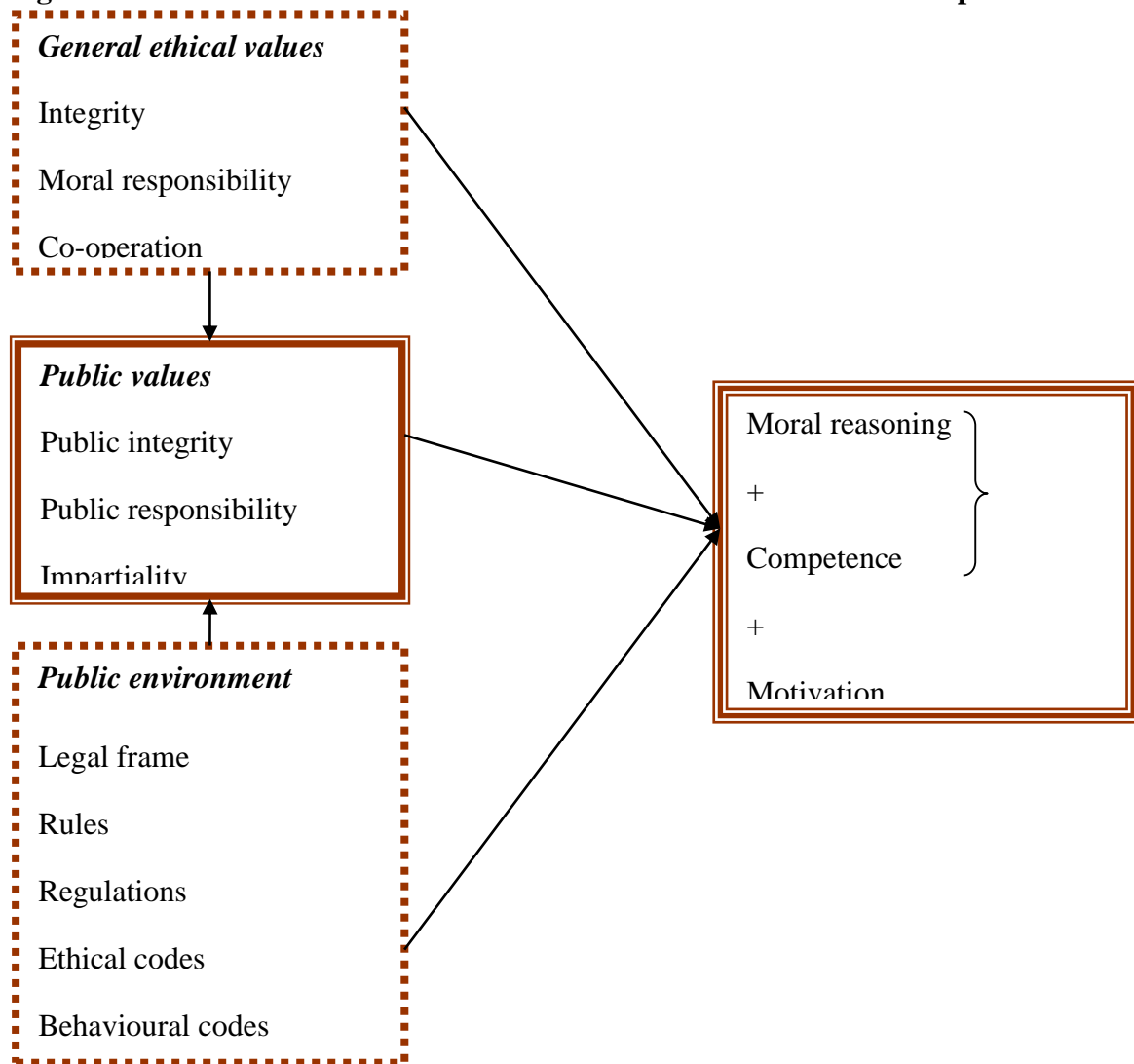


Source: author's representation

The public values are derived from the general ethical values (Ulman, 2015) and influenced by them in a very high level. Therefore, the public actor who in his personal life is defined by the ethical values from the general pyramid translates them at his job in the public sphere. This retrieval also depends on the characteristics and particularities of the public sphere. So, the legal frame, the rules, the regulations, the ethical and behavioural codes, the organizational management, but also the hygiene factors (safety, status, relations with subordinates, supervisors and employees from the same hierarchic level, the salary, the conditions of work, administration policies) and motivators factors (professional growth, responsibility, work itself, recognition, achievements) from Herzberg's theory influence the general ethical values such as, when they are transposed into the activity of the public actor, to delineate the public integrity that is concreted in ethical or un-ethical behaviour in the public sector (Figure 3).

