Communication in municipal intervention in Portugal – A value proposition

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Abstract

Communication plays a crucial role in the management of any Local Authority, assisting in the promotion and achievement of its objectives and services to the community. The production of cultural events in the municipalities promotes the social and economic development of the municipalities.

In turn, a Local Authority is an administrative entity with autonomy to govern and manage the interests of a particular region or municipality. Thus, the ambition to combine political communication with the cultural spectrum is the main premise of this research.

In this sense, this research aims, through a qualitative analysis, and a sample of 20 specialists, (professionals linked to the field), and 50 citizens to demonstrate the importance of Communication in Local Authorities.

Keywords: Communication, Local Authority, Citizens; Value Proposition

INTRODUCTION

In contemporary societies organizations and their acts are under constant observation and evaluation by citizens (Oliveira, 2017) which makes it crucial to acquire legitimacy, which usually implies an agreement between the objectives, actions, and values of an organization and the social system where it is inserted (Wæraas, 2020), through communication, which will strengthen the trust and relationship between the organization and its audiences.

The democratic organization of the State comprises the existence of Local Authorities, which are constituted as public entities that develop their action over a certain territorial area (Article 236 of the Constitution of the Portuguese Republic).

These areas are duly delimited in Law 56/2012 of November 8 of the Administrative Reorganization of Lisbon and which is premised on the pursuit of the interests of the resident population. They are made up of their own representative bodies.

Following the attributions and exercise of powers of Local Authorities, they, within the scope of Law 75/2013 of 12 September of the Legal Regime of Local Authorities, are bound to respect the principles of administrative decentralization, subsidiarity, complementarity, the pursuit of the public interest and

the protection of the rights and interests of citizens and intangibility of the State's attributions.

In this context, it should be noted that the representative bodies of the parish are the Parish Assembly and the Parish Council (Article 244 of the Constitution of the Portuguese Republic). Its attributions are:

- Rural and urban equipment;
- Public supply;
- Education;
- Culture, leisure and sport;
- Primary health care;
- Social action;
- Civil protection;
- Environment and healthiness;
- Development;
- Urban and rural planning;
- Protection of the community;
- Planning, management, and realization of investments in the cases and terms provided for in the law.

According to articles 245 and 246 of the Constitution of the Portuguese Republic, the Parish Assembly is the deliberative body, while the Parish Council is the executive body.

Finally, Local Authorities are also assigned powers of an administrative nature as provided for in the Constitution of the Portuguese Republic.

The Evolution of Communication

Talking about Communication refers us to important authors. In 1776 Adam Smith an awareness of the interconnection between consumption and production in a perspective in which the former is incorporated as the sole purpose of the latter (McDonald, 2004).

In turn, in 1993 Kotler states that Communication is based on human desires and needs to the extent that these appear associated with deprivations (Motta et al., n.d.).

Another relevant notion that helps to understand this concept is related to the culture and to the individual characteristics of each one. These two variables allow us to perceive the impact of the individual's exposure to certain objects, images, and services that meet their interests and needs in the same way that these concepts are apprehended by companies in the context of their Communication campaigns (Motta et al., n.d.).

There are several approaches to this concept, but it is unequivocal the importance of establishing a relationship between the parties, that is, client and object/service (Motta et al., n.d.).

Philosophically it is important to realize the difference between the concept and the function of Communication. If the concept seems to orient to the perspective of the market already the function extends the scope to the various types of Communication (McDonald, 2004).

The evolution of Comunicação has allowed a distinction from the more traditional conception to the modern and current conception. If traditionally the concept of Communication was ancillary in relation to production, physical distribution, and advertising, being more limited also to consumer goods, in turn, the modern design refers to a distinct importance with emphasis on both the company and the customer.

The communication department in the municipalities

The Communication department plays a key role in any local authority, although it is often underestimated or neglected within the context under study. Marketing Communication can be defined here as a set of activities that aim to create, advertise, and create value through the promotion of services, programs, and events offered by the municipality (Almeida, 2011; Fantasy, 2015):

In an attempt to specify some of the reasons why the Communication department is important it is up to us to mention:

1. The Communication Department shall be responsible for ensuring that relevant information on the municipality's services and programmes is communicated in a clear and accessible manner to citizens.

To this end, the department must evaluate the use of different communication channels, such as social networks, websites, newsletters, advertising campaigns, and public events. Effective communication helps raise awareness of the autarchy's activities and strengthen citizen engagement.

2. Communication plays an important role in building relationships between municipalities and citizens. Through appropriate communication strategies, it is possible to establish a closer and lasting connection with the local community. This involves listening to the needs and opinions of citizens, involving them in public consultations, participation programs, as well as receiving feedback on the services provided. By building solid relationships, the municipality can gain the trust, loyalty, and loyalty of citizens.

