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PUBLIC INFORMATION SYSTEM AS THE MEANS OF SOCIAL AND POLITICAL COMMUNICATION

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Goal: To detect the state of communications between municipal authorities and the population; to devise recommendations on creating public information system to improve communications between municipal authorities and the population.

Methods: The study is based on the results of opinion poll ‘Information Needs of the Population of Gubkinskiy Urban District’ conducted in Gubkinskiy urban district in 2010, which included:

- a questionnaire survey (a representative sample, based on three criteria – type of settlement, sex, age, n=600 of respondents, standard sampling error did not exceed 4.5%);
- a survey of experts (the group of experts included municipal employees, who work with public information system, n=50 respondents).

Results: The author suggests a model of public information system for managing a municipal entity and improving communications between the authorities and the population.

Scope of application: The results can be used by analytical subdivisions of local authority departments; in special-purpose programmes to improve public information systems of municipal government; in designing academic courses for university students majoring in State and Municipal Management.

Keywords: public information system of municipal government, informational interaction, political communications, population’s information awareness.

ИНФОРМАЦИОННАЯ СРЕДА УПРАВЛЕНИЯ КАК ОСНОВА ОБЩЕСТВЕННО-ПОЛИТИЧЕСКОЙ КОММУНИКАЦИИ

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Цель: определение состояния системы информационного взаимодействия органов власти с населением на муниципальном уровне; разработка рекомендаций по формированию информационной среды, способствующей организации эффективного взаимодействия органов муниципальной власти с населением.

Метод или методология проведения работы: Эмпирическую основу составляют материалы социологического исследования «Информационные потребности населения Губкинского городского округа», проведенного в Губкинском городском округе в 2010 году и включающего в себя:

– анкетный опрос населения (репрезентативная выборка с соблюдением удельного веса отдельных квот в структуре населения по трем критериям: тип поселения, пол, возраст, n=600 респондентов, стандартная ошибка выборки не превысила 4,5%);

– экспертный опрос (в группу экспертов вошли муниципальные служащие, имеющие непосредственное отношение к наполнению информационной среды управления, n=50 респондентов).

Результаты: Предложена управленческая модель организации информационной среды управления муниципальным образованием для повышения эффективности информационного взаимодействия органов власти с населением.

Область применения результатов: Результаты исследования могут быть использованы в деятельности информационно-аналитических подразделений органов муниципальной власти; для разработки муниципальных целевых программ совершенствования информационной среды муниципального управления; а также для разработки и преподавания учебных курсов студентам вузов,

обучающимся по направлению подготовки «Государственное и муниципальное управление».

Ключевые слова: информационная среда управления муниципалитетом, информационное взаимодействие, политическая коммуникация, информационные потребности населения, информационная активность населения.

An efficient local government system is impossible without deep involvement of citizens into managerial decisions, which in its turn is closely linked to the intensity of communications between the population and the authorities. Public information system can help in improving communications between local authorities and the population.

J. Habermas mentions two types of authority: ‘the authority which evolves during communication and administratively exercised authority’ [4, p. 31-55]. This means that the authority either evolves as the result of communication or ensures its legitimacy by managing political communications. In present-day society the communication is only limited to the authorities influencing the citizens unilaterally, which A.I. Soloviev calls ‘unipolar communication’, when ‘the authority only informs the passive mass of individuals preoccupied by their everyday matters’ [1, p.14].

The key elements of public information system are the authorities, the population, and communication means. Presently, the mass media, Internet resources and meetings with governmental officials are the main means of communication.