In other words, the public values correlate with the general ethical values of the individual from a public position, nearby the public context of the public sphere. The influence does not come from a single direction, the delineation of the public value system represents a combination between personal determinants of public actors and environmental factors of the public activity. This correlation's result concretes into the moral reasoning that, nearby the competence and motivation, conducts to an ethical or un-ethical behaviour of the public actor (figure number 3-6).

**Figure 3 – The determinants for the ethical/un-ethical behaviour in the public sector**



Source: author's representation

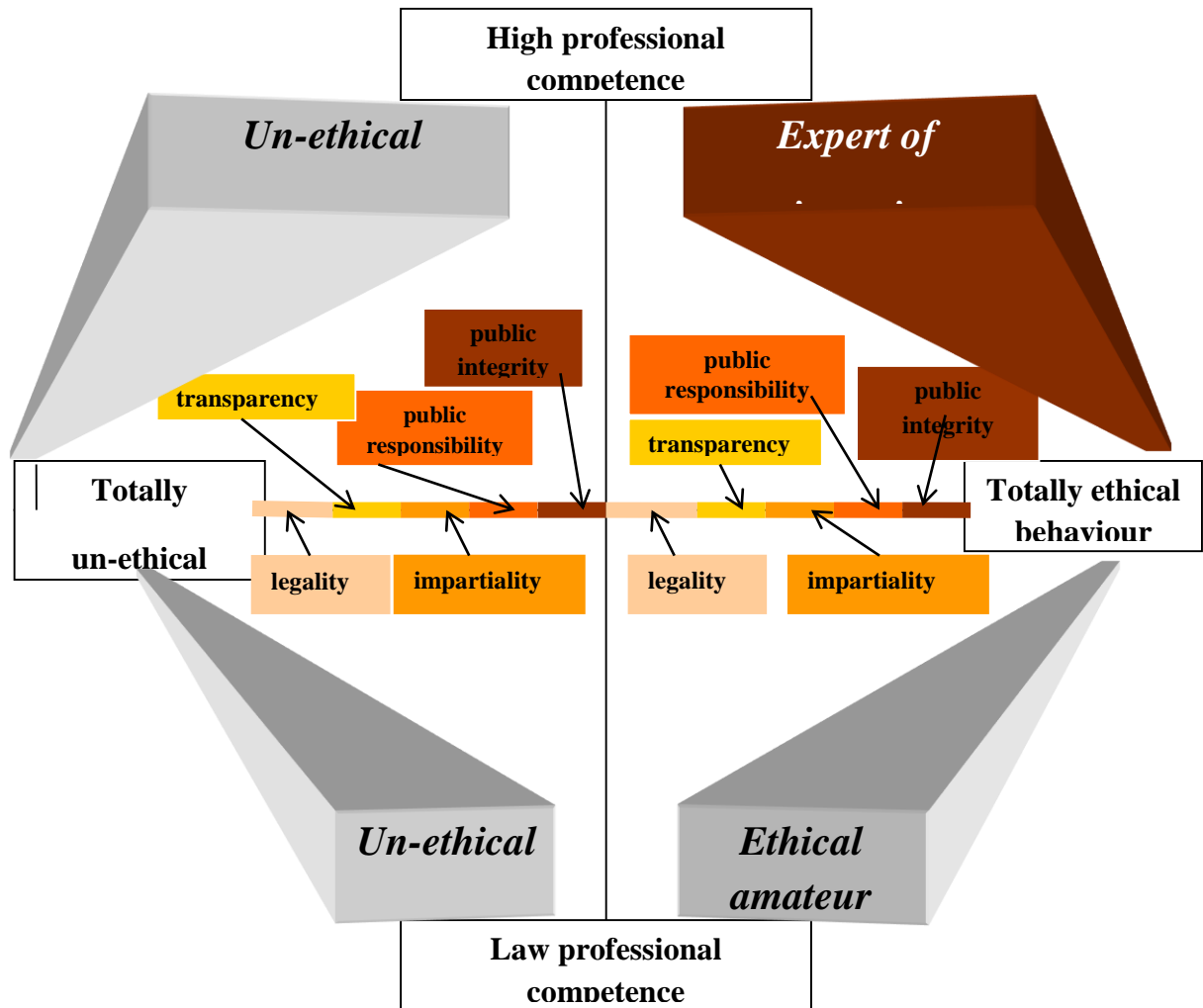
The public actor may be estimated taking into consideration two dimensions: professional competence and his ethics from the place of work. First of them, professional competence, has two extremes: high professional competence and low professional competence. The second, the ethics from the place of work concretes into an ethical or un-ethical behaviour, with its extremes: totally ethical behaviour and totally un-ethical behaviour. Their intercrossing divides the public actors in four categories:

