

Theoretical and practical aspects of transparency of local governments of rural settlements

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Abstract—Results of a research of theoretical approaches to determination of transparency of rural territories, regulatory legislation and assessment methodology of transparency are presented in the article. Also the author's definition of transparency is included. A study of transparency of rural territories according to materials of particular municipal area is taken. Necessity of the systematic approach to increasing of transparency of state and local governance is justified in the article.

Keywords—local governments; rural settlements; authorities; transparency.

I. RELEVANCE OF THE STUDY

Relevance of transparency study of local governments of Russian rural settlements is caused by lack of transparency management system on places, low professional human resources endowment, deficit of informational communication channels with people, and political lack of people's interest in administration of municipalities in this regard.

The works of D.I. Gunin [1], P.A. Manchenko [2], M.A. Kulakov [3], G. V. Pyzin [4], E. A. Kamenskaya [5] are devoted to the researches of openness and accessibility of activities of the local authorities.

One of the main human rights in democratic developed countries is the right to unhindered access to informational resources. According to social and governmental development, people turn to official sources more often. Besides, development of informational technologies allows to frequently use this right. An important place in the whole amount of information, which is necessary for normal living standards of population, is information about activity of public authorities. The access of individuals and organizations to the state informational channels is the basis for providing of public control on actions of authorities at all levels of government, also other non-profit organizations. Furthermore such openness improves the level of their actions' clarity and regulates the corruption situation in the country. High level of IT's development, firstly in the public sector, naturally shows the total technological power of the country.

In Russian science literature and legislation it is often said about openness and clarity, but up to now there is no common approach to understanding and essence of modern and more wide term of "transparency". It's worth noting that the term "transparency" has the foreign origin, but its roots go to the Middle Ages. Originally there was the verb "transparere", that meant "to illuminate". It was made from

"trans", that means "through", and "parere", that means "to appear". Then like a lot of Latin words it started being used in other languages. According to the New big English-Russian dictionary of U.D. Apresyan "transparent" in English language means clear, illuminating, obvious, opened, honest, understandable. Besides, in other languages this word has the definition of "visibility" in the biggest on-line translators. In French, German and even Finnish languages "transparent" is used as words of the national language in the meaning of visible and visibility. In Russia initially this word was started using in its' direct meaning "banner", which is an image on open-work fabric that can be visible when this fabric was lighted from behind. On an equal basis with literal interpretation it started being used also in figurative sense. In the Explanatory dictionary of foreign-language words of L.P. Krysin "transparency" means something that doesn't have secrets and half-words. In the dictionary of foreign words written by E.N. Zaharenko, L.N. Komarova, I.V. Nechayeva, "transparency" means "lack of privacy, availability of any information without any limits" [4]. In the dictionary of T.F. Yefremova transparency is shown as full lack of privacy and openness of informational resources. The study of interpretation sources shows that this word started being commonly used as the visibility of a field of activity. In sociological sciences the category of transparency is compared with full and enough awareness of interested people in any information about this or that action. So we can see that in different spheres of science the explored category is used in the necessary clue for this science.

The essence of transparent authorities in science is observed from different points of view. According to it there are problems because of absence of concrete and full interpretation, that would show all the existing situations in work of public and municipal authority. Besides, there is a problem of mixing of the meanings with word analogs, for example, "informational openness" and "transparency of authorities". So we have the task to define what is "transparency" and how it is connected to adjacent terms.

II. PURPOSE AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The purpose of the study consists in the analysis of theoretical approaches to transparency and assessment of the level and present condition's quality of transparency in rural settlements of Vologodsky district. Within the conducted research the following methods were used: analytical, historical, comparative, statistical, the method of observing and expert assessments, questioning, the tabular and graphic method.

Having generalized all available points of view we can mark out two directions of scientific thoughts. The first part of scientists which are D.I. Gunin, A.A. Korobov, S.A. Ovchinnikov [1], consider transparency in a specialized meaning. They understand it like a visibility of authorities' activities regarding to the information that they open and its' credibility, or like an informational openness that means having knowledge of authority's actions in the open sources and availability "to get and process" it. A broad meaning of transparency is the condition (or the princip, or the property) which defines relations according to the principal of transparency and informational openness of government bodies' activities and information about them, as well as the possibility of unhindered access to the data sought. This position is followed by U.I. Stetsovski, P.A. Manchenko [2]. U.I. Stetsovsky puts three main categories into the essence of transparency: openness and visibility of authorities, the availability of information about their activities and awareness of involved people, that defines it in a broad meaning.