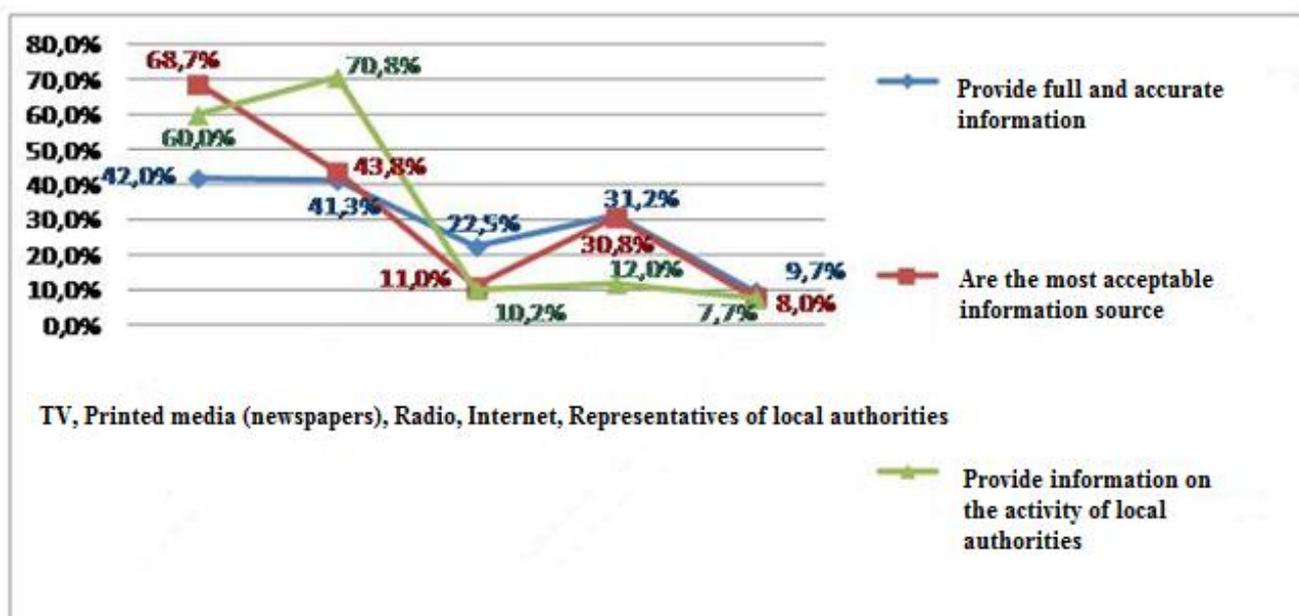
The main tasks of public information system are collecting information on the problems in the district and informing the citizens about local events and new opportunities to improve their living conditions. Besides, the system should promote moral and spiritual values, patriotism and civic consciousness. An efficient public information system should be self-regulated and perform the main functions: managerial, communicative, motivational, axiological and evaluation function.

The opinion poll has detected unsatisfactory state of the system. This can be explained mostly by a high share of respondents (53%) who are poorly informed about the authorities' activity.

One of the reasons is incompliance of public information system's content with population's needs. For example, the majority of population is interested in legal information. 41.3% of respondents would like to get it regularly and more than a half (54.8%) have noted its deficit. Information about healthcare institutions, the Pension fund and social welfare authorities is the most demanded. 87,8%, 87,3% и 87,5% of respondents would like to get information about these institutions respectively 'on a regular basis' and 'sometimes'. However, one fifth of the respondents cannot access the information about public healthcare authorities. 30% of respondents claim they have no access to the information about the activity of local authorities, 21.7% would like to get it regularly and 61% - occasionally.

To some extent the difficulty in communications can be explained by inefficient use of communication means. Meetings with the representatives of local authorities is the least effective means of communication. Only 8% of respondents consider it acceptable. The respondents also noted it provides the least full and accurate information as compared to other communication means (Pic.1).

People often have difficulties with perceiving the information they get during the meetings with the representatives of local authorities, so they have to turn to their friends for consultations. Thus, there is no guarantee the information will not be distorted or misinterpreted.