- 1) The un-ethical amateur – the professional competence and the ethics from the place of work are at a low level;
- 2) The ethical amateur - the professional competence is at a low level, but the ethics from the place of work is at a high one;



- 3) The ethical expert or the expert of integrity - the professional competence and the ethics from the place of work are at a high level; and
- 4) The un-ethical expert - the professional competence is at a high level, but the ethics from the place of work is at a low one.

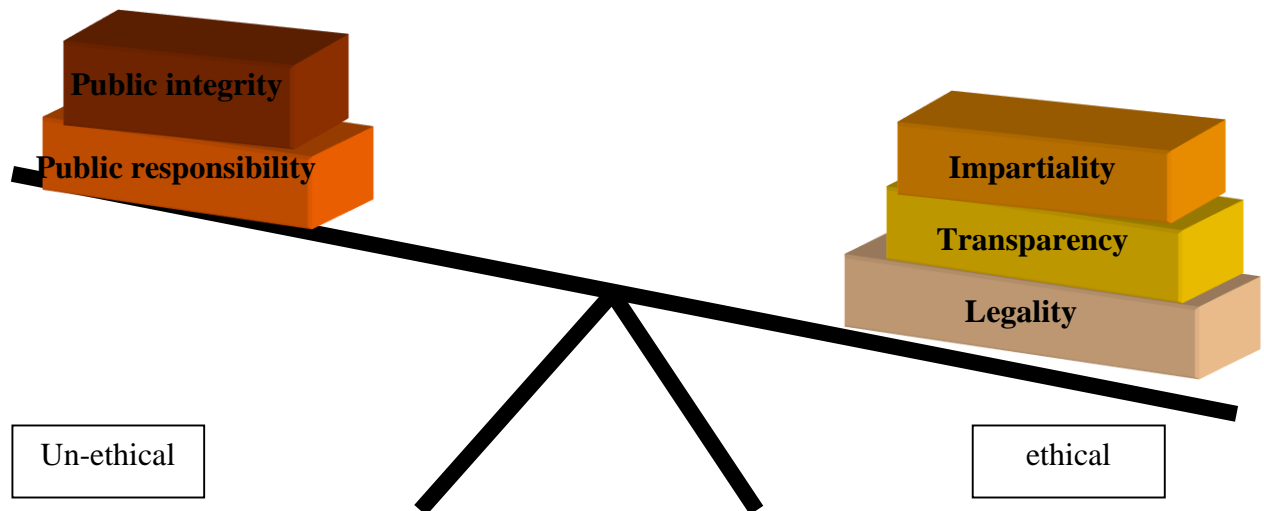
**Figure 4 – Public actor’s professional categories taking into consideration his professional competence and his ethics from the place of work**



Source: author’s representation

A public actor can be called as having integrity only when he detains both professional and ethical competencies at a high level. So, a public actor is an employee of integrity only when he is professionally competent and behaves in an ethical manner, being called an ethical expert. In the former figure, the right above quadrant is the only quadrant in that can be included the public actor of integrity. Indifferent if the public actor respects the first four values from the pyramid of public

values – legality, transparency, impartiality, public responsibility – but he does not attain high professional competence, he cannot be seen as a man of integrity at his place of work. This happens because the ethical part becomes insignificant here without attaining the professional skills needed to be balanced with the ethical ones.



