

## MODERN ASPECTS OF CIVIL SOCIETY INTERACTION WITH LOCAL GOVERNMENT BODIES

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**Purpose:** The purpose of the article is to reveal the essence and forms of interaction of local government with the civil society in Ukraine, to identify the main problems and to outline the ways of improvement.

**Design/methodology/approach:** In the research process, general scientific methods were used – information collection, its analytical processing, theoretical generalization and comparison; graphic method – to illustrate the dynamics of the indicators studied in the work.

The object of research is communicative processes in regional administration. The subject of the study is the peculiarities of modern aspects of the interaction of civil society with local government bodies.

The information base of the research became theoretical and methodological developments of domestic and foreign authors, materials of periodicals; statistical data of the State Statistics Service of Ukraine.

**Findings:** Based on the analysis of literary sources was summarized the essence and forms of interaction of civil society with local government. It is shown that in the modern conditions of the development of society, as well as external challenges in Ukraine and in the world, a promising direction for the development of communication processes of local government with civil society is the use of electronic democracy tools. Presented an analysis of statistical data on the use by citizens various forms of electronic communications in local government in Ukraine for 2019-2020 years. It was established that the effectiveness of using electronic capabilities in the communicative processes between local government and civil society is not the same in different regions.

**Research limitations/implications:** The presented problem also requires further research in order to establish criteria for determining the effectiveness of the application of various communication approaches in the process interaction between civil society and local government bodies.

**Practical implications:** Based on the generalization of the research results, was proposed the main directions for improving the communicative activity of local government.

**Originality/value:** The conducted studies showed that after the implementation of the decentralization reform, local government in Ukraine became more open and transparent. Has been established a positive trend in the use of such communication mechanisms as electronic appeals, electronic petitions and the participation budget. However, it is necessary to

pay attention to the uneven use of the specified types of communications in different regions of the country, which requires solving a number of organizational, technological and social issues.

**Keywords:** local government, civil society, communicative processes, electronic democracy tools, communication technologies.

**Category of the paper:** Research paper.

## 1. Introduction

A necessary condition for the development of democracy in Ukraine is the establishment of effective cooperation between the authorities and institutions of civil society. The priority is an issue of involving the civil society in the process of making decision, which will ensure increased efficiency and transparency of the activities of public authorities.

The issue of interaction with the public society is one of the key point in the Association Agreement between Ukraine and the European Union (Association Agreement between the European Union and its Member States, of the one part, and Ukraine, of the other part, 2015). In particular, in the text of the Agreement determined that the interaction of the state with civil society based on partnership is necessary for the development of Ukraine as a legal, democratic and social country.

The experience of the democratic countries all over the world proves that it is public participation, contributes to the greater efficiency of public administration, the openness and transparency of the activities of state bodies and local government, and increases the level of society trust. To date, the adoption of a number of legislative acts provides grounds for asserting the expansion of the legal field for the interaction of executive authorities, local government and the public society. At the same time, focusing on dialogue with society through more active involvement of the public requires the introduction of new methods and tools. Successful and effective interaction of local government bodies with the civil society is an important component of solving topical issues of local politics and socio-economic development of the region.

It should be noted that the development of local government in our country is in a state of stagnation. Such state required effective and significant changes in approaches to the process of regional and local governance. The decentralization reform, which began in 2015, provided for the transfer, adaptation and implementation of European practices in Ukraine, which would be based on the principles of transparency and accountability (Kravtsova, 2019). Historically, it happened that for decades the paradigm of thinking of the governing bodies in the territory of Ukraine was formed without the involvement of the public in the process of forming an opinion and making decisions both at the local and national levels (Selivanov, Obushna, Khadzhyradieva, 2019). At the same time, public consultations of the authorities with the

community require the formation of such an effective model of understanding and trust, where the authorities are legitimate, and the level of political culture and legal awareness of the population is high (Vysokyi, 2021).

The modern legislation of Ukraine provides certain opportunities for the interaction of public authorities with the civil society, but the technologies and methods of this interaction still need to be implemented and improved.

Also, it should be noted that the need to improve approaches in the communication processes of local authorities with the public society is also due to current external challenges, namely the impact of the pandemic and introduction of the state of war in the country. The specified factors actualize the further development of studies of the state and main trends in improving the process of civil society interaction with local government bodies.

