

The importance and necessity of marketing communication management in local government in the Slovak Republic

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Abstract:

The main research objective of the study presented in this article was to analyse the scope and main forms of management of marketing activities in the local government in the Slovak Republic. The study has found that the management of marketing activities is still not usual in the local government in the Slovak Republic. Marketing is coordinated rather in cities than in villages, but there are still some cities that do not consider marketing to be important at all. Marketing activities at the office are mostly carried out by one employee while only a few cities or villages can afford to have more staff to carry out them. The main reason why cities and villages do not carry out marketing activities is the lack of financial resources or the need to deal with more serious problems. In conclusion, the author emphasizes the need to discuss the objectives and tasks of local marketing.

Keywords:

Slovak Republic, local government, marketing, implementation, city, village

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1. Introduction

The theory about regional and local marketing began to develop in the Netherlands in universities in Rotterdam and Gröningen, from 1980s. In 1990s, it is also possible to meet integrated concepts of local marketing and management, in particular in Germany and the Netherlands, where the concept of Stadmarketing (city marketing) has become very modern and widespread. Nowadays marketing of local self-government (municipalities, cities, regions), is no longer such an unfamiliar concept in the Slovak Republic (Lincényi et al. 2011).

Several domestic and foreign experts have highlighted the importance and benefits of regional and urban marketing (Jeuring 2016, Felzensztein 2014,

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Berg 2016, Vavrečka 2016). While some of them have analysed the issue more specifically, some other have considered the issue of marketing and public opinion in general. Môtík states that “public opinion is in this age full of information very volatile” (Môtík 2018a: 51).

According to K. Lacina, setting strategic goals and effective communication among the main actors of regional development is one of the basic prerequisites for successful regional policy: “The essence of regional management is the realization of six components influencing the success of long-term business activities” (Lacina 2012: 120). It is believed that “the marketing strategy is aimed to achieving specific marketing goals in the right marketing environment” (Bednarčík 2013: 587) As Kubicová and Kádeková said (2017: 7) “creating the strategies must be regarded as a continuous process of strategic assumptions of constant confrontation with reality, flexible changing of programmes and its implementation in relative stability strategy”. However, the important thing is to prevent the marketing at regional and local level from manipulation, which is in media according to Môtík “possibly perceived as an integral part of society” (Môtík 2018b: 8). In developed market economies, the question of marketing transfer to public administration has been under discussion for more than 20 years. Currently, marketing activities in individual regions and cities in Slovakia are being carried out, but there is insufficient insight into what activities are these, who implements them, who is responsible for them and what legal forms of urban and regional marketing exist (Bočáková and Lincényi: 2014).

2. Methodology of research

The territorial self-government in Slovakia is divided into local self-government (municipalities and cities) and regional territorial self-government (higher territorial units; Janas and Kucharčík 2015). In our research, we have focused on municipalities and cities in Slovakia considering the framework of local self-government. The main objective of the presented study is the analysis of the scope and main forms of marketing activities management in the local self-government in the Slovak Republic. The secondary objective of the research was to find out, how it is possible to increase the scope of management of marketing activities in those cities and municipalities, that do not coordinate marketing activities in the Slovak republic so far.

For further planning and research design, we identified three major general research questions (VVO):

VVO 1: How many cities and municipalities coordinate marketing activities in the local government in the Slovak Republic?

VVO 2: In what way are the marketing activities in the local government in the Slovak Republic coordinated?

VVO 3: What are the main reasons due to which cities and municipalities do not currently have a separate organizational unit that should coordinate marketing activities in its core competencies?

In the context of the research, we have decided to use the questionnaire method, which is intended for mass data, in view of the broad research team. The questionnaire consisted of fourteen questions, nine of which were purely quantitative questions and five qualitative ones. We have determined all items according to research objectives. We considered several factors which influenced the selected number of questions. Our primary objective was to get as much information as possible from the representative of the local government as well as qualitative, but we did not want to demote them and burden with the time-consuming questionnaire. Regarding the structure and form of questionnaire, we have followed the recommendations of the methodological framework of Petr Gavora (2010). As a research team we decided to reach out to all municipalities and cities/towns in Slovakia. According to available information, the core set of local government consists of 140 cities and 2933 municipalities (Government Office of Slovakia 2017).