**Figure 5 – The balance of the public actor’s values**

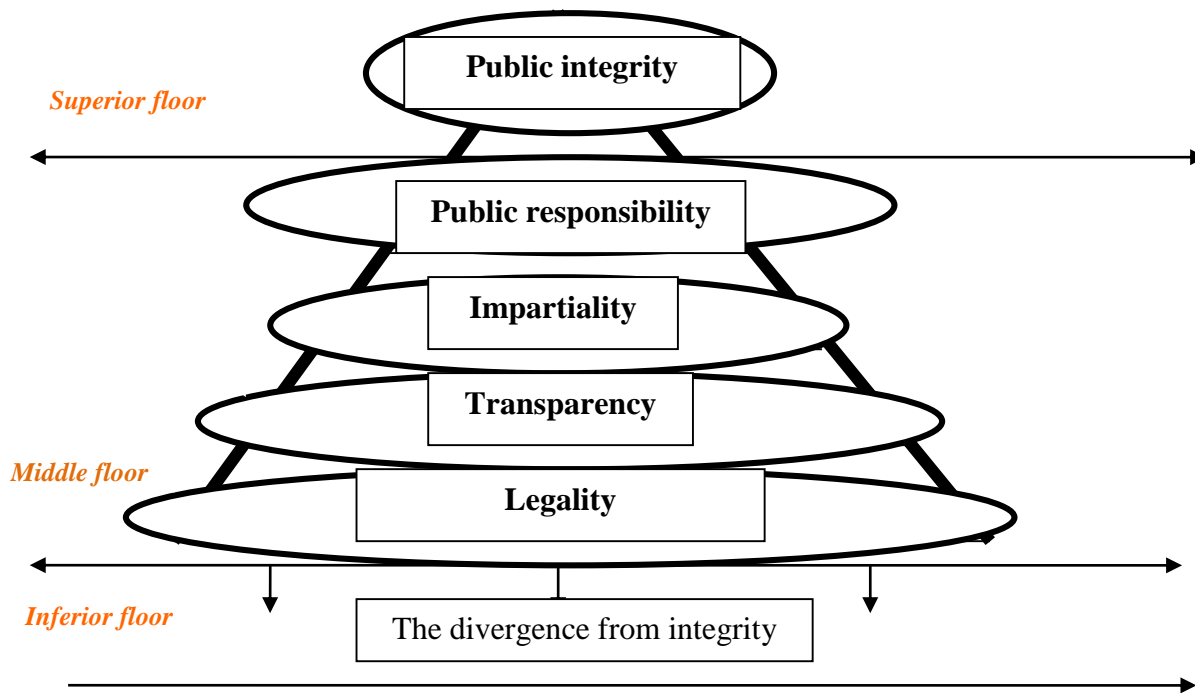
Source: author’s representation

The ethical or un-ethical condition of a public actor can be evaluated through a balance of values that, once being accumulated, or, on the contrary, being lost by an individual, bows it either to the right, meaning to an ethical condition, either to the left, to an un-ethical one. As long as the public actor learns to take into consideration and to respect, one by one, the values of the pyramid, he advances on the ethical aspect and bows the balance to the right till near its vertical position. It must be said that both the zero level of ethics and the maximum level of ethics aren’t possible to attain. This fact can be explained if we think on the way of being of the equivocal human nature, that is always inclined to habilitate himself, but also to tend to the general moral welfare. In this context, if a public actor respects the public integrity’s values, he assures to himself and to the people around him, proper public relationships, that helps him and the others to obtain the expected economic and social stability.

From general to particular, similar to the integrity concept as a general ethical value specifically for the social actors implied in reports of labour, the tending to public integrity is almost impossible to attain, but, also, it is wanted to be always cultivated as a final ethical aim in the public space. Therefore, a conscious public actor, that is always available and open to find and resolve the goals

from an ethical and fair perspective to himself, to the organization and society, is a real model, dignified to be followed and possible to be characterized as tending to integrity.

