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Communicative Model as an Institutionalization Factor for a Local Self-Government in the Russian Federation: By the Example of Local Self-Government Bodies in the Republic of Tatarstan

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Abstract--The paper investigates the communicative model's influence on the local self-government development in Russia. The research's relevance lies in the role of communication in the institutionalization of local government in Russia and is determined by the weakness inherent in local government institutions here. The nature of local self-government in the Russian Federation is contradictory. Local self-government bodies are closely connected with the state power and dependent on it, and at the same time, they are legally excluded from the system of state power bodies. The internal political events of the first half of 2020 indicate a new turn in the development of local self-government in the Russian Federation. According to the amendments to the Constitution of the Russian Federation adopted following the referendum of July 1, 2020, local self-government and state authorities are part of the unified public authority system in the Russian Federation, while at the same time local self-government bodies may be vested with certain state powers, provided that the material and financial resources necessary for the exercise of such powers are transferred to them. The implementation of the delegated powers to local self-government bodies is controlled by the state.

Keywords--communication models, local self-government bodies, local self-government, political communication, PR-activities of local self-government, press-service.

Introduction

The institutionalization process in local self-governance in the Russian Federation was launched with the adoption of the Constitution in 1993. According to the basic law of the country, local self-government is proclaimed to be part of the constitutional order. Since that period, the local self-government reform in Russia begins: the legislative base for local self-government is built up; elected bodies of local self-government are established, opportunities for citizens' participation in local self-government are formed and the Soviet model of local self-government communication is gradually reconstructed (Gecíková & Papcunová, 2014; Zhang, 2005).

In 1998 the Russian Federation ratified the European Charter of Local Self-Government. Consequently, a federal law "On General Principles of Organisation of Local Self-Government in the Russian Federation" was adopted in 2003, which introduced significant changes to the system of local self-government and marked the beginning of the active phase of local self-government reform in Russia. It defines local self-government as a form of people's exercise of their power providing independent decision of the population for the issues of local importance under their own responsibility directly and (or) through the bodies of local self-government based on the interests of the population taking into account historical and other local traditions (Zu, 2021; Gede Budasi & Wayan Suryasa, 2021). This definition contains the key principle of the local government organisation: the solution of issues of local importance is carried out taking into account the interests of citizens. This process is inextricably linked to the local authorities' activity to involve citizens in the discussion, implementation and control of certain management decisions on issues of residence on the territory of a particular municipal entity (Putrayasa, 2021; Lewerissa et al., 2021).

The activities of local authorities are carried out in accordance with international standards, are based on the democratic principles of openness, transparency, public awareness of the main issues of life in a city or other locality (transport services, landscaping, housing, cultural, sports activities, pre-school and school education system), being a common practice for modern society (Fatykhova et al., 2017). Despite significant changes in the local government system in the Russian Federation, experts and researchers note the weakness of the local government institution, which is manifested in the lack of financial independence (Ezhevski, 2015; Bukhvald & Valentik, 2018; Inglehart & Welzel, 2009). Financial dependence of municipal entities on regional authorities is reflected in the existing communication model. There is a shift towards building relations in the direction of "local authority - regional authority" instead of "local authority - public". This local government's position can be conveyed through a well-known folk saying "he who pays the piper calls the tune". In this case, building communication with the population becomes a mere formality and acts as a 'screen'.

This is partly why this subject in the socio-political order is becoming a focus for the country's leadership. In his annual address to the RF Federal Assembly in January of this year, RF President Vladimir Putin outlined a vector for further development of local self-governance, noting: "The real powers of local self-

governance must be expanded and strengthened". And during the subsequent meeting of the Council on the Development of Local Self-Government, with the participation of the Head of State, the problem of the lack of funding for the implementation of the powers by municipalities was discussed. In particular, the Mayor of Kazan - the capital of the Republic of Tatarstan, Ilsur Metshin, pointed out the following: "Over 15 years of authority, up to 43 different amendments have been added to the law, 245 items have been introduced. But the finances remain the same" ... The mayor, head of the city, head of the region has to deal with problems on a daily basis. He has 20 tasks and 10 "bullets". Not everybody has the talent to hit two targets with one shot. And they play this game of tag. Probably, the municipal power should not be given over to the relationship that will develop between a mayor and a governor". However, it is important not only to be aware of the need to create mechanisms of financial independence of local government, but also to be concerned about ensuring citizen participation in solving issues having local importance. Otherwise, local self-government will become unviable, and will be lost ([Froehlich & Rüdiger, 2006](#); [Nulty et al., 2016](#)).

Method

In order to identify the possibilities of the communicative model in the local government institutionalisation in Russia, two methods were used: the political-legal analysis method and the expert interviews method. During the study of the local self-government's communication model in the Russian Federation, the texts concerning federal legislation, local self-government's documents and municipal acts, empirical data collected through the survey method, interviews with experts (representatives of regional media editorial offices, employees of local self-government press services in three major cities of the Republic of Tatarstan, Kazan, Naberezhnye Chelny, Nizhnekamsk) were analysed. The expert interviews were conducted in November-December 2019. Ten experts were interviewed: editors-in-chief/producers/editors-in-chief of Tatarstan24 and Efir TV channels, Kazanskiye Vedomosti and Respublika Tatarstan newspapers, Vechernyaya Kazan online publication, Business Online business newspaper, Kazan First information and news website, employees holding senior positions in information and analysis departments (press services) of local self-government bodies in three major municipal entities of the Republic of Tatarstan. The experts were selected on the basis of their competence and authority ([Androutsopoulou et al., 2019](#); [Odendaal, 2003](#)).

