

OPENNESS OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT BODIES: WORK WITH CITIZENS' APPEALS, FEEDBACK

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Abstract

Work with citizens' appeals is considered as the achievement of a certain stage of information openness of local government bodies and at the same time as the active establishment of feedback with the population of the subordinated territory. Russia is implementing the Concept of development of information society. Openness and transparency of municipal authorities are inherent indicative features of their democratism.

We were interested in the work of local authorities with citizens' appeals, namely, its organization and the order on the basis of Russian legislation. When monitoring the work with citizens' appeals, the method of analysis was applied, 12 parameters and 3 criteria were used. The first criterion is availability: the actual availability of information or service at the official website of municipal authority. The second criterion is navigation convenience: search easiness of information at the official websites, logic of the sections was analysed, number of clicks from home page to desired subsections at the official website. The third criterion is completeness: integral volume of data placed at the official websites of municipal authorities. Comparative and legal method allowed determining correspondence of information content at the official websites of municipal authorities to legislative requirements.

Key words: information openness, local government authority, the work with citizens' appeals.

JEL Code: H75, I2, I21

Introduction

Working with citizens' appeals is always an integral part of the powers of local governments. We think that the right to know is realized through different forms of citizens' appeals. Russia has adopted Federal laws and other documents establishing rules in this area. We set a research goal – to determine the adequacy of the legal framework level in Russia in the field

of working with citizens, the availability of information openness and the ability to monitor the process in this field.

Issues concerning information openness are widely discussed in all spheres of life: from politics and state administration to social service of the population. Implementation of the information openness principle in all spheres of life provides access of citizens to information, ensures transparency of activities of public authorities and municipal organizations, possibility of responsible choice (Badulescu, Kolozsi, Badulescu & Lupau, 2016; Kankanhalli, Zuiderwijk & Kumar Tayi, 2017; Kromidha & Córdoba-Pachón, 2017, Rezer, 2013, 2017, 2018).

Information exchange between the state and local government and society is an important factor from the point of view of state functioning and development (Irving-Clarke, 2017; Jaeger, Lyons & Wolak, 2017; Nisar, 2015; Jēkabsone & Sloka, (2015); Merkus & Veenswijk, 2017). Integral information environment becomes a city-forming feature in the era of information society formation and introduction of “e-government” into the state management.

1 Methods

Research methods as below were applied to analyze whether official websites of the local governments comply with the current legislation which stipulates their information openness and transparency:

- analytical method (monitoring of local governments official websites from the point of the criterion of presence, completeness of information and navigational availability);
- modeling method (carring out systematization of requirements to the structure and content of the official websites of the municipal government bodies on the issues of citizens’ appeals and feedback);
- legal comparative method (comparing information content of local government official websites with the requirements of the current legislation);
- comparative method (comparing the local government official websites information openness within the group, identifying leaders and outsiders);
- statistical analysis method (analyses of the obtained research results of the governmental bodies’ official website);

– observation method (monitoring of updates of local governments' official websites).

We also used the method of deduction. There is the transition from the total requirements for the content of the municipal authority official website to the specific official website of the specific local authority for questions of citizens and the availability of feedback.

In Table 1, as an example, we give four parameters for which the study was conducted (this block included 12 parameters of information openness: work with appeals, feedback). The total amount of points in the block was 48, the evaluation criteria were availability (0;1), navigation accessibility (1;2;3).

Tab. 1: Some parameters: work with appeals, feedback

Evaluation parameter	Legal acts and explanations on the official websites of local governments (presence/absence)
Procedure for consideration by the local government of citizens' appeals	Procedure for consideration by local authorities of appeals of individuals and legal entities on General issues, including a request for information
Time of citizens' reception	Days and hours of citizens' reception of
Reviews of appeals to the local government	Reports on the fact and reasons of citizens' appeals
Information on the results of consideration made and measures taken	Reports for each month on the results and solution of citizens' issues
Procedure and results of monitoring the quality of citizens' appeals consideration	Information on quality of work of the municipal employees working with addresses of citizens on the feedback channel

Source: the table was developed by the author

The basis of our practical part was the "Informetr" project expert monitoring of the information openness of the official municipal sites of the largest Russian cities (sites of the city administration with a population of more than 100 thousand people, except for cities of the Federal Importance). The "Informetr" system is a tool for monitoring, a platform where experts in the course of the study advise the bodies of state and municipal administration, discuss the formed assessments, answer questions. This audit was conducted according to 129 parameters, which were justified by regulatory and expert requirements for the placement of information on the official websites of local governments.

Monitoring of the work with citizens' appeals on the official websites of municipal authorities to work with citizens in the Sverdlovsk region was carried out in the period from

December 2016 to January 2019. We analysed 16 official websites of the municipal bodies, where cities have been grouped according to rankings depending on the number of populations living in localities: the first group includes population over 97 thousand people; the second group includes population from 57 thousand to 90 thousand people; the third group includes population from 37 thousand to 57 thousand people.

Analytical method includes 8 blocks of information, 68 parameters and 3 criteria related to the websites. The first criterion is the criterion of availability: the actual availability of information or service at the local governments' official website (0 – information isn't placed, 1 – information is placed); the second criterion is the criterion of navigation comfort: ease of information search at the website, structure of the website, number of clicks from the home page to particular sections of the website (1 – bad navigation (heavy to find required materials), 2 – average navigation (with small efforts), 3 – good navigation (fast finding of the necessary information). The logic of the section, and also number of transitions from the main page to the necessary subsections of the official site are considered. The third criterion is criterion of completeness: the integral volume of data published at the local governments' official websites. (1 – not all information is placed, 2 – the most part of information is placed, 3 – all information is placed). Comparative and legal methods help to establish whether the information content of official websites complies with legislation requirements.