In the field of state and municipal administration M.A. Kulakova defines transparency in a more limited sense, understanding it only as a side of government activity related to the showing of all the information that a subject and an object of public administration possess. Possessing of the executive branch such a property like transparency which means open decision-making, social control over the governmental activities and publicity, has been proposed by the political sciences.

Western explorers [6,7,8,9] show the essence of transparency from the point of view where it conforms to the following meanings. Firstly, it is the openness of the governance, guaranteed allowance of information, great activity of government on showing of information about its' work to interested persons. Quite a different point of view is traced in international acts, where in general transparency implies the process of creating clear laws of effective information flow to ensure fairness, trust and accountability. Possibly, using of the category that we study here is fixed in criminal law context, which rather has no relation to the state and municipal administration.

The transparency of the authorities has a slightly different component in science. According to the opinion of sociologists and philosophers, transparency implies accessibility, speed and high degree of information structuring, convenience of its transformation into various easily readable formats, and the presence of constant feedback. Also, transparency is understood as the explanation of the essence and process of implementing public policy to citizens, receiving reliable and relevant information about government's activities, that is the quantitative component of information. The more information can be seen, the more transparent authorities are. The existence of transparency is ensured by the fact that civil society by showing its position turns itself into millions of "auditors", representing the interests of the entire population to their benefit.

On the basis of this approaches, the author developed his understanding of informational openness, which is existence of real opportunity to communicate with authorities for each member of public relations for getting a full and true information about their actions from accessible resources. According to it it is possible to give the author's meaning of

transparency in the field of management activities. Transparency is a system of organization of actions and working process of authorities and local governments, which is characterized by willingness to communicate with civil society, clearness of made decisions, credibility of opened data and availability of information.

According to the Law №131 Federal Act a rural settlement is one or some rural locality which are connected by the common territory (villages, countrysides, stanitsas, farms) where local governance is organized by people and (or) through the electoral and other local government bodies. Transparency of local authorities has to ensure availability to get all of the asked information for everybody, to assess its clarity and completeness, to control the actions of the head of the settlement, to get the feedback from them.

III. RESULTS

The provided analysis of the open information environment functioning allows to state that the right on getting an information is one of the most important rights of a human. Current legal provisions in Russia don't ensure the system approach to increasing of the openness of the governmental authorities. Firstly, a significant part of the regulatory legal acts which control openness issues is mainly devoted to issues of access to information on the public authorities' activity, or informational openness, which is just one of the elements of public administration system openness. Secondly, the legal concepts used in various regulatory legal acts often contradict each other, suggesting different approaches to organizing the activities of a representative government body to ensure openness. Thirdly, the adoption of unsystemized legal norms and requirements for individual mechanisms of organizing the interaction of government bodies with citizens of the Russian Federation and public associations leads to fragmentation of regulation in this area and does not allow the full using of the tools of public involvement and public control in order to improve the quality of government administrating. Fourthly, there is no regulatory system for accessing the activities of local governments in terms of openness by the state, citizens, public associations and the business cluster.

Regulating of transparency processes involves the following control of their efficiency. One of the instruments is monitoring and assessment of the available data. In the modern world, monitoring and evaluating are widely used and are applied in all areas of activity in many countries of the world. The official method of monitoring of the information openness of the authorities is the "Method of monitoring and evaluating the openness of federal executive bodies", approved by the decision of the Government Commission for the coordination of the open government activity in December 26, 2013 №AM-P36-89pr. Let's notice that this method applies only on the executive authorities, which is the Russian Federation Government, ministries, agencies, departments [15] and involves the study of the activities of federal executive authorities only in the field of information openness and interaction with citizens, not including consideration of transparency of procedures and decision making, etc. This is its main drawback – the limited application. The imperfection also includes the fact that the method cannot be legally applied to the analysis of the openness of local governments, which significantly impairs the rights of residents of municipalities. The significance of

the method is in the fact that it helps the authorities that are behind in the rank and the regional administrative apparatus can use more successful practices in their activity. The leadership of the state can use rating data to assess the effectiveness of the implemented mechanisms of interaction between the Government and civil society; participation in monitoring and evaluation is a useful experience of political activity for people. It shows the desire and opportunities for citizen participation in decision making to the authorities.