**Figure 6 - The framing of the public values taking into consideration the level of ethics needed to be attained**



Source: author's representation

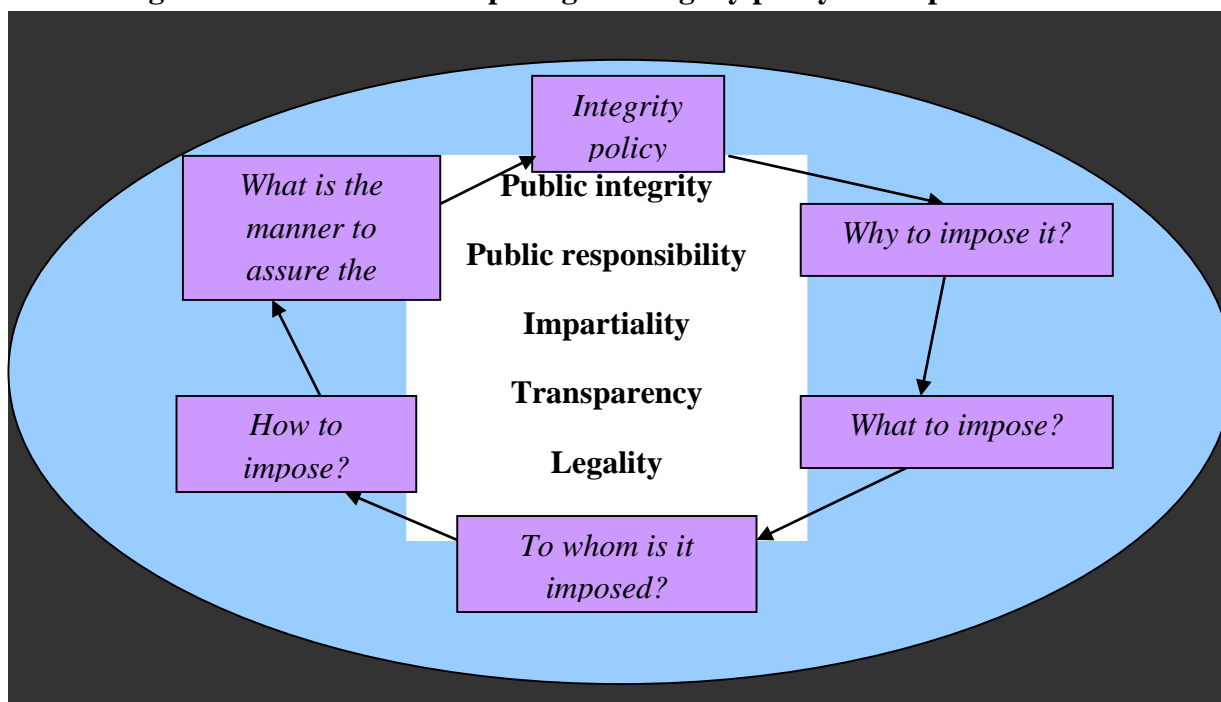
As a supreme public value, the public integrity can be identified, as the general integrity, with the value of the values from the superior floor of the values. The middle floor of the public values is formed by the other four values of the pyramid: legality, transparency, impartiality and public responsibility. The inferior level is for the divergences from the value of integrity, corruption being included here. Neaby this, fraud, conflicts of interest, violence, abuse or manipulation of information, discrimination, abuse of public resources, etc. can be included in this floor.

## 2. The way to put into practice the public values of the pyramid

As we discussed about what integrity really means, trying to define in a precise way its characteristics and manner of achievement, the way it can be applied to the social and economical reality as to generate a more ethical and economically stabile space and a development of the general welfare is imposed to be up for debate. All the public actors frame its principal characteristics,

defining and transforming it in correlation with their attitudes and behaviours about the problems and challenges of the public environment and of its relations with the exterior provoke. If a management policy is desired to impact the public actors, it is necessary that its goals to be very clearly defined. On their turn, the public actors and their system of values concreted in the adapted behavior from the place of work are influenced by the belonging system. In these conditions, the macro perspective approach is as important as the micro perspective approach is.

**Figure 7 – The frame of imposing an integrity policy in the public sector**



Source: author's representation

Much more, as Mises accentuates, the action is always an action made by particular human beings (Mises, 1985, p. 152), but, he likes or not, the individual is obliged to take into consideration that he is born into a pre-existent society; and this society is not a manifested entity across him, but only through him and his peers (Pohoata, 2009, p. 119). Making a parallel of this reference adapted to the present paper, it can be concluded that the public action is always made by the public actor directly responsible for this, but, either he likes or not, he is obliged to realise that he is part of a pre-existent public system. So, his entire system of personal values must be adapted to the conditions and to the context of the pre-existent public system. Secondly, this must happen with the conscience that this system is not an entity that manifests above him, but only through him and his colleagues. Therefore, the influence between the two variables is reciprocal, and the greater importance of one

then the other one is equally with the dilemma of the ascendancy or of the egg or of the hen, equally with the problem of the individual's pre-eminence over the society, as it appears to Mises (Ibidem).