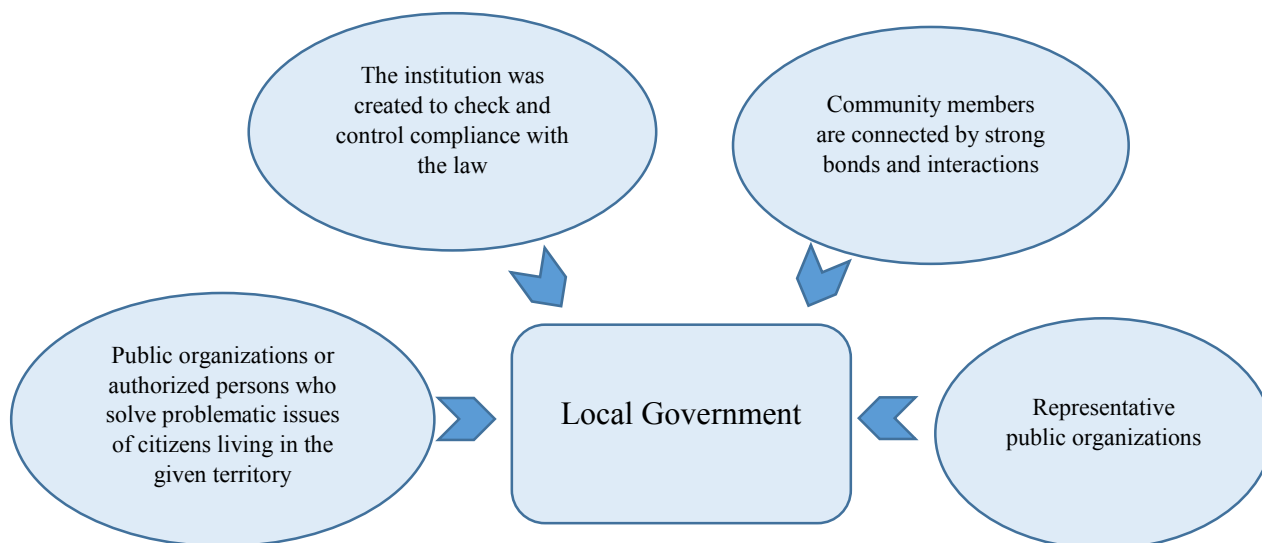
Accordingly, the purpose of the article is research and analysis of modern aspects of the interaction of civil society with local government bodies, identifying the main problems and outlining ways of improvement.

## **2. The essence and forms of interaction between local government bodies and the civil society**

Progress in all spheres of life of society and the country is possible only under the condition of the functioning and development of an active public society. The interaction of state authorities of Ukraine with the public is the most important joint task of state administration, local government and the society.

The government acts as a subject when involving the public society in joint interaction in the decision process. At the same time, it influences for the public society in order to intensify its activities, creates the conditions necessary for them, organizes different events, etc. As a result, the public society, which acted as an object of government activity, turns into a subject. That is, the public society begins to influence on the government, execute certain control over its decisions and actions, and demand solutions to urgent issues (Koliianko, 2021).

Local government reflects the social interactions and dependencies between the people who make it up. The key aspects here are: a connecting goal (interest), and therefore the ability to act on behalf of the community, a sense of group and spatial identity, the socio-economic space of action (Fig. 1) (Sakowicz, 2007).



**Figure 1.** Elements of local government. Source: compiled by the authors based on work «Modernizacja samorządu terytorialnego», Sakowicz.

Institutions of public society include public, religious, charitable organizations, trade unions and their associations, creative unions, associations, employers' organizations, non-state mass media and other non-business societies and institutions legalized in accordance with the legislation of Ukraine.

The process of interaction of authorities with the public society involves informing, consultations, active participation of citizens in the development and implementation of state policy (dialogue) and partnership (Asotsiatsiia Sotsialno-Ekonomichni Stratehii ta Partnerstva, 2012). In particular, in the Law of Ukraine «About Local Government» considerable attention is paid to openness and accountability in the development of public policy and making management decisions (Zakon Ukrainy “Pro mistseve samovriaduvannia”, 2021).

Pisotskyi's (Pisotskyi, 2013) work proposed a classification of forms of communicative interaction between public administration bodies and the civil society. Author considers the classification of forms and methods of manifestation of communicative activity of the territorial community in the process of implementing local government according to the criteria of their belonging to certain types of communication. The proposed classification takes into account the methods and scales of certain communicative interaction: 1) according to the method of interaction – direct, indirect (technically or socially) and mixed communication; 2) by the scale of communication – interpersonal, group and mass communication.

The practice of relations between state authorities and local government involves, first of all, informing the public society in order to provide it with a general idea of activities, implementation of plans and problems that need to be solved. To achieve this goal, executive authorities use the following main types of communication channels:

- direct communication,
- personal contacts between citizens (associations of citizens), on the one hand, and government officials, on the other,
- intercourse using different means of communication (telephone, various forms of personal correspondence),
- indirect communication through mass media (press, television, radio, computer networks, etc.) (Hurina, 2013).

