

Development of Municipal Authority's Communication with the Public Including Emphasis on Concepts of CSR Following



Znojmo is a town struggling with many problems. The most controversial issues are high unemployment, high debt and excessive congestion of the major roads. The aim of this article is to draw attention to media communication, which is an important part of the town inhabitants' perception. In the context of corporate social responsibility the paper highlights the possible challenges and proposed solutions, which can result in better partnership between public administration, business owners and inhabitants, this being an important factor for local development.

INTRODUCTION

Public Administration as a wide area within the executive has seen a number of changes and innovation in the last few years. As part of a comprehensive reform of the public administration, which aims to modernize and achieve higher efficiency of all sectors, is the increasingly topical area of ethics and social responsibility of public offices. The public sector should not be only an executor of the acts of public authorities, but also the connecting open space for inhabitants to communicate with the state.

Act No. 312/2002 Coll., regarding local government officials and amending certain laws can be understood as a tool for the observance of ethical principles in public administration. Rules and principles are supported by or are consistent with the general ethical principles, established also by the Act No. 500/2004 Coll., called Administrative Code, which came into effect on 1st January 2006. "Public administration is a service for the public" is says in §4 of the Administrative Code. Anyone, who fulfils tasks resulting from the application of the administrative authority, has a duty to the persons to be polite and be helpful to all of them (500/2004 Sb.).

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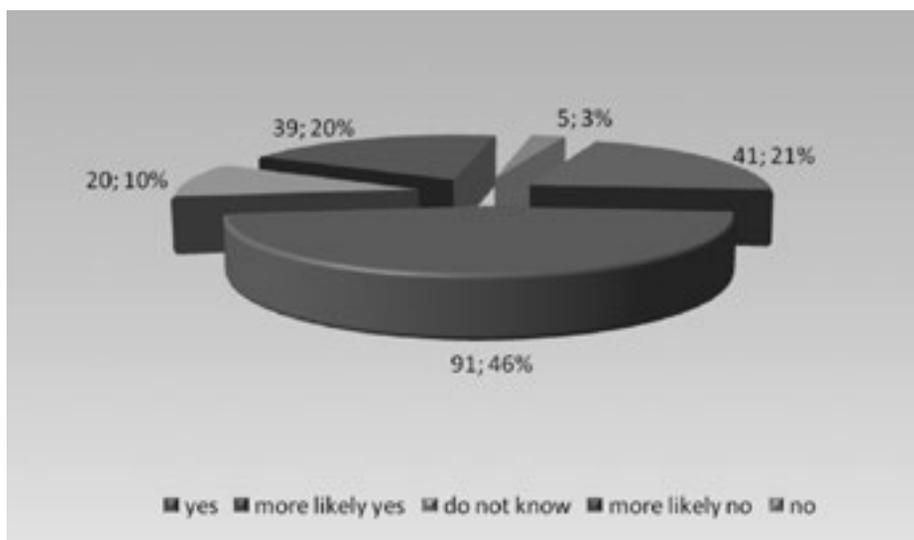
METHODOLOGY AND OBJECTIVE OF WORK

The article is based on data obtained through a questionnaire, which was conducted among residents of the town in the period February to April 2013. Its aim is to find parallels between perception issues of ethics and social responsibility with the actions of management, employees and the image of the municipality. The questionnaire was constructed according to the needs of the project.

RESULTS

In sum 196 citizens of the town were involved in survey. One of the questions dealt with was satisfaction of citizens with the willingness of office employees to deal with their problems. The answer yes occurred in 21% of the responses. Almost half of respondents (46%) responded rather yes, more likely no with 20%. 3% of them were completely dissatisfied. 10% of respondents said they did not know.

