

Information Exchange and Communication Infrastructure in the Public Sector

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Abstract. The article provides an analysis of the characteristic features of communication infrastructure in the public sector in European countries, with their distinguished temporal and contemporary trends in the development of communication infrastructure in public sector. The authors emphasized that the development of government communications contributed to the establishment of mutual communication lines between the state and society, the understanding of public opinion, provided for the modernization of the form of government information. It is revealed that informing the public about government policies can be key for their efficiency. Therefore, governments of modern democracies are likely to develop their own "codes of communication" and recommendations for government advertising in the near future.

Keywords: Communication in Public Sector, Government Communication, Communication Infrastructure.

Introduction

As the experience of work of public administration bodies in young European democracies shows, for a long time the instrumental potential of the dialogue was not considered to be fully relevant to the goals of public administration. A number of countries have been literally pushing for a review of public communication strategies with the society through the opportunities provided by the Internet and new technologies. Modern information technologies contribute to the convergence of social problems and conflicts. «Less government – more governance» becomes another slogan of public administration in many developed countries.

Communication is, above all, the exchange of information in society. More widely, communication is a deal that requires finding understanding as well as building and maintaining relationships where dialogue is needed [1].

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The scientist E. Jianu emphasizes that the purpose of institutional communication in public administration is to ensure the public interest [2]. Public administration serving citizens should ensure a clear communication process, "written in simple language" that everyone can understand. Institutional communication allows public authorities to ensure their image and create an atmosphere of trust around them.

Well-known theorist R. Burkart has developed a consensus-oriented public relations theory, which provides for the quality assurance of communications at three levels: 1) the level of information that the system disseminates; 2) the level of organization that the media disseminate information about; 3) public education on the issue (Burkart, 2007). The scientist emphasized that if the target audience considers a certain information issue to be extremely important or controversial, a face-to-face consultation tool should be applied as well as online chats or social networking. Media platforms should be widely used, and the current situation of information messages should be assessed and monitored [3].

Dutch scientists R. Dekker and L. Melenhorst's studies have focused on the growing influence of the media on society in general and on the behaviour of politicians and the functioning of political and administrative institutions in particular (this is defined as a process of "mediatization") [4]. These scientists insisted that relations between journalists and political actors are mutually dependent.

Theorist B. Head stated that channels for two-way communication between the government and citizens have become more important in the modern world. Indeed, public consultation and citizen feedback provide public servants with the information they need to review service packages that better meet customers' needs. This approach has been particularly useful in reforming the systems of social service delivery. B. Head believes that there is a great interest in developing "partnership approaches" between government, sectoral and social sections to share their skills and experience in finding solutions to the main issues [5]. Such developments have great potential for increasing opportunities to improve public sector service provision.

Government communication also concerns long-term cultivated public relations with regional and local institutions established by the Government [6].

Theorist E. Klijn distinguishes three specific theoretical traditions of the study of the prospects of media and public authorities: 1) a tradition of public relations (emphasis placed on conveying specific ideas, brands or media messages to the general public), 2) The tradition of the agenda (emphasis on how the media influence the political agenda) and 3) The tradition of mediatization (an aspect of possible subjective re-interpretation of government reports in the media) [7].

Results

In the era of the information society communication technologies change the process of communication and promote social services through a computer-based communication network. The system of e-government is effective means of communicating power with society, which ensures openness and transparency of the activities of authori-

ties at all levels, simplifies the procedure of obtaining services and increases the level of confidence of citizens in power.

Since the introduction of electronic services for citizens, which Ukrainians have begun to actively use in recent years, Ukraine has risen from 87th to 62nd place in the rating of development of the e-government, consisting of the United Nations, and from 75th to 32nd place in the rating of e-activity (e-participation) [8]. However, the implementation of e-management in the country has a number of problems. The availability of updated and well-structured content sites that satisfy the information needs of people about public services or tools of interaction with authorities is the official source of up-to-date information for community residents.