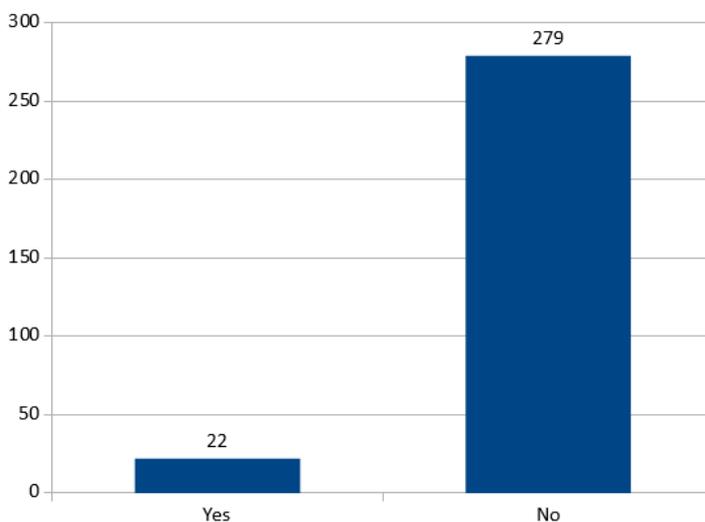
3. Result of analysis

Obviously, our aim was to reach the largest possible range of respondents in view of the representativeness of research. After repeated addresses of mayors of the cities and municipalities, we were able to get 301 completed replies, which is 9,79 % return of the questionnaires. From this we achieved 39,29 % return on questionnaires for cities and 8,39 % returns for questionnaires from municipalities. When looking at the entities that responded to the survey according to population of the cities and municipalities, the most of them have a population of 1.000-5.000 (95). The research group also consisted of cities and municipalities of 100-500 inhabitants (81), 500-1.000 inhabitants (69), 5.000-10.000 inhabitants (21), 10.000-20.000 inhabitants (16), 20.000-50.000 inhabitants (13), 50.000-100.000 inhabitants (4), 100.000 and more (1). In response, we did not record a community of up to 100 inhabitants. Most municipalities and cities responded from the Košice self-governing region (111). The research sample also consisted of municipalities and cities from the Nitra self-governing region (71), the Banská

Bystrica self-governing region (34), the Trnava self-governing region (21), the Prešov self-governing region (17), the Bratislava self-governing region and Žilina self-governing region (equally 16 municipalities and cities). The smallest amount of municipalities and cities responded from the Trenčín self-governing region (15).

The survey showed that of the 301 cities and municipalities in Slovakia, only 22 (which is 7,3%) have in the organizational structure the office, which coordinates the marketing activities (see figure 1).

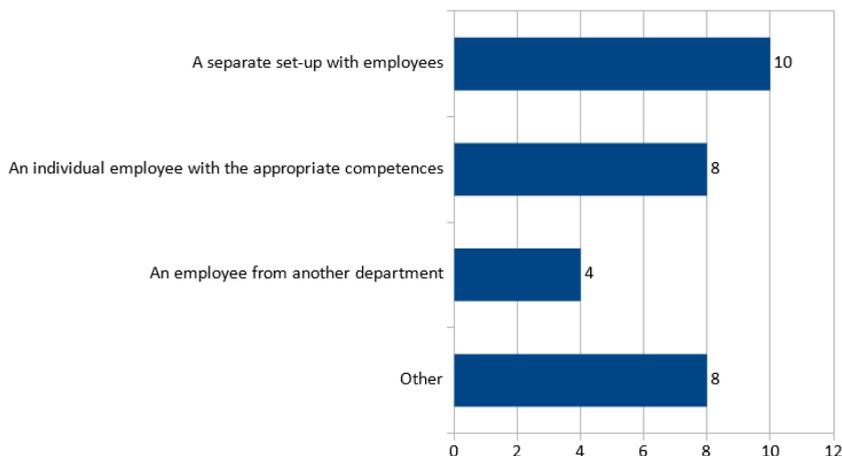
Figure 1: Do you have an organizational structure, respectively in the organizational order of the Office a separate organizational entity that coordinates marketing activities?