3. In many local authorities, tourism plays a significant role in the economy. The Communication department can play an important role in promoting local tourism by highlighting the attractions, cultural events, historical heritage, and natural resources of the region. By attracting visitors and promoting economic development, the Communication department contributes to the growth of the local community, job creation, and improvement in the quality of life.

4. Citizens' perception of local authority is crucial to its success. The Communication department plays an important role in managing the image of the municipality, ensuring that it is viewed positively and reliably. This involves developing a consistent visual identity, creating clear and persuasive messages, and promoting community success stories.

In summary, the Communication department plays an essential role in effective communication, establishing relationships, promoting tourism and economic development, as well as managing the image of the municipality. It is important to recognize the importance of these activities and provide adequate resources so that the Communication department can perform its role efficiently and effectively (Almeida, 2011; Fantasia, 2015).

The importance of Communication for Local Government

The reorganization of Public Administration has been a subject frequently discussed over time, evidencing the evolution in perceptions and expectations regarding its competences. Participation in this process is conditioned to the perception of value that residents attribute to the services provided, often with visions and expectations that are not aligned with the current form of organization of public institutions (Almeida, 2011).

In this follow-up it is perceived the relevance of the perception of the quality of municipal services, an aspect directly interconnected with the form of communication of the autarchy facing the exterior (Almeida, 2011).

Communication was not always seen in a positive way since it had an attribution to less transparent contexts and that did not allow to

perceive the essence of each political power. Currently, Communication is based on aspects of communication and the promotion of an image that is intended to be transmitted.

At this level, politicians both in campaign moments and in their day-to-day lives in more or less formal moments have indications of how to dress, how to position their voice, the care to be taken with sign language, all these aspects with a clear intention of passing the image that is intended (Almeida, 2011).

The development phases of Political Communication can vary in different theoretical approaches and contexts, but can usually be summarized in three main phases (Almeida, 2011):

- Initial Phase – in this phase the Communication is mainly focused on electoral campaign activities, focusing on communication strategies and persuasion to win votes.

Political communication strategies are usually traditional, such as advertisements in the media, with an emphasis on promoting the candidate or political party as the best option for voters. Public opinion research can be used to identify key issues and adjust campaign strategies.

- Intermediate Phase – in this phase Communication begins to expand beyond electoral campaigns and focuses on strategies for building image and relationship with voters. The management of the public image of the candidate or political party becomes more important, with the use of political branding techniques, social media management, content communication, and public relations.

Public opinion polling and data analysis are most widely used to perceive voters' needs and preferences and tailor political messages.

- Final Phase – In this phase, Communication becomes a long-term strategic approach, embedded in the organizational culture of political parties and political institutions.

The management of the political brand currently has a more professional approach, with the use of advanced techniques of voter segmentation, big data analysis, digital communication, among others. In addition, Communication can extend beyond electoral campaigns, also covering governance and public management, with a focus on building continuous relationships with voters and promoting public policies.

Public opinion research and data analysis are used strategically to shape policy strategies and make informed decisions.

If Communication wants to convey a message, then it is a form of communication. At the level of public services, communication is based on the following objectives (Fantasia, 2015):

- Creating an image
- Basis justification for certain decisions
- Promotion of social interests and volunteering
- Information on existing services and development

- Behavior change
- Generate funds

This means of communication is intended to facilitate the communication of decisions and creation of services given the growing pressures and demands of public opinion. In this context it is intended to maintain a good relationship of proximity with the population (Fantasia, 2015)

The effectiveness of communication can be determined by the extensive knowledge of the various target audiences with which one works. In the scope of the public organization, Communication also gains prominence and relevance since the strategies and instruments used internally determine the internal image of the organization, making it with greater capacity for competitiveness and learning (Fantasia, 2015).

Value Proposition as a Communication tool in municipalities

The value proposition is an essential element of Communication, as it represents the unique and distinctive promise that a company or organization makes to its customers, showing how its products or services meet the needs and desires of the target audience (Belo, 2010).

Given the realistic perception of the municipal context enriched by the theoretical conception mentioned above, it is important to note that the value proposition in an Autarchy is fundamental to communicate the benefits and value of the services offered to citizens.

Based on the same author, the value proposition in an autarchic context can be considered as follows: (Belo, 2010):
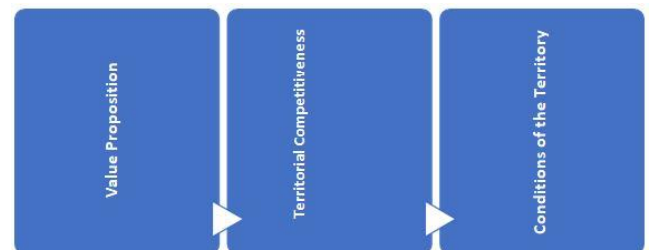
1. **Value Proposition**

Intrinsic and extrinsic characteristics of the autarchic territory.