On a par with this method there is a more modern service of learning the official governmental web-resources. It is the automatic information system called “The monitoring of the governmental web-sites”. The name of the system slightly doesn’t match to its essence. Because not only federal web-sites are analyzed here, but also the resources of municipal administrations. The monitoring is the WEB-site <http://gosmonitor.ru/>, where is the information about all the provided revisions of transparency according to all official web-sites of the federal and regional level structures.

The study of transparency level was organized in 11 rural territories Vologda municipal district, which is one of the most densely populated and rapidly developing region of Vologda region. The attractiveness of this region is in its transport accessibility and infrastructure. The social and economic infrastructure is also actively developing due to its territorial location in the region. Ways of the district development are fixed in the Strategy of Social and Economic Development of the Vologda Municipal District of the Vologda Region until 2025, where the main goal is to increase the level of welfare and improve the quality of life of the population.

Observation was used to make a study of the transparency of rural areas in the Vologda region, survey of the population and representatives of the business community of rural settlements, interviewing of employees of the municipal administration, analysis of the information from publicly available sources and official documents, monitoring of the work of the official web-sites, analysis of the local government activities in its interaction with the public.

Firstly, we analyzed the regulatory, methodological and local database of documents of rural settlements and the Vologda region. Regulatory transparency is radically different in specific rural settlements and areas. Only in some rural settlements there are rules governing their informational openness, and they can be divided into 2 groups according to their meaning (Table 1).

TABLE I. THE ELEMENTS OF TRANSPARENCY IN THE VOLOGDA MUNICIPAL REGION

Confirmation of the official web-resource	Regulation of access to the information (duplication of №8 Federal Law)
Mayskoye, Podlesnoye, Semenovskoye, Spasskoye rural settlements	Spasskoye, Mayskoye, Kubenskoye rural settlements

In this case, the regulatory base of the Vologda region and its rural settlements on the points of openness and realization of the accessibility is not enough and don’t guarantee the full enforcement of the human rights to get the information about the local governments activity.

Secondly, from October 15, 2018 till October 31, 2018 we provided the content-analysys of the oficial web-resouces

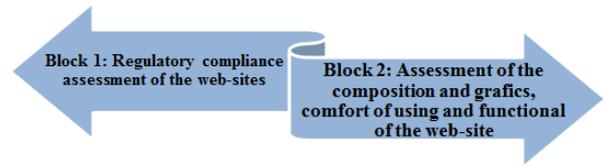


Fig 1. The structure of the study of the official web-sites of the rural settlements.

of 9 rural settlements in the Vologda region. The study can be divided on 2 blocks (fig. 1).

In the article №13 of the law about informational openness there is a list of information which must be included on the web-site of every government department of all levels of administration. Here are criteria that were developed for the assessment (table 2).

TABLE II. CRITERIA OF ASSESSMENT OF THE OFFICIAL WEB-SITES THAT ARE ESTIMATED IN SCORES

Criteria of assessment of the official web-sites			
Assessment for the list of information according to the article №13 of the law about informational openness		Assessment of the composition, grafics, functional structure	
Presence/absence of the information	Completness of the opened information	Design, navigating, filling	Functionality, comfort

According to the results of a content analysis of official Internet-resources of the rural settlements we can say that formally 87% of the sites comp ly with the legislation , the completness of the information disclosed is generally slightly lower and equals 70%. This indicates that the leadership of rural areas exists and operates within the framework of the legal field, where all are presented with the same requirement – the information must exist, but the form is the individual wish. And the lack of the wish to bring the official web-site to the proper state is their main problem.

The third event of a general study of transparency from November 1,2018 till November 30, 2018, with the theoretical installations of N.F. Yakovleva, we organised a sociologycal study named « Transparency of the local self-government bodies of the rural settlement ». It was held to study the level of citizens and representatives of the business community involvement in public activities and their civic position to the authorities operating in the settlements of the Vologda region.

Analysis of the results based on the polls developed by the authors showed that 20% of inhabitants of the settlements are always interested in what is happening in their lives, 40% are sometimes interested in it, which can’t be said about their satisfaction by the work of the main and administrative bodies on issues of openness of the governance. The information that is presented by the municipalities is enough only for 20% of the serveyed residents. Of them are either not satisfied or have never interacted with the authorities. In all studied municipalities, the transparency of the governance was positively assessed by 20% of the respondents inthe business sector, which is 4 times lower than the proper result in absolute terms. The majority of respondents from 18 to 40

years old and partially from 41 to 60 years old answered that information about the activity of, for example, the Administration of the settlement is mainly received through social networks. Basically, these are informal groups organized by active villagers where anyone can post news without any restrictions. Besides, each settlement has an official community where some entertainment information is published. Information stands as well as personal meetings with the members of Administration were chosen by citizens of 61 years old and older. Only 20% of people answered that they use the official web-site, the rest didn't even realize that there is a lot of useful information to be obtained.