Figure 1: Satisfaction with the willingness of employees

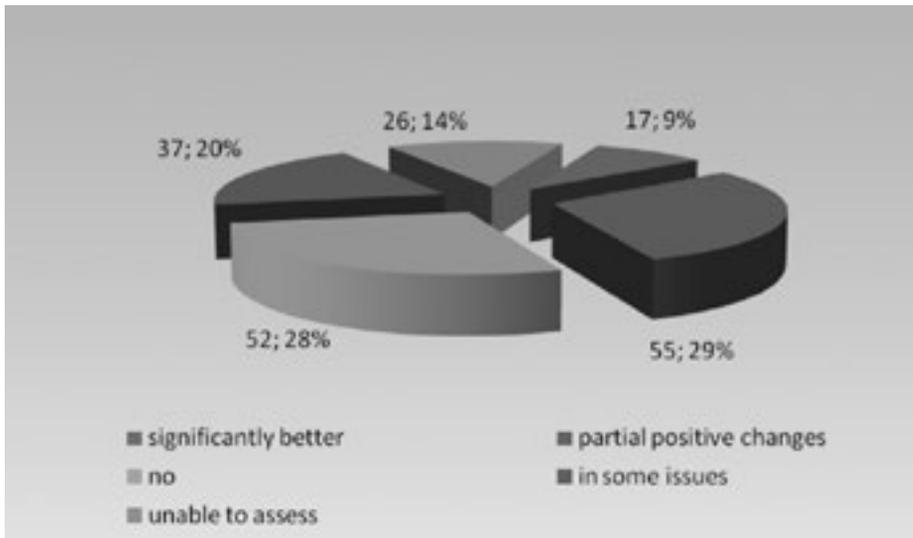


Source: Author's own.

The survey also tried to reveal so called “soft practices” in the providing of public services. Inhabitants evaluated the helpfulness of officials in dealing with specific situations. 91 respondents (46%) found that the office staff was

more helpful in solving problems. While almost 27% of the respondents were completely satisfied, 3% of respondents spoke of their dissatisfaction with the helpfulness of officials. The possibility rather not was chosen by 16% of the survey participants.

Figure 2: Views on the environment of the city from the last municipal elections



Source: Author's own.

Citizens also assessed changes that had occurred in the town since the last municipal elections. The graph in Figure 2 shows that 9% of the respondents are of the opinion that the environment has changed significantly for the better, 28% of the population feel partial positive changes. According to 26% of respondents the situation has not yet changed, 19% of respondents think that the change occurred only in some areas. 13% are not able to assess the situation. The remaining 5% of respondents did not answer at all.

The aim of the next question was to determine which of the areas in the opinion of the citizens should most concern Znojmo municipal authority. Total of 48 respondents think that the office management should be most concerned with the quality of life in the town and 29 respondents say that the issue should be the environment. Another 10 speak of sport for youth and culture, 18 of building school facilities and 34 respondents speak of dealing with entrepreneurs.

DISCUSSION

The research project aimed to assess perceptions of issues of ethics and social responsibility, with an emphasis on the image of the municipality creation. Essential in this viewpoint is the fact that public administration is a public service, which is quoted in §4 of the Administrative Code. In public administration there is a close link between morality and traditional values, which are necessary for the effective and ethical functioning of public administration.

The web site (www.znojmo.cz) can be viewed as the main source of information (excluding personal contact with officials). These pages are the main tool of regular notification for our citizens about events in the city. Shared content has its disadvantages because it proves hard to find correct information among such a large amount of information. On the website is also the project “Opened town hall”, which aims to clarify the town administration checking. Only information concerning the right codes of ethics is still lacking so far. The plan is to publish a code of ethics officer and councillor (Code of Ethics of the public official available in the portal of government www.vlada.cz). It would then be appropriate to re-investigate which reveal any unethical conduct of officials of the Municipal Office of Znojmo. As revealed by the results of the survey Znojmo residents are quite satisfied with the work of officials and the publication of the two codes will further support this positive trend.

In connection with the Internet, it is necessary to mention one of the phenomena of our time. Facebook is a widespread means of communication between users of the social networks across the population. It serves not only to share personal content (status, comments, photos, etc.), but also the representation of firms, interest groups and other formal and informal groups. It is also used by public administration institutions for representation. City Hall posts the current information in the field of entertainment, sports and political events in the town hall and information for citizens on Facebook. City leaders inform the public through the site about the current issues of the newspaper “Radniční listy”, publishing a calendar of events, photos and links to articles about the city issued by other local periodicals (e.g. Znojmo, Znojmo diary, etc.)