2. **Territorial Competitiveness**

Location, infrastructure, human resources, financial capital, knowledge, technology and information, quality of life, cultural activities and own identity

3. **Conditions of the Territory**

Social and economic capital, attractiveness, policies, and communication strategies of local authorities

In short and with reference to the previous scheme, an effective value proposition with regard to strategic and political communication can highlight the following aspects of a local authority and should highlight the following points:

- Benefits for the community – the value proposition should highlight how the services of the autarchy positively impact the community, whether in improving the quality of life, providing adequate infrastructure, offering educational programs, or promoting health services. The benefits listed here refer to the attributions of local authorities as explained in Law 75/2013 of September 12.
- Solution for specific needs – value proposition should emphasize how the Autarchy meets the specific needs of the community. This can be achieved by highlighting the unique services offered, the differentiated approach in service delivery, or the direct response to local problems and challenges.

With the political-administrative decentralization in Portugal and according to Law 56/2012 of November 8, the political power closest to the citizen refers to a decision-making that meets the need of the citizen closest to it.

- Credibility and trust – the value proposition must convey the reliability and credibility of the Local Authority. This can be achieved through quality evidence such as certifications, awards, or recognitions. The municipalities, these days, develop a work with reflection in the search for recognition by the target audience, but with clear through awards of recognition of merit attained. In a concrete way can be highlighted the awards Autarchy of the Year and Quality Seals.
- Clear and persuasive communication – the value proposition must be communicated clearly and persuasively. It must be easily understood by citizens and convincingly convey the benefits and relevance of the municipality's services. The use of concise messages, accessible language, and appropriate communication materials can help convey the value proposition effectively.

Requirement addressed throughout this work in what is the attribution to the Department of Communication / Communication of an autarchy, which develops a double action: dissemination of projects and political decisions and construction of a political image of the mayor himself.

In short, an effective value proposition in Local Government Communication must communicate the benefits to the community, address specific needs, convey credibility, differentiate itself from the competition, and be communicated clearly and persuasively.

Methodology

The qualitative approach refers to investigations of meanings, psychic representations, social representations, symbolizations, perceptions, points of view, perspectives, experiences, life experiences, and analogies. It has addressed, among other topics, adaptation mechanisms; adherence and non-adherence to treatments; stigma; Care; reactions and roles of professional and family caregivers; facilitating factors and difficulties in the face of

the profession / in the face of treatment / in the face of working conditions (Turato, 2003).

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Subjects can vary in number—from an individual to large groups—and the focus of inquiry can vary from a particular action of a person or small group to the function of a complex institution.

Research methods include interviews (structured, semi-structured, and open), observation (external or participant), and analysis of written material. Classic examples of the qualitative research approach are anthropological investigations of cultures, sociological investigations of institutions, and psychological investigations of behaviors (Holman, 1993).

In the qualitative approach, the samples are purposeful, since it seeks to learn and understand certain selected cases without the need for generalization to all possible cases. According to Minayo (1994), Some care should be taken with the sampling process, in order to reflect the totality in multiple dimensions:

- to privilege the subjects who hold the information and experiences that the researcher wishes to know;
- consider a sufficient number for the recurrence of information;
- choose a set of informants that allows the apprehension of similarities and differences.

The interview allows access to data that are difficult to obtain through direct observation, such as feelings, thoughts, and intentions. The purpose of the interview is to make the researcher place himself within the perspective of the interviewee (Patton, 1990). More than in other research instruments that, in general, establish a hierarchical relationship between the researcher and the researched, in the interview, the relationship that is created is one of interaction, with an atmosphere of reciprocal influence between those who ask and those who answer (Lüdke and André, 1986).

The great advantage of the interview over other techniques is that it allows the immediate and current capture of the desired information, practically with any type of interviewee, and on the most varied topics. The interview allows corrections, clarifications, and adaptations that make it effective in obtaining the desired information.

Other instruments have their fate sealed when they leave the hands of the researcher who prepared them, the interview comes to life by initiating the dialogue between the researcher and the interviewee. (Lüdke e André, 1986).

In this research, the researcher focused on conducting interviews with various professionals and citizens, and his main objective is to find out what they think of the current Communication Management at the Level of the Municipalities.

The interviews conducted are the focus of the investigation. During the process, the researchers found it pertinent to formulate some questions to interview not only the professionals but also the users, in order to find out what they think of the service and the work done by the health teams, thus interconnecting some questions that are common to the interviews.

In this way, it is possible to investigate the vision of those who provide the services, as well as those who receive them.

The respective interviews are different, and a specific questionnaire was carried out, both to interview the professionals and the users. There are issues that coincide with both groups, just as there are issues that do not coincide, and it is not possible, therefore, to mate all the issues and their conclusions.