In order to achieve mutual understanding, friendly relations and cooperation between state authorities and the public society, according to L. Gurina (Hurina, 2013), should be observed the following requirements:

- to provide broad, adequate information to both the public society as a whole and its individual social groups,
- organize effective «feedback» with the public society,
- involve the public society to take part in the process of discussion and making decision.

According to S.M. Vysotskaya, can be used different types of relations between state authorities and local government bodies with mass media (Vysotska, 2012):

- issue and distribution of newsletters, reviews, photos, video materials, information collections, express information, etc.,
- conducting press conferences, briefings, televised debates, press clubs, organizing interviews with heads of state authorities and local government bodies for employees of domestic and foreign mass media,
- provision of publications (speeches) of heads of state authorities and local government in mass media,
- creation of archives of information on the activities of state authorities and local government bodies,
- placing web pages on the Internet about activities of state authorities and local government.

Currently, Ukraine needs a system of relations between the public authorities and the civil society, which would be professional, effective, designed to serve the interests of citizens (Rykun, 2013).

People consider that the main reasons that prevent public society cooperation with the state authorities and local government is disbelief that their influence on the government can be effective (34%), as well as the unwillingness of state authorities and local government to cooperate with the public, lack of information about its decision. Among the various forms of activity of public organizations, the population considers the most important those related to control over the activities of the government (42%), helping people to defend their rights (39%), helping socially vulnerable groups (37%), joint development by the government state decisions (25%), environmental protection (23%) (Hurina, 2013).

Eva Zeman-Mishevskaya's (Zeman-Miszewska, 2019) research shows that there is a problem of cooperation between local government and public society, as there is still little real interest in such cooperation. However, it is worth noting that local governments are gradually gaining trust among representatives of the local community, which may contribute to the growth of public participation in the future. Forms of active participation of citizens facilitate this, for example, in the management of public budgets.

Thus, one of the conditions for the stable functioning of local government is a developed civil society. Unfortunately, unlike countries with a stable democracy, in our country, it is only at the stage of formation, and the vast majority of society is indifferent to the processes of managing the territories in which they live.

### **3. The use of electronic democracy tools in communication processes of local government with the public society in Ukraine**

The communicative subsystem of public administration includes subjects of interaction, information connections and management relations, processes of interaction of subjects of administration among themselves and with other public institutions. It also includes the infrastructure that ensures the creation, transmission, search and receipt of management information, that is, information that circulates in this system and is used to implement management interactions and influences (Dreshpak, 2015).

The main forms of public involvement in the process of making state decision used by modern Ukrainian government are: public hearings; open budget hearings as their component; the so-called «hotline» – answers of authorities representatives to citizens' questions by phone, etc.

In the tables number 1-4 shown statistics data of using electronic democracy tools by local government.

Thus, one of the common electronic communication tools is an E-appeal, where a citizen notes personal information and explains the essence of the raised question, remark, proposal, statement or complaint, request or demand. The analysis of statistical data (Table 1) showed an increase in the number of «E-appeals» in 2020 by 49% compared to 2019.

**Table 1.**

*Analysis of the use of electronic appeals by citizens («E-appeals») in local government for 2019-2020*

Year	The number of registered «E-appeal», units	The number of considered «E-appeal», units	The share of considered «E-appeal» in the total number of registered «E-appeal», %
2019	356634	349779	98,1
2020	534314	532842	99,7

Source: compiled by the authors based on data from the State Statistics Service (Derzhavna sluzhba statystyky, 2020).

This fact indicates positive trends in the development of communications between local authorities and the public society, as well as an increase in civil society trust to the local government. In addition, this is due to the introduction of strict quarantine regulations in connection with Covid-19. Most people began to use online services, instead of the usual meetings with representatives of the authorities.

With electronic petitions, citizens can apply to the local government body through the official website of the body to which it is addressed, or the website of the public association that collects signatures in support of the electronic petition.

The number of published «E-petitions» is significantly less compared to the number of «E-appeals» of citizens (Table 2).

**Table 2.**

*Analysis of using of public society of the electronic tool «E-petitions» in local government for 2019-2020*

Year	The number of published «E-petitions», units	The number of supported «E-petitions», units (which received the required number of votes in their support)	The number of «E-petitions» supported by the decisions of the local government to whom the petitions are addressed, units	The share of «E-petitions» supported by the decisions of the local government to which the petitions are addressed, in the total number of supported «E-petitions» (which received the required number of votes in their support), %
2019	9607	1533	918	59,9
2020	6344	875	458	52,3

Source: compiled by the authors based on data from the State Statistics Service (Derzhavna sluzhba statystyky, 2020).