As a result of a sociological survey on the use of information and communication technologies in work with the public on the question "How do you assess your level of information and communication competence?" only 9% of respondents identified their level as high, 11% of respondents indicated an average level of knowledge. The level of respondents (80%) was very high who spoke about the low level of ignorance and inability to use new information technologies (Fig.1).

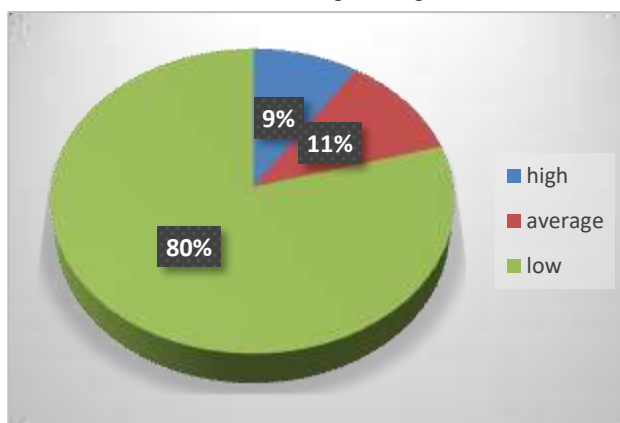


Fig. 1. Levels of information and communication competence

The answers of respondents are presented in Fig. 2, on the feasibility of using Internet technologies and in what directions to build effective work with the public.

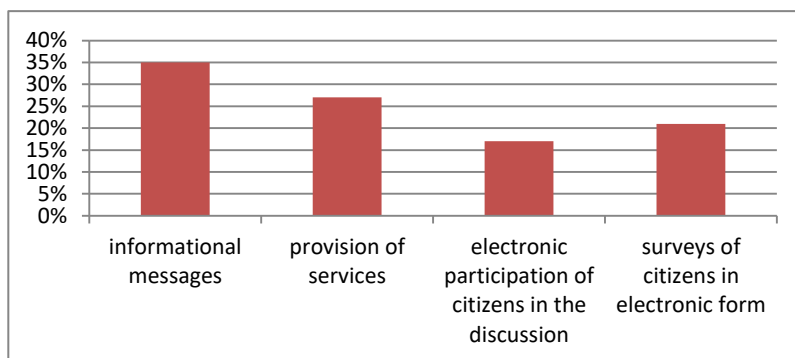


Fig. 2 Directions of Internet technologies usage

It is worth noting that in conditions of constant renewal of information and communication technologies it is difficult for every citizen to learn in a huge flow of information without having new skills to work with information. Therefore, in the process of establishing a modern information society, the practical application of information and communication technologies, and the information competence of public servants should be of great importance, since only a specialist can improve the efficiency of public service structures, involved in the processes related to social changes that take place.

Analysis of statements during sociological research allowed to identify the main topics that interest respondents in improving their own skills in the field of use of information technologies in professional activities.

Table 1
Names of topics in the field of information technology use

The title of topic	Indicator, %
Search for information on the Internet	23,6
Work with email	12,7
Work with electronic services of authorities	12,3
Electronic workflow	19,5
Electronic digital signature	12,1
Internet Security	8
Web Page Development and Provisioning	6
Electronic government procurement	5,8

If in European countries Internet services are used by people of all ages, in Ukraine the most active users of the Internet are persons between the ages of 18 and 44, it creates a gap between citizens over 55 years of age, mainly less use of Internet services. At the same time, there is an increase in the Internet audience of users aged 55 and over in 2019 compared to 2017 (Fig. 3) [9].

