

PhD Dissertation Evaluation Report

By Prof. Dr. Tilcho Kolev Ivanov - 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 local self-government in Republic of Bulgaria" for obtaining an educational 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.)

1. General description of the dissertation work.

The dissertation presented for evaluation has a volume of 237 pages, contains an introduction, three chapters, a conclusion, a bibliography and three appendices.

It examines a current and poorly researched problem of the communication practices in local self-government, including revealing the deficits and priorities of communication practices of local self-government authorities in the country. This starting point determines the choice of "local authorities and their supporting administrations" as the object of research.

The subject of research is "...communication practices examined through the prism of the management carried out by the local authorities and the administrations supporting them".

A major argument for undertaking the research is the key role of communication in coordinating the efforts of local authorities with social communities in pursuing the goals of self-governing communities.

The main thesis of the research is that "The state of the external proactive and Internet-based communication practices carried out by the local authorities and their supporting administrations do not contribute enough to the deployment of the complex processes of decentralization". The doctoral student also claims that: "...the current state of these practices does not contribute to the full benefit of the multi-layered institutional and social contemporary reality with a view to achieve an enabling local management environment, corresponding to the criteria for good local self-governance".

The main goal of the work is "... determining the deficits and priorities of communication practices in local self-government". The instrumental goal is to propose a system for classifying, analyzing and evaluating the deficiencies and priorities of communication practices, with which to identify the state and make recommendations for improvement. These goals are pursued by solving five main research tasks: determining and classifying the nature, role and expected results of

communication practices; analysis of the current state of proactive communication; deriving a methodological framework of criteria for analysis and evaluation of communication practices carried out through their Internet pages; analysis and assessment of the current state of electronic based communication practices and the derivation of a recommended core model of an electronic communication platform to improve communication practices. These statements of purpose and tasks of the work are clear, logical and touch on major problematic aspects of communication practices in local government and administration.

The PhD candidate indicates a wide range of theoretical approaches as the main methodological tools, consistent with the complexity of the studied subject, from which he derives an integrated normative model and a specific methodological apparatus. The main sources of information are 24 sources in Bulgarian, 63 in English and 152 websites of local authorities.

The research components and elements listed are well aligned and balanced, both structurally and substantively.

In pursuit of the set goal, the candidate performs the three main research tasks in separate chapters of the work. In the first chapter (75 pages) it examines the theoretical framework of the study of the deficits and priorities of communication practices. This part of the work clarifies the role of communication interaction in the organizational system of local self-government. It also analyzes the contemporary context of local government and offers a normative model of communication practices.

This task of the research is fulfilled with a thorough understanding of the essence, main systemic characteristics and properties of local self-government. As a result of combining the characteristics with the context of local self-government, including the nature and process of decentralization and the principles of good local governance, the author proposes basic directions for communication interaction of local government. It calls these directions a normative model instead of, for example, a conceptual model, a term that would better match the model's research purpose.

The second chapter of the study covers methods of scientific research and operationalization of the theoretical statements from the first chapter. This chapter (20 pages) is significantly shorter than the first and third chapters. In practice, it presents a criterion framework and indicators for assessing the deficits of communication practice. The proposed framework is a continuation of the conceptual ideas for a model of practice developed in the first chapter and provides a good basis for the following empirical research. What should be noted in this section is the heavy-handed style of exposition and use of many unnecessarily complicated terms, for example the term "specific subjects of study" for

the types and sub-types of practices that can more simply be referred to as measures or indicators for the evaluation of practice.

Chapter three is the most essential part for the contributions of the study. As a result of a large-scale study of communication practices, comparative deficits of the practices were revealed, which actually determine the priorities for improving communication. The received assessments of the degree and opportunities for development of communication practices and their elements can have a significant effect on improving the specific policies of the municipalities covered in the study with a population of more than 10 thousand people, if they are accepted by the relevant administrations. They reveal the main and component deficits in each municipality separately and provide arguments for necessary changes.

The conclusion of the work (9 pages) reviews the implementation of the set research tasks. It summarizes the local evaluations of the communication practices for the local administration of 154 municipalities in the country. He attributes the deficits to a lack of will, adequate planning, and inconsistency in improvement. It indicates the positive changes that have been made and draws reasoned conclusions that highlight the main arguments of the research work. The PhD student emphasizes the need for local authorities to become a driver and proactive organizer of improving communication practices.

This review shows that, in terms of content and structure, the dissertation work connects in a good logical unity the theoretical-methodical study of communication practices with the empirical analysis of deficits and priorities for their improvement.

The good compositional aspect of the research shows that the author of the dissertation demonstrates a thorough knowledge of the theory, methodology and practice of public administration science and its communication aspect. He also shows an ability to operationalize theoretical aspects by offering contemporary instrumental assessment measures and means to improve communication policy and practice.

The candidate knows the main national and foreign literary sources in the field of public administration. Expands traditional understandings of the scope, essence and content of public administrative work in a contemporary communication aspect. It argues for a communication policy-oriented approach to the development of administrative practice.

In general, the scientific work is dedicated to an up-to-date and poorly researched theoretical, methodological and practical issue affecting communication practices in local self-government in the country. It has a balanced theoretical-methodological and empirical character. Examines important theoretical, methodological and practical-applied issues affecting the quality of communication practices of municipalities

in the country with a population of over 10,000 people. Demonstrates breadth of view, depth and integrity of research. Uses a slightly complicated but completely understandable presentation style. As main contributions of the work I accept:

- a conceptual model has been synthesized for the identification of deficits and priority directions for improving the communication practices of local authorities and their administrations.
- a criterion framework and composite indicators for evaluating the quality of communication practices of local authorities have been proposed and verified in practice.
- the deficiencies of the electronic communication practices of the administrative regions of the Capital Municipality and the municipalities with a population of more than 10,000 people have been identified and recommendations have been made to overcome them
- a model of communication platform was developed and proposed to improve the electronic-based communication practices of the local administration, allowing setting priorities for their improvement and overcoming existing deficits.

The indicated two publications on the dissertation work present the achieved results of the research in authoritative publications.

The abstract adequately reflects the scope of the research. The contributions proposed by the candidate are acceptable, they correspond to the results actually achieved.

The following notes and recommendations can be made to the work:

- the applied approach to evaluating communication practices is based on well-argued theoretical and conceptual understandings, but it is not tailored and does not reflect the satisfaction of citizens with these practices. Even the best practices will be useless if they are not understood, used and supported by citizens.

- the study is based on a comparative internal benchmark analysis. It does not offer information on the state of communication practices in comparable countries. Revealing this aspect would help motivate even good administrations to improve the practices applied.

- The noted complexity of terminology and means of expression may hinder the wide use of research results in practice.

- Finally, the improvement of communication practices has its price, which is not always acceptable for smaller authorities and administrations. Uncovering this aspect of practice can also contribute to a more complete illumination of the reasons for the level of development reached. The remarks made do not change the positive assessment of the content and the presence of significant contributions of the doctoral work. They have the meaning of a proposal to improve its qualities.

Conclusion

The doctoral work submitted for defense has the character of a completed and mature scientific study. With it, the author convincingly demonstrates his ability to solve complex theoretical, methodological and practical problems in the field of public administration. The obtained results of the dissertation give me reason to consider that it meets the requirements of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria. I propose to the Honorable Jury of the NBU to award the scientific and educational degree "doctor" to Boris Filipov Hadzhipetkov in the scientific field "Organization and management of the non-production sphere (public administration)" in professional direction "Administration and Management" (3.7.)

January 03, 2023
City of Sofia

Prof.Dr. Tilcho Ivanov