

PhD Dissertation Evaluation Report

By Prof.Dr. Katya Ivanova Vladimirova - member of the scientific jury for the evaluation of the dissertation work of the doctoral student Boris Filipov Hadzhipetkov on the topic: “Deficits and priorities of communication practices in the local self-government system in Republic of Bulgaria” for obtaining education and scientific degree “doctor” in the scientific field “Organization and management of the non-production sphere (public administration) in professional direction “Administration and management”(3.7.).

The dissertation work of Boris Filipov Hadzhipetkov has a total volume of 237 pages and includes: an introduction, three chapters on the topic, a conclusion, three appendices and a list of used literature and other sources of information. The attached list of used literature and other sources of information, which is presented on 11 pages, is impressive and respectable, testifying not only to the educational, but also to the research training of the doctoral student. It contains: a list of legal acts, strategies and documents in Bulgarian; used specialized literature from 24 titles in Bulgarian and Russian languages and 63 in other languages - mainly in English and 152 Internet-based sources. This makes it possible to claim that the doctoral student knows very well the literature and scientific achievements, regulations, policies and practices in the researched field.

The timeliness, significance, practical needs and research interest in the topic predetermine the construction and content of the doctoral dissertation. In practice, the research is located in the development of the theoretic-methodological approaches of the modern public administration at the local level and the improvement of the practice in the field of communication strategies in the context of the ongoing reforms in the local self-government authorities. As pointed out by the doctoral student on page 5 of the dissertation abstract, "... one of the most important and at the same time one of the most unexplored aspects of this governance are the communication practices, regardless of the fact that their condition is key to the satisfaction and practical implementation of the criteria for good local self-governance..".

The research is original in its scope and structure and the first of its kind in our country. As the author also points out /page 8/: “a field is being researched in which there is a lack of development and knowledge about the dominant phenomena occurring in it”. The object of research is a new and significant area of the reforms that have taken place in our country in the last two decades in public administration - communication strategies and practices in Bulgaria. By its nature, the research is multifaceted, social, economic, sociological and other aspects are examined. Not only are the concepts of change, the reforms made, first results and the achievements highlighted, but

also the challenges for the future. In addition, policy proposals are made and the result of the study of the practice and the decisions in different municipalities, sociological studies, and other studies of the doctoral student conducted in the country are also shown. The aim of the dissertation is "...determining the deficits and priorities of communication practices in local self-government..." /page 2/. To achieve the set goal, the author applies a system for classifying, analyzing and evaluating the deficiencies and priorities of communication practices, and on its basis, the current state of practice in the researched area is identified and recommendations are made for their improvement. In order to achieve the goal, five specific tasks were set, which were successfully implemented with the conducted research and the presented dissertation work.

The research subject are the communication practices in the local self-government in Bulgaria, carried out by the local authorities and municipal administrations. Therefore, the specific object of research are the local authorities and their supporting administrations, divided into two groups: all districts of the Capital Municipality and all municipalities in Bulgaria with a population of more than 10,000 people. The thesis that the PhD student defends boils down to his statement that "Still, the state of external proactive and Internet-based communication practices carried out by local authorities and their supporting administrations do not contribute sufficiently to the deployment of the complex processes of decentralization." (page 6). Additionally to the main thesis, it is added that "... the current state of these practices does not contribute to the full use of the multi-layered institutional and social contemporary reality in order to achieve an enabling local management environment corresponding to the criteria for good local self-governance" / ibid/. The main methods and approaches used by the doctoral student to achieve the set goal and tasks are: the systematic, complex and interdisciplinary approach; an integrated normative model of communication practices of the local government on the basis of which a specific methodological apparatus is defined. The research has a dual purpose insofar as, on the one hand, it is aimed at deepening and expanding the theoretical and methodological approaches for classification, research and analysis of the role of proactive communication interaction in the development of the processes of decentralization and local self-government in the country, and, on the other hand, to offer specific management recommendations to improve the state of communication practices of local authorities and their supporting administrations, so that they are in harmony with the normative requirements of the theory and practice of local self-government, as well as being adequate to the requirements, imposed by the modern complex socioeconomic environment.

At the end of the introduction, and due to the research wide scope, seven limiting conditions of the dissertation are indicated.

The dissertation work has the three classic main parts: theoretical - outlining the framework of the study of the deficits and priorities of

communication practices in local self-government; methodological - the methods of scientific research and the operationalization of theoretical propositions and analytical - including an analysis of the deficits and priorities of the communication practices of local authorities in Bulgaria.