Source: processed from own research results.

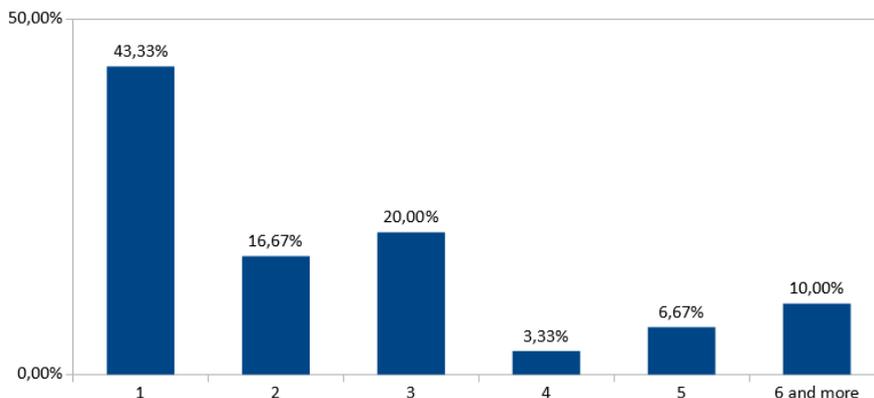
The situation is a little bit better as far as the coordination of marketing activities is concerned, because according to the survey it is carried out in 30 municipalities and cities. The findings presented on the figure 2 show that marketing at the office is most often provided by an independent department with employees (33,3%) or independent employee with the appropriate competencies (26,7%). It should be noted that marketing activities in local government are also coordinated by other departments or employees who do not have marketing tasks within their competencies (see figure 2).

Figure 2: The entities responsible for marketing activities coordinated in the municipal office²



Source: processed from own research results.

Figure 3: The number of employees involved in the marketing activities in the office (the colour shows the number of those involved)



Source: processed from own research results.

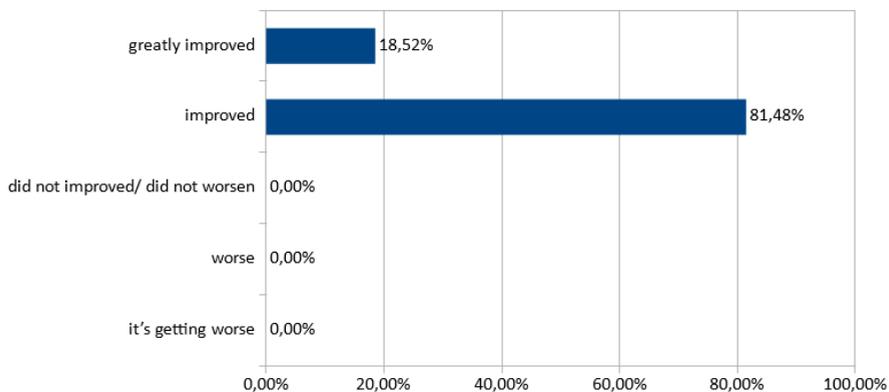
As presented on the figure 3 the majority of respondents (13/43,4%) declared that only one person is involved in the marketing activities. In five cases (17%) these are two employees involved and in six cases three of them coordinate

² It should be noted that the figures 2-4 present responses of those 30 respondents who declared that in some way the marketing activities are coordinated in their office.

marketing in the office (20%). It shows that usually the teams of those involved in the marketing coordination are up to 3 people. However there were three entities where six or more people were involved (10%).

We also wanted to find out about perceived results of conducting marketing activities. The most mayors commended coordination of the marketing activities (81,5%), declaring that the image of the municipality or city has improved and five of them believed that this image has improved greatly (18,5%). None of the representatives of the municipality or the city said that the situation would deteriorate after the activities of the marketing activities. Three mayors did not answer this question (see figure 4).

Figure 4: The identity of the municipality (city) after conducting marketing activities:



Source: processed from own research results.