In addition, the number of «E-petitions» for 2020 that received the required number of votes is only 13.8% of the total number submitted. This indicates insufficient readiness of citizens to formulate the essence of petitions and low public activity. At the same time, local government supported more than half of the petitions (52.3-59.9%) of those that received the required number of public votes.

From the analysis of information (Table 3), it can be noted that there is a positive trend of increasing the level of trust to the local government, because the number of "e-consultations" in 2020 compared to 2019 increased by 45.7%.

**Table 3.**

*Analysis of citizens' use of the electronic tool «E-consultation» in local self-government for 2019-2020*

Year	The number of published «E-consultations», units	The number of published reports based on the results of «E-consultations», units	Share of reports, %
2019	5736	1844	32,1
2020	14093	937	6,6

Source: compiled by the authors based on data from the State Statistics Service (Derzhavna sluzhba statystyky, 2020).

An essential factor in the making of effectively relationship between local government and the civil society is the participation of the public in the creation of local projects aimed at solving social problems in a certain territorial community. The analysis of statistical data (Table 4) shows that in 2020, local government supported more such projects than in 2019 (as a percentage equivalent to those that submitted). That is, the local government listens to the opinion of the community and promotes their interaction.

**Table 4.**

*Analysis of citizens' use of the electronic tool «Participatory budget (public budget)» in local government for 2019-2020*

	Year	
	2019	2020
Number of projects submitted by the public «Participation budget (public budget)», unit	13749	10635
The number of projects submitted for voting «Participation budget (public budget)», unit	11516	8615
Number of supported projects (winning projects) «Participation budget (public budget)», unit	5014	3267
The number of projects «Participation budget (public budget)» implemented at the expense of the local budget in the reporting year, units	3790	2685
The share of projects «Participation budget (public budget)», implemented at the expense of the local budget in the reporting year, in the total number of supported projects (winning projects) «Participation budget (public budget)», %	75,6	82,2

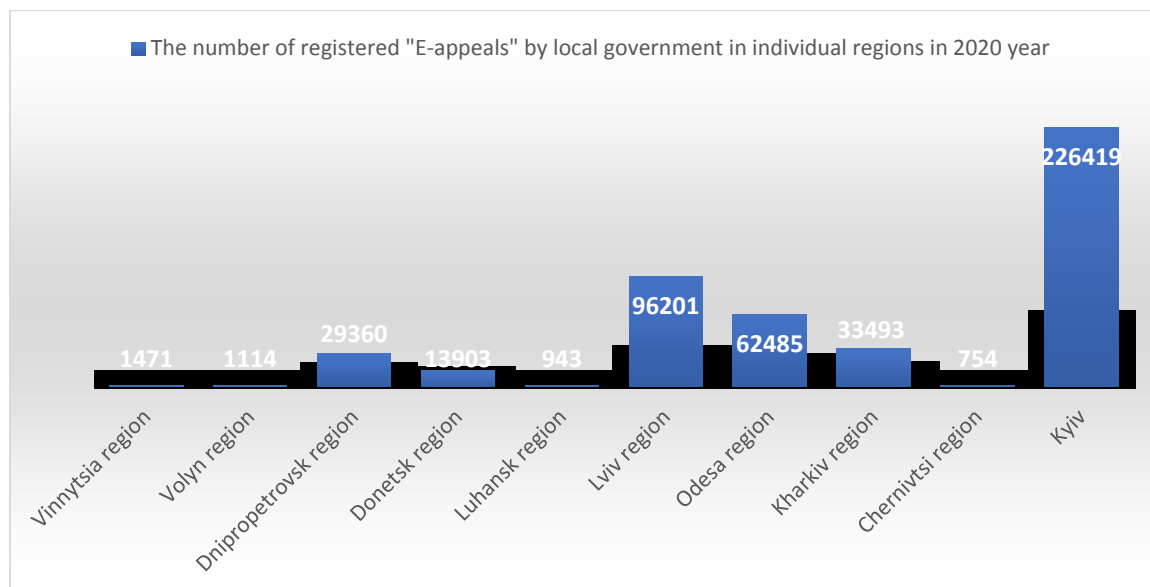
Source: compiled by the authors based on data from the State Statistics Service (Derzhavna sluzhba statystyky, 2020).

Tables number 1-4 presented summarized data on the use of e-democracy tools by local government bodies. At the same time, it is necessary to note significant differences in the degree of use of such methods in different regions of the country. For example, in fig. 1 presents in the form of a diagram a sample statistical data of the use of «E-appeals» by local government in individual regions for 2020.