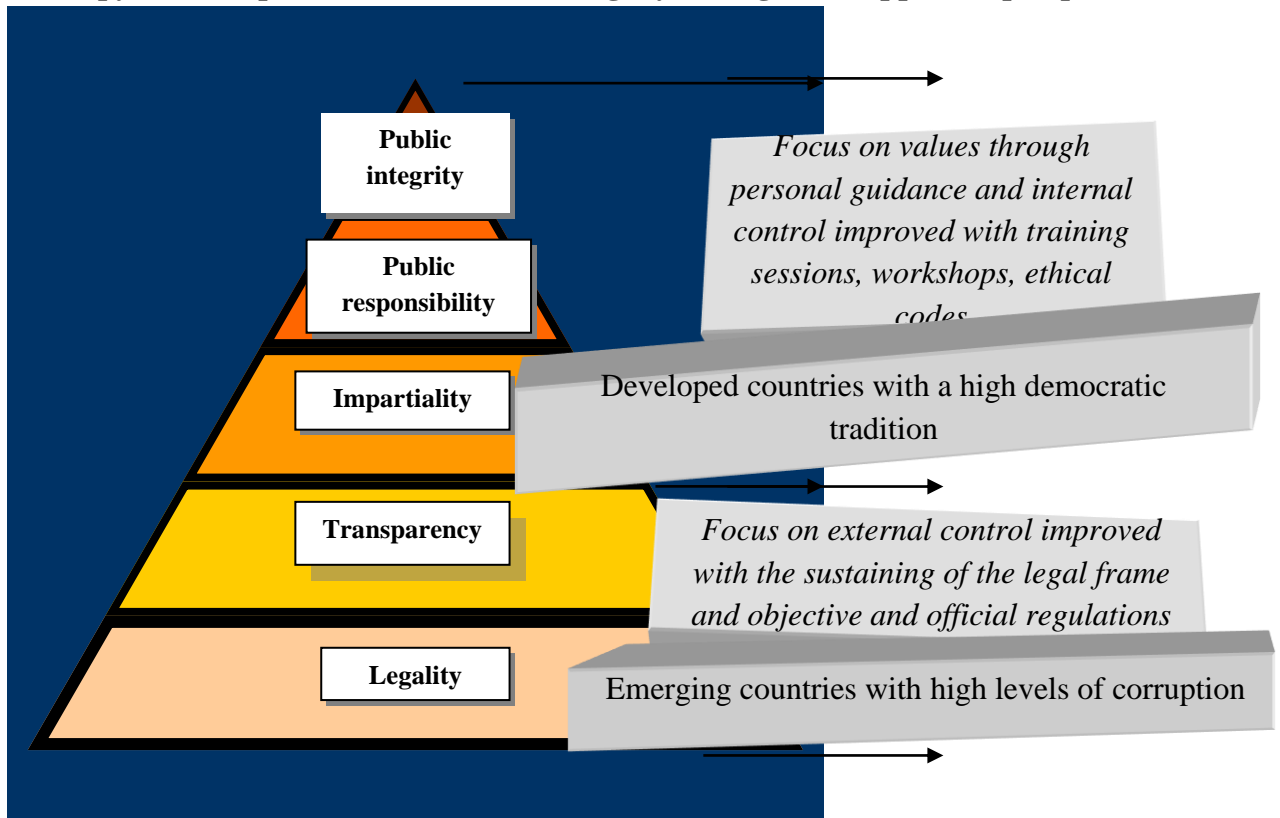
The integrity policy must concentrate to the five discussed public values: legality, transparency, impartiality, public responsibility and, finally, public integrity. Its major goal must be the achievement of the supreme value – public integrity. For the possibility to materialize this goal, it is essential to identify the arguments for implementing such an aim so that, starting from the top of the public hierarchy and ending to its basis, each actor to be conscious and disposed to achieve it. A policy that targets the ethical problems needs, more than others, to be unequivocally supported in the organization. The ways it is implemented must be very clearly established, the implementing steps must be very sure as the trust level to grow along the process. To be well defined, the integrity policy's assessment frame must have the responses to five questions: *Why to impose it?*; *What to impose?*; *To whom is it imposed?*; *How to impose?*; *What is the manner to assure the impact?* (Figure 7).