Pic. 1. Comparative Analysis of Communication Means

Table 1

Distribution of Respondents who Have Difficulty with Perception of the Information and Seek Explanation, Depending on Communication Means

Communication means	News-papers	TV	Radio	Internet	Representatives of local authorities
Have difficulty with perception and understanding of the information	13.50%	11.17%	9.50%	16.00%	49.50%
Had to seek explanation from friends, relatives or colleagues.	11.67%	9.67%	7.50%	15.50%	44.67%

Despite the popularity of the Internet (49.5% of the respondents use it daily and 75.3% more or less often) this communication means can provide information about the activity of local authorities only for 12% of respondents. Only a little more than 2% of the population get the information at the official site of the district’s administration (according to automatic calculator of the number of users)[2].

Population has little trust to completeness and accuracy of information about the life of city district provided by local newspapers and television. This happens because the mass media were founded by the local authorities, so the content of the information is associated with local government officials. This results in:

- in compliance of provided information with people's needs;
- provided information could be biased;
- people do not trust to the information, which they consider deliberately biased.

Besides, the maximum number of population that has an opportunity to watch local TV channel does not exceed 83.4%, as the channel is not included into satellite TV packages. Moreover, current affairs programme is on only for 1 hour a day (a 20-minutes daily programme on at 7 a.m., 2 p.m., 7 p.m.)[3].

Low efficiency of radio is connected with its unpopularity among population, thus, it cannot be considered an efficient means to inform the population.

However, the main reason why the citizens are so poorly informed about the activity of local authorities is because they are not active in seeking information. This presents the most acute problem of information exchange. During the study the respondents were referred to three groups according to their involvement in the process of information exchange with local authorities – active, passive and uninterested. 'Active' citizens (21.7%) are those who try to obtain information about the activity of local authorities on a regular basis. The 'uninterested' group is made up of those who claim they do not need such information – 11.9% The 'passive' group is made up of the remaining respondents (66.4%), who would like to get information about local authorities' activities occasionally or who do not know.

People from the 'passive' group do not seek any interaction with local authorities neither they seek any information about them, they make use of episodic information often from unreliable sources, but at the same time claim the information is unavailable or inconsistent. This explains why nearly half of the number of people

who have no problems with information access are poorly updated about local authorities' activities; however they do not say they do not need this information.

Therefore, unsatisfactory work of public information system is connected with two of its aspects – socio-psychological and managerial. On the one hand, the existence of a problem with perception of the information about the activities of local authorities by the citizens is connected with poor quality of information and a negative attitude to local authorities in the society. On the other hand, this happens because information exchange is poorly organized. Local authorities upload information content illogically without considering people's informational needs.

Therefore, the main factors that prevent efficient functioning of public information system of municipal authorities are: at the social and cultural level – estrangement between population and the authorities even at municipal level; at the social and managerial level – lack of feedback mechanism in the system; at technological level – the authorities use only traditional ways, printed media and TV, to inform the population.

Managerial model of public information system is based on four types of activity. The first is stimulation of information retrieval – devising programmes to support public interest groups, working with young people; informational support of the population groups that lack information. The second is creating a positive image of the authorities and their public information system. The third is informing the population more efficiently, i.e. introducing extra communication means (Intranet, interactive broadcast in public places, billboards), cooperating with independent information agencies and the mass media. The fourth is designing the scheme to estimate the efficiency of public information system.

Managerial model of information system of a municipal entity should include three kinds of activities:

a) institutional, with major changes aimed at demonopolization and decentralization of social information sources and increasing the awareness of the population in general and young people in particular. The first is possible by

including independent and non-conventional mass media into public information system; the second – by improving youth policy and senior school education programme, that could foster integration of the young generation into societal and political life;

b) organizational (appointing a special employee in every subdivision who would work with the information system, creating an information centre, supporting active social groups, motivating government employees responsible for working with active social groups, monitoring the efficiency of public information system, organizing access points to public information system with the help of the Internet and Intranet);

c) normative (devising municipal programmes to stimulate information retrieval and targeted at creating positive image of the authorities and the public information system as a mechanism of information influence; at the federal level – devising standards for information networks of the authorities to improve administrative and political management).

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