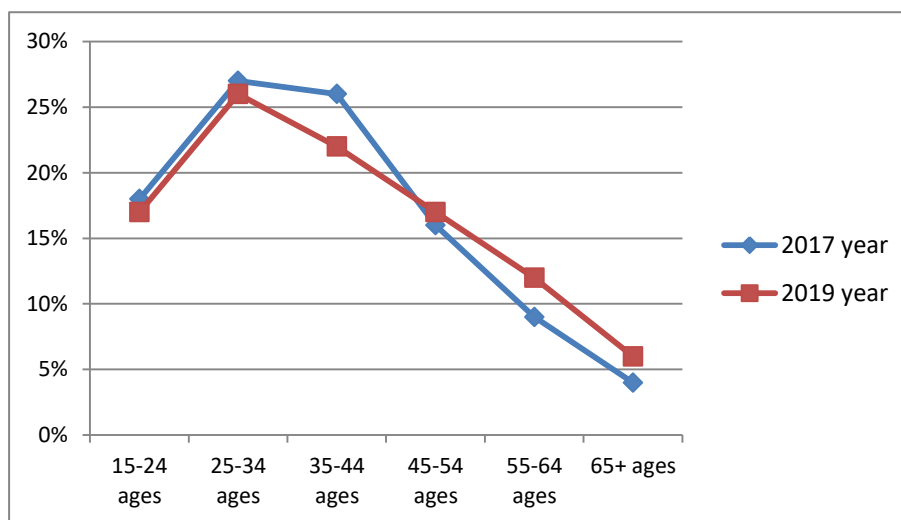


Fig.3 Demographic structure of "regular" Internet users

Consequently, the level of information and communication competence of persons of public authority should be better developed. After all, the development of effective and efficient e-government in Ukraine is possible provided that the information and competence leadership staffs of the region are formed, which will be able to raise the processes of interaction with civil society and business needs to the modern level. Extensive electronic application process is widely used by the Office, which is a special smart software system. Since 2003, the British Directgov portal has provided the fullest range of public services in one place (government services, recommendations, tips). Thus, the government in this case positions itself as a service provider, as a subject of service policy, and citizens – as clients served by the government. In this case, Directgov is like a mobile “live” government information center available anywhere.

The meaning and structure of democracy is changing dramatically. Citizens, as active participants in the political and administrative process, feel the need to demand more information, and they receive it. When the public is able to understand the process of public policy development, then it is easier for public authorities to ensure its development, implementation and achievement of the main goals. Mainly one-way information flows between the subjects of political administrative communication are replaced by communicative bilateral information exchanges. In the new model, media play not only the role of mediator, but also an independent actor of public policy.

However, on the other hand, there are also doubts about the time consuming public discussions in terms of the time pressure of making a management decision (crisis or post-crisis context). In one of his interviews, the Minister of State Property Mikołaj Budzanowski stated that endless public debate and decision-making paralysis would be detrimental to a long-term strategy for the development of the Polish economy [10]. Given the importance of prompt public administration, this view is noteworthy. However, in the preparation of strategic documents, public discussion is very im-

portant, and for these reasons the above statement is debatable, while clearly illustrating the position of some of the public officials in post-communist countries.

As far back as in 1995, one of the goals of the Latvian State Reform Concept (Latvijas Valsts reformu koncepcija, 1995) was conducting state reforms to promote the involvement and personal interest of citizens in government processes and to obtain current accurate socio-political information. Mechanisms for public participation in the development and elaboration of public policy have been identified by such important documents as the 2001 Policy Planning Guidelines and the 2008 Government Communication Policy Guidelines, the 2014 Public Administration Policy Development Guidelines. Since 2003, the NGO representative has the opportunity to cooperate consultatively at the meetings of the secretaries of state, and since 2009 a new form of public participation – Green Books (discussion papers) – has been introduced. This allows the public to promptly get acquainted with the draft legislation – at least 14 days before its submission.

In 2016, inefficient bureaucracy was identified as the second main barrier to business in Latvia after high taxes (Global Competitiveness Report, World Economic Forum, 2016). To the opinion of the Latvian scientist A. Petersons, the main reason for the inefficient activity of public servants is inefficient communication policy of public authorities [11]. As A. Petersons notes, as early as at the beginning of the XXI century, a small number of public managers, who due to their positions interacted with entrepreneurs in the country, understood their values and needs, were very far from making important political decisions. In the opinion of M. Zanders, the word "dialogue" was compromised in the Latvian reality, as it was used by many policy-makers who were not ready to listen to public opinion, not to mention the promotion of public participation, partnership in policy making and implementing [12]. This practice reaches the Soviet times, when any professional dialogue in the socio-political sphere was considered strange or even dangerous. Democracy is an asymmetric process of communication in Latvia, where the public has great opportunities to express their opinions, but there is no significant feedback from the political elite, says the Latvian theorist J. Nikišins [13].