Results and Discussion

The architecture of the communicative model of local government in Russia is set out in federal legislation. The existing normative documents enshrine the principle of information openness of local self-government bodies ([de Vivero, 1995](#); [Vitálišová et al., 2021](#)). The basic law that guarantees citizens' access to information on the activities of public authorities and local self-government bodies is the Federal Law N 149-FZ "On Information, Information Technology and Information Protection" dated 27 July 2006. The norms of this law oblige local self-government bodies to provide access to information on their activities, including by using information and telecommunications networks, including the Internet. The official website of municipal authorities is becoming an effective

communication tool that allows the legal principles of accessibility, openness, timeliness, and reliability of information on the activities of local authorities to be put into practice. According to the federal legislation norms, local self-government bodies determine the relevant structural units or authorized officials in order to organize access to information on their activities (Starshinov, 2019).

Not less important are the normative provisions that delegate to municipal entities the authority to establish a printed edition, where all local laws, bills, as well as information on the socio-economic, political and cultural situation of the municipal entity should be published on a mandatory basis. The Federal Law "On General Organisation Principles for Local Self-Governance in the Russian Federation" contains a norm according to which municipal legal acts affecting the rights, freedoms and obligations of man and citizen do not come into force until they are officially published, which confirms the mandatory nature of informational interaction between the population and local government. Organisation of the mechanism for considering citizens' appeals is an obligatory part of the local self-government bodies' activity in the Russian Federation, an instrument of receiving "feedback" from the residents living in the municipal territory and studying the social well-being of the citizens (Starshinov, 2019).

However, despite the existing legislative mechanisms that allow for two-way communication between local self-governments and citizens, the experts' answers confirm the contradictory nature of local self-governance in Russia. The experts were asked to choose one of the two proposed characteristics inherent in the nature of local self-government in Russia (by the example of the Republic of Tatarstan):

- Local self-governance is a form of people's exercise of their power, independent resolution of issues of local significance by the population on their own responsibility.
- Local self-governance is the representation of the state at the local level, designed to execute the orders of state power.

Most experts agree that local government in the Republic of Tatarstan is characterised by a dual nature: it contains characteristics and forms of exercising power by the people and has elements of state representation on the ground. The experts note the following characteristics of local government in the Republic of Tatarstan: "...in Kazan, there are various public hearings, meetings of representatives of the municipal entity with the citizens, for example, on the organisation of public spaces. The government has a request for feedback from the population. And a certain barrier in interaction of local government with public is gradually coming down...", "Local government is a representative of the state at the local level intended for execution of orders of state power", "Local government is practically powerless now, as it has no certain financial possibilities, no certain ability to influence anything. That is why, although the first option is more correct, the second is closer to the truth, closer to reality".

Speaking about the role of the communicative function in the activities exercised by local self-government bodies, the experts are unanimous: local self-government bodies are obliged to ensure information transparency: "Local self-government

bodies are responsible for communicating with the population. This is their responsibility..."; "It is necessary to report everything: both about some of their successes and, possibly, about some of their failures. Especially since with the development of social media it has become problematic to withhold anything at all, because people react instantly".

The experts participating in the study were unanimous in their opinion that the communication model of modern local self-government and the population should be two-way symmetrical. The experts note: *"The communication model should be two-way so that both sides have the opportunity to convey information to each other. The development of information technology allows this mechanism to be implemented in different forms and formats..."; "...the authorities should inform the population about changes in laws, development of territories, financing of priority areas for the society, etc..., at the same time, the authorities should hear the population about their problems, about the progress in implementing certain decisions accepted by the authorities.*

When describing the existing communication model implemented by the local self-government bodies in the Republic of Tatarstan, the experts highlighted the following characteristics:

- Regular and prompt notification about adopted and planned decisions, programmes and activities, and clarification of complex issues in their areas of activity are performed;
- Communication is carried out through various channels: personal meetings of municipal officials with citizens, by considering written applications, including through the Internet reception desk, posting information on the official website, social networks, and through public discussions;
- Feedback channels (Internet reception, social networks, reception of citizens, acceptance of letters) are maintained, which enable the delivery of information on problematic issues of the population, to perceive the citizens' reaction to the implemented policy;
- Local self-government bodies provide information about their activities mainly in a positive connotation; there are examples of silencing information that can have a negative impact on the image of the municipal entity;
- Local self-government bodies use in their daily practice information technology to discuss with the citizens the adopted management decisions related to the issues of life in the municipal entity;
- Local self-government bodies respond to media enquiries promptly, but their content may be incomplete, or have a formal character.

Summary

Local self-government communication is a mechanism for involving citizens in the implementation of local self-government. The model of local self-government communication under study shows signs of an asymmetrical relationship. At the same time, both the authorities and the public are aware of the role of effective local self-government communication. By managing information flows, including through social media, ensuring two-way communication, responding to social challenges, problematic issues, local self-government PR services are able to

ensure information transparency of government, create an atmosphere of trust, and thus increase its legitimacy (Styrin et al., 2021; Anna & Nikolay, 2015). In this regard, the development of local self-government is called to be one of the important state-building directions for the coming years.

Conclusion

Further institutionalisation of local government in Russia is impossible without a clear-cut and balanced communication system within the local self-government bodies. Particular attention should be paid to the content of the broadcast messages, which, in fact, should comply with the principles of truthfulness and concreteness; in case of enquiries from citizens, the media responses should correspond to the essence of the question asked (Putrayasa, 2017; Dasih et al., 2019). Ideally, attempts to avoid problematic topics, silencing of the real situation in a municipal entity, manipulation of the agenda (shifting public attention from real problems to pseudo problem areas for their joint solution by representatives of local self-government and public, citizens, public organisations, business structures) should be minimized.

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