We also have found out why the municipalities and cities did not have in their organizational structure a separate organizational entity that would coordinate marketing activities. Up to one-third (30,7%) of the asked mayors expressed that they would like to take advantage of marketing activities, but unfortunately, they do not have the money. Nearly one-third (26,7%) can imagine using marketing activities, but they are currently solving more serious issues. On the other hand, we found 45 mayors (16,2%), who think that their municipality or the city does not need marketing, with seven other municipal and local representatives (2,5%), who heard about it for the first time (see figure 5).

Figure 5: Please, indicate the main reason why there is no a separate organizational entity in your office that coordinates marketing activities (N=279)



Source: processed from own research results.

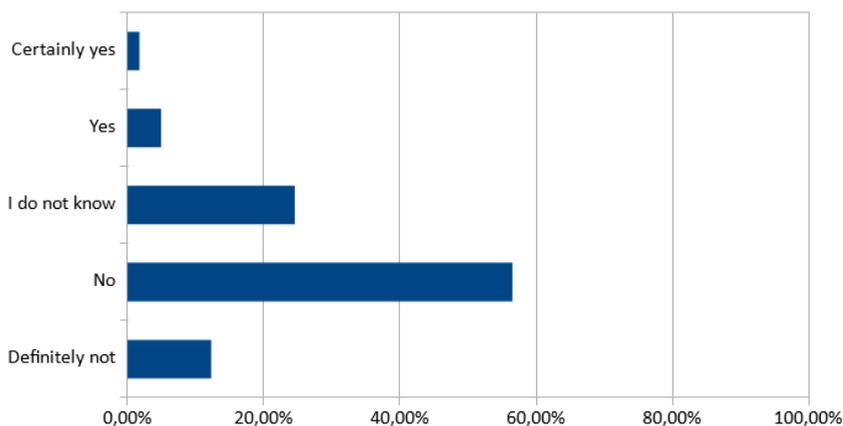
In the open-ended questions in the questionnaire we were able to find out more about reasons behind a lack of a separate organizational entity responsible for the marketing activities. The mayors could express their own opinion. In this case, as the main reason for absence of the marketing in the municipality, most of the respondents indicated existential or financial reasons. Most municipal representatives said that one, two, or five administrators work in their municipal office in addition to the mayor and they do not have enough money to pay another employee. As the mayor of Mudroňovo municipality from the Nitra region said, the village has 116 inhabitants and they do not know what to do to keep the running of the village. According to the mayor of Gočovo from Košice region, municipalities with up to 500 inhabitants do not have finances to deal with common problems and not for marketing at all. “We are a small village with two employees (mayor and one other person), who provide a whole range of activities and responsibilities of the municipality. We do not have marketing as a separate activity due to capacity and finances” said mayor of Zemplínsky Branč from Košice region.

Several mayors have also said that they do not have historical monuments, accommodation capacities or other tourist attractions in their village and therefore do not need marketing activities. “For many citizens marketing is irrelevant if

they are troubled by other problems” wrote Mayor of Brezová pod Bradlom from Trenčín region.

In several municipalities the coordination of marketing activities is run by the mayor himself. According to the mayor of Sírnik from Košice region, there are 2.900 municipalities in the Slovakia, including those from 500 to 1500 people, where doing marketing is a trouble and this is the most effective option. “Every mayor must be either a businessman or a manager” said mayor of Bodiná from the Trenčín region. Other mayors address marketing activities continuously as needed. In some municipalities, marketing activities are made universally or through the culture department in the form of posters and event promotions, through the project department, and municipalities where they provide training in this respect.

Figure 6: Do you think that you will set up a separate organizational entity in the near future that should coordinate marketing activities in the core competencies? (N=279)



Source: processed from own research results.