As of 2017, about 66.2% of Latvian residents used the Internet regularly [11], while in Iceland and Denmark the same indicator is 80% [14]. The need to ensure "legal awareness and public involvement in decision-making processes, ensuring modern communication" was defined in the Latvian document "Guidelines for the Development of Public Administration for 2014-2020". Public servants had to learn how to use twitter, youtube, facebook and local social networks. The State Chancellery in cooperation with the Latvian School of Public Administration has started to work on a new modular system of training for public servants, including the topics of "customer orientation, cooperation, public involvement, integrity" and other principles and practices of good governance [15].

According to some scientists, in the case of Latvia, it is possible to talk about asymmetrical two-way communication, rather than two-way symmetrical communication [16]. According to I. Pure, and in the case of asymmetry, many things can be achieved as people live in large amounts of information and do not have enough free time for frequent dialogues. Therefore, a two-way asymmetric model is more widely

used in communication than a two-way symmetric model, as resources (finance, time, personnel and technology) are in some way limited for both parties and the dialogue is too complex as a tool. As of 2016, there were 16 259 registered NGOs in Latvia, of which 2.4% are continuously involved in the development and implementation of public policy [11].

Given that there are overlaps between policy areas, ministries often have coordinated communication policy. Ministries are also responsible for the operation of shared infrastructure and information distribution channels in general and social media. The Information Council also joins the audit of the media, which remain within the competence of the ministries. Each year, a list of selected media companies to be audited is submitted to the lower house of parliament. The Information Council is also responsible for promoting the evaluation of new electronic media, exploring opportunities to provide information to ethnic minorities and other target groups. The Information Council also provides a platform for promoting various mutual interests of the parties involved in the implementation of the communication policy of public authorities. For example, arranges meetings with municipal and provincial information officers, members of major press organizations, consumer organizations and private associations, which deal with the provision of services [17].

In order to continuously develop professional competencies of communication employees, the Information Council regularly organizes conferences and trainings for information service employees. Topical issues in the work of the Netherlands Information Council still include the problems of building a national image of the country, public relations, promotion of the Netherlands abroad, effective social media campaigns, discussions on European integration issues, information policy on possible natural disasters and joint development of the recommendations on that issue with popular television organizations.

Discussion

The existence of information (education on social and political issues) rationalizes the choice and behavior of citizens, and thus increases the constructive component of civic participation.

In most European countries, the communication policy of public authorities is coordinated by an office located in the centre of government buildings or close to them, which is the main provider of information services for citizens and the general information needs of the media (Federale Voorlichtingsdienst (Service Fédéral d'Information) in Belgium, Bulgaria Government Information Service, French Service d'Inform du du Gouvernement, Dipartimento per l'informazione e l'editoria in Italy). As a rule, the central information office serves as the main contact point for providing detailed information about the state organization, laws, plans, social services and benefits, statistics. The central information management system performs at least six functions: 1) conducting research and analysis, 2) consulting senior officials, 3) media relations management 4) informing citizens; 5) coordination of communication policy and promotion of internal services, coordination of information flows 6)

measurement and evaluation of public opinion (viewing correspondence and comments received over the phone, conducting surveys, distribution of questionnaires, holding public hearings, round tables, organization, focus groups can get useful information about the perceptions, needs and wishes of citizens).

The Central Information Office as a rule manages the cooperation between servants on information of public authorities. In many countries, this office takes a leading role in organizing regular meetings of information servants to review government themes, priorities and developments along with potential media campaigns. However, the full integration of policy and communication remains an unachievable ideal; Some public servants tend to perceive communication as an additional activity in the process of implementation of decisions, rather than the main function of public administration bodies.