Representatives of the commercial environment need more official informationsuch as legal acts, statistics of population, small business support. So for 40% of all respondents the official web-site of a rural settlement is mostly demanded. Social networks are still the best option for interacting among people and the business sector.

On the question « What information would be interesting for you ? » 41 % of the local residents answered that they would like to get entertaining information (exhibitions, fairs, studios, concerts, sport events). The materials of approving and executing of the budget are interesting for 39% of the respondents, 33% would like to take part in official meetings and public hearings, 21% would like to get the information about the draft legal acts of local importance. About 20% would like to know the information about municipal property and transactions made with it and the decisions of the Administration and the Settlement Council. Less than half of the residents hope that they will be able to find out the information about the housing problems and communal services., the news of the settlement and the region, the improvement of the territory, also about the social benefits.

Representatives of business structures (47%) are interested in the financial component of the municipality, because they can offer their services to local governments according to their knowledge of the budget. The same number of the respondents wants to see the regulatory framework as well as cultural and leisure information (exhibitions, fairs, studios, concerts, sport events). 33% of the respondents expressed the willing to know about municipal property and transactions made with it. In addition, the overwhelming majority of business representatives (80%) offered their own options : statistical information about the socio-economic development of the territory, news, investment characteristics of the settlement.

In this way, the transparency principle in the studied rural settlements is not enough ensured by the municipal authorities. Most of the respondents, residents and businessmen, are ,firstly, not interested in the solving of local problems , are not satisfied by the given information or it was difficult for them to give an answer. Social network for them is an important place to find out different news. But there is no other information, that negatively influences on relations between people and the governance which is suggested closed.

The last part of our study was to find the existing informational channels of communication between people and businessmen and the executive branch and the head of the settlement (table 3).

The personal reception of citizens by the head of the settlement and public hearings, as forms of interaction with people established by the Law, are not so popular among

residents. We also noted that only 21% of citizens and 27% of enterpreneurs visit members and the head of the Administration at the time of admission. Based on the survey we saw that most of the respondents (53% of citizens and 47% of businessmen) don't know that there is such an effective feedback as public hearings. 81% of residents and 67% of enterpreneurs don't take part in the meetings

TABLE III. STATISTICS OF APPEALS OF CITIZENS AND OTHER PEOPLE FROM 2016 TILL 2018

	2016	2017	2018
Amount of citizens' appeals	850	341	267
Amount of other appeals	1214	1516	1459
Total amount	2064	1857	1726

dedicated to head's reporting, because they don't know about its conduct.

IV. CONCLUSION

The rural settlements have certain makings of transparency : there is an official web-site, news is published in social networks, a large number of written and « online » appeals are considered. But all of this is an outer shell that we see as observers. The survey of the direct participants in the local government showed that everything is not so good and the political apathy and ignorance of the citizens shows that the Administration< the Council and the head of the settlement are not interested in interfering into their working process.

Proceeding from the thesis that « local self-government... must be maximally adapted to the local conditions, specific needs and interests of the population, and its functioning must reflect and realize these needs and interests », we highlight, in our opinion, the existing shortcomings of the informational openness, transparency and accessibility of the local governments :

1. The lack of the full regulatory support of the level of the rural settlements reflects on the tactics of working with open information and with citizens.

2. In order to improve the municipal administration, it is necessary to fix the work targets in this area with the transparency, by developng of the 5 years municipal program. The aim of which will be the accesibility and openness of any information about actions of the local governments, informational – communicative resources and also the increasing of the people's activity in solving of the local issues.

3. For an objective assessment of the work of the authorities in the settlements, to determine the rational using of the budget funds, for identifying of the best heads of rural settlements and stimulating them to provide quality municipal service also the assessment of results of interaction with the civil society and observing the principles of information openness, a comprehensive methodology of the assessing the effectiveness of local governments in rural settlements is necessary.

4. The main disadvantage of web resources (of the content of official sites) remains the absence of their functionality, compositeness, design and navigation.

The development of transparency of local self-governments is estimated both by state authorities and by the population itself. The close relationship between local authorities and people is only formally declared in the legislation. The study shows that there are certain problems for citizens in the field of openness and accessibility, which can be solved only by an integrated approach to improvement of all levels of transparency.

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