Other mayors can imagine an independent employee who would coordinate marketing activities, but they are afraid of rejecting a plan by the local deputies themselves. As the mayor of Košeca municipality of Trenčín region has said, the Municipalities Act 369/1990 Coll. clearly establishes the competence of approving the budget to the collective body of the municipality – the general council. All efforts for marketing activities that require financial resources must

be approved by the deputies. If they do not know anything about it or they do not want it, the mayor can only dream of marketing. "Marketing as a part of the office is clearly necessary, but the law does not determine such a role for the municipality. If the mayor introduces marketing elements in the village, there is a high risk that deputies will accuse him of wasteful spending of public funds beyond the tasks of municipalities. In addition, in the case of a bad setting, there is a risk that it will be abused in favour of private interests" added the Mayor of Štúrovo from Nitra region.

We also wondered whether mayors can imagine setting up a separate organizational entity that would coordinate marketing activities in the future. More than two-thirds of respondents definitely do not know or cannot imagine in the near future to set up a separate organizational entity in the offices that should coordinate marketing activities in the core competencies. Opposite opinion can be seen among 7% of the respondents, with the remaining mayors not being able to decide (see figure 6).

Conclusion

The analysis has shown that the management of marketing activities is still not a regular part of local government in the Slovak Republic. Within the 301 chosen cities and municipalities in the Slovakia, there are only 22 of them (7,3%) with an organizational entity in the organizational structure, or in the organizational order of the office, responsible for the coordination marketing activities. The other 8 municipalities and cities do not have marketing coordination for a particular department or employee, but they also provide marketing activities. As a result, marketing is still not a matter of course even in the cities themselves, with 55 representatives answering to the survey. In this context, a similar research study from 2014 (Bočáková and Lincényi 2014), can also be mentioned, which showed that marketing is used in all regional cities in Slovakia, but in different forms, scope and with different responsibilities. This study also highlighted the discrepant understanding of marketing communications in individual cities, given that there is a varied number of workplaces with heterogeneous responsibilities within the organizational structure at municipal offices.

Majority of the marketing activities at the offices are provided by separate departments with employees or independent employee with the relevant competencies. In some cases, there are also employees from another department or the mayor himself. As we have found out in the survey from those places where marketing activity is taking place, marketing activities are most often performed by one person, in some cities 2 or 3 employees, with only one third of surveyed

having more than 4 employees for these activities. The positive thing is that all managers of the cities and municipalities where coordinated marketing is present, found out that the image of the municipality/city has improved after the implementation of marketing activities.

Another positive thing is that more than half of the managers of municipalities and cities (159) would coordinate marketing if accepted by the council, but the main reasons why they do not currently have it is the lack of financial resources or the need to solve more serious problems. Some mayors know about the benefits of marketing, but they have not needed it yet, and there are also managers who have admitted that their municipality does not need a marketing.

In conclusion, local marketing is an important prerequisite for the future prosperous development of the municipality and the city, because it can affect not only the acquisition of budget resources through potential entrepreneurs and investors, but also residents who have the opportunity to choose their place of life in the future. We think that an active discussion with the mayors about the marketing benefits for municipalities could increase the use of marketing in self-government.

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Znaczenie i konieczność zarządzania komunikacją marketingową w samorządzie lokalnym Republiki Słowackiej

Abstrakt:

Głównym celem badań prezentowanych w tym artykule była analiza zakresu i najważniejszych form zarządzania działaniami marketingowymi w samorządzie lokalnym Republiki Słowackiej. Badania wykazały, że zarządzanie działaniami marketingowymi jest wciąż raczej rzadkością w samorządzie lokalnym Republiki Słowackiej. Marketing jest koordynowany raczej w samorządzie miejskim, niż wiejskim, jednak wciąż są miasta, które nie przywiązują jakiegokolwiek wagi do działań marketingowych. Działania marketingowe w urzędach samorządowych są najczęściej realizowane przez jednego pracownika, a tylko nieliczne miasta i wsie mogą sobie pozwolić na zaangażowanie większej liczby personelu w tym zakresie. Głównym powodem, dla którego miasta i wsie nie realizują działań marketingowych jest brak środków finansowych lub konieczność radzenia sobie z poważniejszymi problemami. W konkluzjach autor podkreśla potrzebę dyskusji na temat celów i zadań marketingu lokalnego.

Słowa kluczowe:

Republika Słowacji, samorząd lokalny, marketing, implementacja, miasto, wieś