The study identified two official websites of local self-government bodies in the Sverdlovsk region (Yekaterinburg city, Krasnoturinsk city), which can be considered a standard of information content for other municipalities. The sites reflect the organizational and information culture, as well as modern website design and timely response to citizens' appeals.

2 Results

We analyzed the Federal law of 02.05.2006 No 59-FZ "On the procedure for consideration of citizens' appeals in the Russian Federation, the Federal law of 09.02.2009 No 8-FZ "On the access to information on the activities of state bodies and local governments"; the Federal law of 06.10.2003 No 131-FZ "On the general principles of local government organizations in the Russian Federation" of 06.10.2003 No 131-FZ; the Federal law of 27.07.2010 No 210-FZ "On the organization of state and municipal services".

In the letter of the Ministry of Economy and Development of the Russian Federation of 29.04.2011 No 8863-OF/D09 "On methodological recommendations for the organization of monitoring the quality of public (municipal) services" we received information about the rules of monitoring the quality of public and municipal services.

Methodological recommendations for the implementation of the principles of openness in the Federal Executive Authorities and the methodology for monitoring and assessing the openness of the Federal Executive Authorities of the Russian Government allowed us to develop a technology for the study of information openness of the local governments. Analysis of the provisions of the all-Russian competition of the local government "Open municipality" allowed us to identify the main criteria and determine the directions of the study.

We came to the conclusion that Russia has formed a sufficient legislative framework for the implementation of the rights of citizens to receive answers to their questions when addressing the bodies of state and municipal government and the implementation of feedback using information and communication technologies, which are actively used in modern management.

Conclusion

Comparative and legal method allowed to determine correspondence of information content at the official websites of municipal authorities to legislative requirements in the work with citizens' appeals.

Official websites of local government authorities in the work with citizens' appeals comply with requirements of applicable legislation only to 51,95%, which corresponds to average degree of information openness. The leader for the information openness in the work with citizens' appeals is the city of Nizhny Tagil with the rate of 100 %, at the second place – Yekaterinburg with the rate of 92 %.

Outsiders are small towns of Russia and the Urals: Asbest (the population is 65,305) and Irbit (the population is 37,444), their information openness in the sphere of citizens' appeals was 8% and 12%, respectively, due to technological and social problems of the local population and local governments. All official websites provide the best information about the time of citizens' reception (in 93.7 5% of cases), poorly presented information (in 12.5% of cases) about the presence of an interactive portal and the presence of accounts.

In Table 2, we present the overall results of the study in the field of openness and work with citizens of municipalities in the Sverdlovsk region.

Tab. 2: The coefficient of openness dealing with appeals, feedback

City or town	Points	%
Yekaterinburg	44	91,67
Nizhny Tagil	48	100,00
Kamensk-Uralsky	24	50,00
Pervouralsk	20	41,67
Serov	20	41,67
Novouralsk	28	58,33
Verhnyaya Pyshma	28	58,33
Asbest	4	8,33
Revda	19	39,58
Krasnoturinsk	20	41,67
Berezovsky	28	58,33
Verkhnyaya Salda	24	50,00
Kachkanar	32	66,67
Krasnoufimsk	28	58,33
Alapaevsk	24	50,00
Irbit	8	16,67

Source: the table was developed by the author

The first group of studied cities (over 97 thousand people) contains three parameters that have 100% occupancy (the time of reception, the name of the head, the review of appeals). The following cities do not have information on the official website: Pervouralsk at seven parameters (the results of consideration, the order and results of monitoring, sending appeals from the site, monitoring of issues, the order of public hearings, voting, social networks), the Serov city at seven parameters (the results of consideration, the order and results of monitoring, comments, social networks, voting, the order of public hearings, monitoring of problems), the Kamensk-Uralsky city at six parameters (the order of appeals, the results of consideration, sending appeals from the site, monitoring of issues, voting, social networks), Yekaterinburg city at only one parameter (comments under reviews).

The second group of research towns (from 57 thousand to 90 thousand people) does not have 100% content of information. Three parameters are not fully filled in by all the towns of the second group (monitoring of problems, the order of public hearings, social networks). The following towns do not include such information: Revda at four parameters (the results of considerations, cases submitted from the website, comments, voting), Krasnoturinsk at four parameters (the results of the monitoring, sending appeals from the

website, comments, voting), Novouralsk at two parameters (monitoring results, review under materials), Verkhnyaya Pyshma at two parameters (the name of the head, quality monitoring). Asbest has only one filled parameter (sending appeals from the site).

The third group of towns in the study (from 37 thousand to 57 thousand people) contains two parameters that have 100% occupancy (the time of citizens' reception, the name of the head). Four parameters are not fully filled in by all the towns of the third group (comments under the materials, monitoring of problems, the order of public hearings, social networks). The following towns do not have information on the official website: Berezovskiy at one parameter (voting), Verkhnyaya Salda at two parameters (monitoring results, voting), Krasnoufimsk at one parameter (voting), Alapaevsk at two parameters (sending appeals from the site, voting). Irbit has only two filled parameters (the time of citizens' reception, the name of the head)

Acknowledgment

The validity and reliability of the results and conclusions contained in the article are confirmed by the consistency of the results with the theoretical sources and empirical results of the author obtained earlier in the study of information openness of public administration, as well as a comprehensive level of analysis of the phenomenon under study

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