Nowadays problems with the objectivity of periodicals seem to be widespread. These periodicals are intended for citizens and are published under the auspices of the municipality. Discrediting of this kind of information is a problem that significantly affects the area of ethical communication in public administration. It is directly related to the basic principles of ethics and social responsibility in public administration. The results of this survey confirmed this situation in the framework of this research project.

A plurality of views in the town hall press should ensure the new press law is abided by, which came into force on 1 November 2013. This precisely defines the space in which the opposition has to be able to deliver information in the local periodical. The aim, according to the authors of this landmark amendment,

is to bring a balance to this type of information source. But the situation remains unclear, because §4 of Act No. 305/2013 Coll. again vaguely formulated question of "an implementation of adequate space." We find ourselves again at the beginning; the ethical issues at the preview on the very principle of operation of the city hall press, which is in the current turbulent domestic political culture is still a matter for further discussion.

As revealed from the results of a survey conducted in the spring of 2012, the most pressing issues of Znojmo are lack of jobs, low wages and high indebtedness of the city. This fact is substantiated by this investigation. Specifically in the area of the increasing competitiveness of individuals and firms a positive trend can be seen. In response to the results of the last questionnaire the city government published information about the Columbus project, which should help in improving competitiveness.

Information about the project can be obtained from both the website (www.znojmokolumbus.cz) and also on Facebook. This project is based on cooperation between the private and public sector, the Private College of Economic Studies and other partners (currently e.g. the British Council and Goethe Institute along with the possibility of obtaining a certificate of English or German).

Within the discussion suggestions are made that the city government could use for continued work in improving its image toward town inhabitants.

CONCLUSION

The aim of this study was an evaluation of the officials' work in the Municipal Office Znojmo in terms of social responsibility and ethical aspects when dealing with the inhabitants of the city. Inhabitants of Znojmo were involved in the study, which took place in the spring of 2013, and their task was to answer the questions focused precisely on the area of ethics, behaviour of officials, possible corruption and social responsibility. Generally, Znojmo inhabitants evaluate these issues positively. Rather exceptionally unfair actions or other methods occur during the solving of the same problems.

The survey also found that among the city inhabitants the opinion prevails that the city government should focus on improvement of the quality of life in the city, improvement of the governance attitudes to the business sector and focus on cultural aspects of life in the city.

The research project aimed to also assess perceptions of issues of ethics and social responsibility, with an emphasis on the creation of the image of the municipality. Essential in this respect is the fact, which is quoted in §4 of the Administrative Code, and that public administration is a service to the public. The fact is that public administration is forging close links between morality and traditional values, which are necessary for the effective and ethical functioning of public administration. From the point of view of shaping the image of

the municipal authority plays an important role as well as responsibility of the officials, and a complete objectivity in public administration, which is also one of the seven guiding principles of ethical conduct of public officials.

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PROJECT

The article was created in collaboration Scientific research centre of SVŠE Znojmo and the town of Znojmo in the project VGS 2013K01 Analysis of the relationships and attachments between companies, customers, public authorities and citizens.

HUNGARIAN SUMMARY

Znojmo számos nehézséggel küzdő délkelet-csehországi kisváros. A legégetőbb problémákat a magas munkanélküliségi ráta, az eladósodottság és a főutakon jellemző közlekedési dugók jelentik. A tanulmány célja a közösségi kommunikációra felhívni a figyelmet, amely fontos szerepet tölt be a város lakossága véleményének formálásában. A tárgyalás a közösségi felelősségvállalás kontextusában tér ki a lehetséges kihívásokra és megoldásokra, amelyek eredményeképp jobb partneri kapcsolat alakulhat ki a városi adminisztráció, a vállalkozók és a lakosság között. Mindez a helyi fejlesztések egy fontos tényezőjét is jelentené.



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