The main theoretical and timely questions are posed and presented in the first part of the dissertation research. These are the organization of the system of local self-government and its decentralization process, the role of communication interaction and the normative frameworks of the communication practices of local authorities, inter-municipal partnership, communication with the central government, international communication of local authorities, the connection with e-government, and the transparency and accountability of local self-government.

The second chapter is a logical continuation of the first and the theoretical statements from the first are operationalized in it by using, on the one hand, the directions and criteria for evaluating the proactive communication practices of the local government, and, on the other hand, by using the directions and criteria for evaluating Internet-based communication practices of local authorities in the context of the specific subjects of research /information, transactions and electronic interaction/. Based on the accepted theoretical framework and methods of research and operationalization, the third chapter presents the results of the specific research - of the deficits and priorities of the communication practices of the local authorities in Bulgaria. The object of analysis are, first of all, the proactive communication practices of each of the 16 districts of the city of Sofia, and, secondly, the municipalities in the country, carried out through the official Internet pages through analysis in the directions of information, transaction and electronic interaction. On the basis of the analyzes in the indicated directions, the summarized conclusions and recommendations are presented in separate points, on the one hand for the proactive communication practices of the regions in Sofia, and, on the other hand, through the official Internet pages of the municipalities in Bulgaria. On this basis, a number of proposals of practical importance are made. A separate place is devoted to the presentation of a recommended model for improving the e-based practices of local authorities, for which serious deficiencies have been identified.

Different approaches and sources of information were used for the research. An important place is occupied by the Questionnaire "Communication practices of local authorities" given in Appendix 3.

In the conclusive part of the dissertation, the most important highlights of the research are presented in a synthesized form. First of all, the doctoral student presents the subject of his research and the work done with the dissertation research on the assigned tasks. On this basis, generalizations and conclusions are made.

In summary of the results presented so far and the conclusions, and proposals made from the research, it can be summarized that the scientific contributions are done in two main directions: enrichment of existing knowledge and application of scientific achievements. The doctoral student demonstrates good knowledge of the theoretical and practical aspects of the researched problem and makes well-founded generalizations and proposals.

The specific scientific and scientific-applied achievements of the doctoral student, with the work done in the dissertation research, are mainly in the field of:

1. The theoretical analysis and derivation of specific normative factors that predetermine the specific role and dependencies of communication practices in the system of local self-government. A system for classifying, analyzing and evaluating the deficiencies and priorities of communication practices is proposed.

2. The methodology of communication management in local self-government has been derived, which sets a standard for the behavior of local authorities and their supporting administrations in the conditions of modern society.

3. Conducted practical research, analyzing the state of the external proactive communication practices of the districts of the Capital Municipality. A proposal for a communication platform has been developed to improve the state of electronic-based communication practices of local authorities and administration.

4. Making proposals for improving management at the level of local self-government by improving the applied communication strategies and platforms. A recommended model of an e-communication platform is proposed to improve the state of electronic-based communication practices of municipalities in the country. Formulation of conclusions and specific proposals based on the main results to improve the behavior of local authorities so that they can be adequate to the requirements and challenges of modern society.

The dissertation is well laid out and illustrated with tables, graphs, etc. Up-to-date information, results of questionnaires are used.

It seems to me that the dissertation work would gain more if communications at local government level were not treated primarily as a practice to be developed and improved, but seen also as a policy - with its shortcomings and opportunities for better management and connection with the surrounding world – population, social partners, civil sector, central authority, international structures and organizations.

I think that the dissertation work would have increased its qualities to an even higher degree if another approach had been used for the conclusion, namely that it should not tell what was conceived and done, should not be an annotation of it, but should be systematized in it, grouped and ranked the summaries, conclusions and proposals that are contained in the research, but

remained with the individual elements of the dissertation. The many repetitions could also be avoided with a tighter structure and logic of the exposition. The dissertation would also benefit from editing to reduce repetitions.

The abstract presents well the dissertation research as well as its main contributions. Two publications of the doctoral student on the subject are also indicated, one in the Yearbook of the Center for Public Administration of the National Bank of Ukraine /2008/ and the other in the magazine Economic Alternatives of the UNSS /issue 3 of 2009/.

In *conclusion*, on the basis of the achievements indicated in the dissertation work of a scientific and applied nature, I propose to the respected members of the jury to award the educational and scientific degree "doctor" to Boris Filipov Hadzhipetkov in the scientific specialty "Organization and management of the non-production sphere (public administration) in a professional direction "Administration and Management" (3.7.).

January 02, 2023
City of Sofia

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