As mentioned earlier, the central information service in many countries serves as a first 'stop' for citizens' requests for public services (as a clearing (remote) home for public information). The development of a "connected society" provides an attractive opportunity for democratic governments to regularly develop broad public information campaigns to raise citizens' awareness of social issues (for instance AIDS prevention, reduction of smoking, promotion of waste sorting). These campaigns are also used to train the society and develop support for citizens for major government plans. Such campaigns in EU member states have been linked to problems of European integration, explanations of referendums on EU treaties and the consequences of adopting the euro as the common currency of the Union.

The UK has a Central Information Office attached to the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom. The Office is based in London and has eight regional offices. The staff of the institution is just over 300 servants. The main powers of the Office are to advise the government, inform the general public about procurement and project management, and share information with the media. The human resources potential of the Office is special – the majority of public servants employed here were involved from the private sector, which made it possible to fully implement a client-oriented approach within the framework of the New Public Management concept. The innovative process of electronic applications is widely used in the work of the Office – it is a special smart software system.

But to the reform of government communication, which started in 2003, in the UK there were about 1800 government portals, most of which did not respond to citizens' requests for some kind of information. As a result, users were automatically (and ineffectively) redirected from one website to another, from ministry to ministry. So the government information did not reach the citizens, they did not respond to it, and moreover, they almost never visited the ineffective government websites.

The Government Information Service plays a central role in providing information support to government policy in the Netherlands. There are about 135 people working in this government body. The main activity of the the Government Information Service is to provide information on weekly meetings of the government. This requires a great number of prior consultations with ministries. Emphasis is placed on highlighting and explaining politics through the independence of the media; journalists covering parliamentary affairs provide detailed information on official visits within the country and abroad. Office staff provides the Cabinet, Parliament, Committee, The

Council of State, the General Accounting Department, the National Ombudsman and all other ministries of information from daily newspapers, radio, television and magazines. The Office forms this information using computerized filing systems and also performs certain tasks in special circumstances, such as natural disasters, military affairs, hostage situations, flood warnings.

At present, the expectations of citizens of democratic countries regarding what information on government activities should be available have changed significantly [18]. The demand for more responsibility and transparency in the activities of public authorities is also linked to new technologies, the potential of which can be used to spread a huge amount of information more easily and quickly.

In 2000 the Dutch theorist Bart W. Édes noted that no other country is yet taking full advantage of the rich potential of the internet to communicate and better serve its citizens, the movement towards online government and online civic engagement is implacable [19]. According to Bart W. Édes, the balance of power shifts from public buildings to a "click-through", and this is an IT revolution in the relationship between the state and citizens.

Modern theorists call the sphere of internal and external communication policy of public authorities variously: "public relations in public administration", "communication in public administration", "government communication". M. Lee notes that the relationship between public authorities and the media has grown from competitive to cooperative, but still far from progressive [20]. (Public servants sometimes treat journalists in a hostile manner in the process of revealing scandals, while journalists treat in a stereotypical way individual reports of public servants as propaganda).

Conclusions

In the modern world, it is more and more difficult for public servants to justify the need for limited access to certain information. Citizens feel the need to demand more information and they receive it. When the public is allowed to understand the policy-making process, it is easier for the government to build support for the implementation and achievement of key objectives. Therefore, an important state objective is to improve public information services. Public expectations of "open authorities" may be higher today than ever before. Citizens recognize that there is a greater risk of not having access to information than of using it for dangerous purposes.

Perhaps the most significant development in the provision of public information at the beginning of the 21st century has been the increased use by governments of the Internet as a tool for communication between the society and servants. As of 2000, all European Governments had an official website, and almost all ministries and key agencies also had their own websites. This sets new challenges for the public administration systems of the states: 1) it is necessary to actively direct efforts to overcome the "digital divide" (the problem of providing wide access to the Internet in insufficiently economically active regions); 2) upgrade the system of training and professional development of staff in the field of information support (e.g., introduce modules from web design into their training programs), provide modern equipment for

information services employees, etc. Through the process of communication, the state authorities seek to establish close relations with the citizen; by drawing nearby and starting a dialogue, they see personal demands and complaints.

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