It should be noted that the most active interaction of local government with the public society is observed in large regional centers, such as the city of Kyiv, Lviv, Odesa, Kharkiv and Dnipropetrovsk regions. This is due to the following factors:

- the digital literacy of the population and the degree of interest in the development of communities in cities is higher than in villages and small regions,
- internet connection.





**Figure 1.** The number of registered "E-appeals" by local government in individual regions in 2020 year. Source: compiled by the authors based on data from the State Statistics Service (Derzhavna sluzhba statystyky, 2020).

The lowest indicators of cooperation of the population with local government were recorded in Chernivtsi and Luhansk regions.

#### 4. Discussion

In the conditions of global challenges facing Ukraine, gaining special relevance the issue of ensuring transparency and openness of the activities of public administration bodies using the modern capabilities of the information society and the latest forms and methods of communication activities. Such requirements require the provision of effective feedback to the public society, improvement of communication processes in the system of local government.

Communicative activity in the system of local government consists in carrying out information exchanges aimed at the performance of public administration functions. An important component of the interaction of local government with the population of the community is information. Local government bodies must constantly inform citizens about their own activities through social networks, the website, and mass media. Another important component is access to public information: regulatory documents, financial statements, etc. If in regional centers and big cities there are mostly no problems with this, then small settlements often have problems both with timely information and with access to documentation.

However, it should be noted that the effectiveness of using electronic capabilities in the communicative processes of local government is not the same in different regions. It mainly happens for the following reasons:

- reluctance of authorities and their representatives to cooperate with the population,
- lack of legal obligation of government to solve all important issues together with the public society,
- concerns of the authorities that the public society through its participation will slow down the process of making decision,
- ignorance of the public, lack of specific knowledge among the majority of the population about the activities of the government body, its obligations to the community, as well as their rights and obligations.

The possibility of creating information units in local government is provided for by the Law of Ukraine «On the procedure for covering the activities of state authorities and local government». According to Article 6 of this Law, information units (services) in the system of executive bodies and councils may be created in the form of information departments, information and analytical units, press services, press centers, public relations departments and centers, press bureaus, press-secretaries and press attachés with the appropriate apparatus (Zakon Ukrainy «Pro poriadok vysvitlennia diialnosti orhaniv derzhavnoi vlady ta orhaniv mistsevoho samovriaduvannia v Ukraini zasobamy masovoi informatsii», 2005).

The main functions of public relations departments established at local government bodies are:

- relations with mass media,
- relations with the local citizens,
- relationships with information centers,
- creation and maintenance of a generalized image of a state authority or a local government body,
- organization of exhibitions, meetings and lectures,
- work on increasing the role and authority of the state administration body (Malyk, 2015).

Therefore, in order to improve the communicative activity of public administration bodies in modern conditions, it is most expedient to develop the following directions at the regional and local levels:

- ensuring the openness and transparency of the activities of local government through fuller engagement of the civil society in the discussion of a wide range of issues,
- development of electronic democracy tools to create optimal conditions for community development planning,
- improvement of information support for sustainable socio-economic development of communities (cities, towns, villages): ecology, education, social protection, etc.
- use of the modern information and communication technologies during the provision of public services to citizens and organizations in various spheres of activity,

- improving approaches to using the communicative potential of official websites of local government bodies,
- creation of interactive services to expand the participation of civil society in solving socially significant matters at the regional and local levels, including by using methods of marketing analysis of the target audience,
- introduction and development of modern tools for interaction between public administration bodies and interested groups at the local and regional levels based on the use of modern forms and means of communication, including social networks,
- expansion of participation of civil society in communicative interaction with local government due to the implementation of training programs for people in the field of information and communication technologies.

Thus, the modernization of the communicative activity of public administration bodies in modern conditions requires solving problems of an organizational, social, and technical-technological nature.

## **5. Conclusion**

Based on the analysis of theoretical and methodological principles and the main aspects of the interaction of civil society with local government, summarized the directions for improving the communicative activity of public administration bodies in modern conditions at the regional and local levels.

It should be noted that after the implementation of the decentralization reform, local government bodies became more openness and transparent. There is a positive trend in the use of such communication mechanisms as electronic appeals, electronic petitions, and the participation budget. However, it is necessary to pay attention to the uneven use of the mentioned types of communications in different regions of the country, which requires solving a number of issues of an organizational, technological and social nature. Expanding the communication capabilities of civil society interaction with local government will contribute to increasing the degree of trust to public administration bodies, the socio-economic development of communities, and increasing the investment attractiveness and competitiveness of Ukraine.

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