The professionals who agreed to conduct the interview practice in Continental and Insular Portugal, aged between twenty-four and sixty-two years of age.

Analysis and discussion of results

According to the author Ralha (2021) the target markets of any municipality, region or even city go through 3 focal points. It is exactly these 3 points that solidify our investigation.

Q1 Attracting residents, which would imply a positive increase in the level of local tax;

Q2 Attract tourists who stay overnight in the locality generating revenues for the local economy

Q3 Attract investors who choose the location as the destination of their investments and generate jobs.

The convenience sample consists of a total of 70 individuals. A sample of 20 specialists, (professionals linked to the field), and 50 users. In the sample related to specialists are professions such as Administrative, Manager, Marketeer, and Accountant among others.

The sample of specialists is composed of different professions, such as accountant, secretary, manager, and assistants.

It should be noted that the sample consists of 70% of female elements and only 30% of males. With regard to academic qualifications, 20% of the sample studied up to the 12th grade, 50% Bachelor's degree, and 30% Master's degree. It is also possible to verify that 20% of the interviewees work in the Porto area, 20% in the Lisbon area and the rest vary between several locations in mainland and island Portugal.

After analyzing the opinion of the sample of experts regarding the importance of attracting residents to their locality, it was possible to realize that 70% of the sample considers this fact to be of high importance.

The interviewees mention that this would generate an increase in revenues from taxes, property taxes and even support activities such as trade and services. Situations impossible to verify due to the non-existence of residents. This is an opinion that meets the author's thinking Ralha (2021).

Faced with the evaluation of the answers given, it was possible to perceive that 90% of the sample agrees that it is important to attract tourists to the localities. Respondents talk about revenue development for the local economy.

They also mention that by attracting tourists the locality gains notoriety, which may have a great implication in terms of housing and business investments. Once again the opinions of the interviewees meet the author's thinking Ralha (2021).

Elisenda Adell, on this subject, mentions:

"The triad of residents, tourists, and visitors feeds on and complements each other."

And he reiterates that it is important:

"pay attention to the smaller towns and villages in the interior of Portugal, which have been losing economic activity and also visitors..."

When verifying the opinion of the sample of experts regarding the importance of attracting investors to the locality, the answers were unanimous. About 95% of the sample argued that it is of high importance to attract investors with the ability to invest in new companies and factories, generating jobs and able to attract a new target audience more dynamic and innovative.

Generally speaking, we all aspire to evolve for our localities. When we asked the interviewees about how to attract this triad the answer fell on the Communication. However, Justa Oliveira mentions that:

"You have to see Communication exactly as it is!"
And further states

"Communication manifests itself in a variety of ways. You can talk here about advertising, public relations, but also some formats such as posters, radio ads, and very important Digital Communication."

Also, Sónia Tavares makes her opinion clear, mentioning that:

"Attracting quality jobs is decisive for most municipalities, without special resources, but with both commercial and tourist potential!" He concludes by stating that:

"Communication is not only valid for small villages. To remember New York. Who lives in the spotlight."

With regard to the sample of users, it can be seen that the sample consists of 50 individuals, 35 females and 15 males aged between 18 and 70 years.

In this case, 4 age gaps were found:

- From 18 to 30 with 21 interviewees;
- From 31 to 40 with 12 interviewees;
- From 41 to 50 with 11 respondents and;
- Over 50 years with 6 interviewees.

With regard to the area of residence of the interviewees of the sample of users, 41% are from the North of Portugal, 38% from the Centre, and only 21% from the South. At the level of education, the sample has 49% interviewed with the 12th grade, 41% with graduates, and 10% with Masters.

The sample analyzed here does not present opinions different from those of the professionals. However, it is verified that the interviewees up to the age of 40 value more the triad under study. While the post 41 already presents itself more without opinion.

Younger layers believe that attracting residents to their locality is important. However, they mention the importance of investing in the lesser-known areas and more inland. They speak, for example, of the existing land extensions in the Alentejo and that, through greater investment and good digital communication, they could be revitalized.

They also say that attracting tourists can only become a reality through the dynamization of the areas, perhaps new investors who bring jobs to the lands.

Conclusion

According to the research carried out for this study, conclusions capable of answering the various research questions posed emerged.

Thus, faced with the need to understand the extent to which attracting residents would imply a positive increase in the level of local tax, it was found that most respondents consider it "important" or "very important" for their lives. This opinion is coincident in both samples.

With regard to the importance of attracting overnight tourists in the locality generating revenues for the local economy, the samples also agree. Both confirm that the dynamization of cities is important, but one should not put aside the towns and villages of the interior of Portugal.

Finally, with regard to P3 (attracting investors who choose the location as the destination of their investments and generate jobs), the samples agree. Coming to give the example of Campo Maior that became very dynamic with Delta Cafés company that created jobs, energized the city, and put it in the mouths of the world.

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