The studies reveal that in the countries with a democratic tradition that is high and well implemented in the collective subconsciousness of their citizens, and with a high level of economic freedom, the integrity from the level of ideas is less detained than the one from the practical level, concreted into the behavioural level. Therefore, although at the first level, they have a similar attitude with the emergent countries, when the ideas are put into practice, the integrity national systems of the developed countries are so well constructed that the systems do not permit the same un-ethical behaviour met in the emergent ones.

Starting from these premises, the sustaining of the legal frame and objective and official regulations consolidation in the countries with high levels of corruption imposes as a logical option. So, for the rules-based approach, the most adequate measures are: risk analyses, codes of conduct, conflict of interest policies, whistle-blowing policies, complaints policies, inspections, integrity testings, early warning systems, formal sanctions, procedure for handling integrity violations, etc. In this way, the level of the public integrity can be improved in the emerging countries. In other words, through the formal and detailed rules and procedure, as instruments to reduce the abnormalities from the integrity and to prevent corruption phenomena, the first two public values – legality and transparency – improve. After their achievements, the advancement to the next levels of the pyramid – impartiality, public responsibility and public integrity – can be assured focusing to personal guidance and internal control improved with the training sessions, workshops, ethical codes, etc. It must be underlined that the balance between the rules-based and the values-based approach to integrity is needed. But, while the first are almost totally attained by the developed countries, so the focus on the value-based measures is naturally argued, in the emerging countries the situation is

different. For better results, the policies must concentrate first on the rules-based measures to improve the first two values of the public pyramid, and, scarcely then, to focus on the public values from the next levels to assure a complete integrity system.

**Figure 8 – The pyramid of public values and the integrity management approach perspectives**



Source: author's representation

In this context, nearby these important elements of the public integrity management, beneficial for the achievement of the integrity goals are: the insertion of better performance standards, the results control and their comparison with the quantitative indices, the promotion of an intervention management and the competition encouragement to the public level, the three E principle specifically implemented in the public sphere (the economy of the resource usage, efficiency and efficacy) to be also applied to the public integrity policies.

## Conclusions

The public servants need to know more precisely the standards they are expected to apply in their daily work and where the boundaries of acceptable behavior lie. In this context, the general ethical values and, then, the public values are the starting point for all the discussions about public integrity and corruption. The public values are derived from the general ethical values and influenced by them in a very high level. Therefore, the public actor that in his personal life is defined by the ethical values from the general pyramid translates them at his job in the public sphere. This retrieval also depends on the characteristics and particularities of the public sphere. So, the legal frame, the rules, the regulations, the ethical and behavioral codes, the organizational management, but also the hygiene factors (safety, status, relations with subordinates, supervisors and employees from the same hierarchic level, the salary, the conditions of work, administration policies) and motivators factors (professional growth, responsibility, work itself, recognition, achievements) influence the general ethical values such as, when they are transposed into the activity of the public actor, to delineate the public integrity that is concreted in ethical or un-ethical behavior in the public sector.

The divergence from the public integrity means: first, the contravention of the principle of the law; second, lack of transparency; then, failing in offering the proper impartiality; and lately, deficiency in the public responsibility. If a management policy is desired to impact the public actors, it is necessary that its goals to be very clearly defined. On their turn, the public actors and their system of values concreted in the adapted behavior from the place of work are influenced by the belonging system. In these conditions, the macro perspective approach is as important as the micro perspective approach is. The profound sustaining of the legal frame and objective and official regulations consolidation in the countries with high levels of corruption imposes as a logical option. For better results, the policies must concentrate first on the rules-based measures to improve the first two values of the public pyramid, and, scarcely then, to focus on the public values from the next levels to assure a complete integrity system. Through the formal and detailed rules and procedure, as instruments to reduce the abnormalities from the integrity and to prevent corruption phenomena, the first two public values – legality and transparency – can be improved. After their achievements, the advancement to the next levels of the pyramid – impartiality, public responsibility and public integrity – can be assured focusing to personal guidance and internal control.

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