

Some suggestions regarding the monitoring of the functioning of the websites of the territorial units

Introduction

The monitoring of the functionality of the websites of territorial units (or administrative territorial units) is a rather difficult work, and it requires obtaining new knowledge and skills from the employers of the regional offices.

The employers of the Sakharov Centre, participating in the mentioned activities, are to possess certain knowledge in the sphere of jurisprudence, systems engineering and in sociology.

In this connection and taking into consideration the time limitation, you have to fully use methodological and methodical assistance of the corresponding profiling civil structures and independent experts, practical tips and recommendations which will make an invaluable contribution to your work.

Taking into account the abovementioned, I suggest developing a system of moral- psychological rewards (I regret that we aren't able to provide financial rewards) through awarding honorary diplomas, performances in mass media, thank-you letters and so on.

Taking into account the fact that the given monitoring is an activity which consumes much time, I think it's reasonable to support Seyran Martirosyan's suggestion on phased (but uninterrupted) implementation of this work.

I assume that each stage of the work will be completed by interim, but quite complete report, which will serve as a basis for public discussion, development of respective recommendations and preparation of appeals to LSG bodies and central governmental bodies of the Republic of Armenia.

It's worth mentioning that Gegharkunik regional branch has already carried out huge work on defining the qualitative characteristics of the websites of local government and self-government bodies. This is a very valuable work of the employees of the regional branch office, and to a certain extent it can serve as the basis of our activities.

Dear colleagues, you should carry out this work in three marzes through a single technology, but taking into account local specificities.

The used concepts

Administrative territorial unit - marz (a territorial organ of state

	governance);
	- a local organ of self-governance (organ for governing rural communities, the executive branch on community level and the Elderly Council-Avagani can be included in it);
	- a municipal organ (the organ of governing an urban community which includes the executive branch and Elderly Council-Avagani of a city);
	- local joint formations consolidating several community formations aimed at improving social and environmental situations in certain administrative boundaries;
Website structure	- a functional scheme of a website reflecting only tasks and functions of the governing (self-governing) organ of an administrative territorial unit;
Normative requirements	- requirements defined by legislative acts and decrees of superior bodies of government, as well as by decrees of LSG organs, which have a normative character.

The sequence of conducting the monitoring¹

1. It's necessary to implement structural and substantial expertise of the order of the RA Ministry of Territorial Administration and Emergency Situations (hereinafter referred to as the Ministry) for №280-A dated on April 8, 2015.
- 1.1. To define the list of experts and prepare letters to the corresponding organizations asking for assistance in conducting the mentioned expertise (the more the experts, the more precise will be the evaluation).
- 1.1.1. The experts can be both professionals of creation and maintenance of similar websites and specialists-managers who must assess the "necessity and sufficiency" of the mentioned order of the Ministry for the head of the corresponding administrative territorial unit starts the work on forming and running his website.
- 1.1.2. Together with the abovementioned (subparagraph 1.1.1.) it's necessary to find out whether there are model (standard) requirements to the peopleware on introducing, maintaining and running (i.e. technological scheme) websites of administrative territorial units.

¹ The suggested sequence of activities to some extent can be revised.

2. It's necessary to define the list of registered websites in each marz regardless the fact whether they operate or not, as of 01.09.2015.
- 2.1. It's necessary to find out whether there are standard requirements in the corresponding regional administrations for creating model websites of administrative territorial units. Whether the Ministry suggested the regional administrations a centralized candidacy of a website developer or whether this problem was the prerogative of the given regional administration, and, in this case, who was (personally) the customer and the developer of the website?
- 2.2. In case there was no centralized funding by the Ministry for the activities for developing the corresponding websites for different organs of local governance, then by what financial means have the mentioned works been implemented?
- 2.3. What functional differences are there between the websites of different local administrative units?
- 2.4. With a view to sort websites by "qualitative" features, I suggest implementing grouping of the registered websites in each marz.

The groups can be of three types:

- well-functioning websites, in which the activities of the local administrative territorial units are fully reflected, even for the period of April-September, 2015;
- satisfactorily functioning websites, which reflect "necessary", but "insufficient" information;
- unsatisfactorily functioning websites, which are registered, but don't function.

For grouping the websites it's necessary to develop a system of criteria. This work has been mainly implemented by Gegharkunik regional branch office.

You all need to fill up the mentioned list of criteria taking the following laws as the basis:

- "Local self-governance"
- "Freedom of information"
- "On community service"
- "Protection of personal data"
- "Taxes"
- "On local budget"
- "Land code"
- "On healthcare"
- "On funded pension"
- "On education"
- Others.

When you can choose the corresponding criterion (that is the functions which are legislatively assigned for the organs of local administrative units), then it will be possible to develop the chart of points according to which one can assess the level of reflection of a given function on the "pages" of the website.

Let's assume that we give a collective estimate for any criterion by 10-points system. The collective estimate will be the estimate which characterizes the given criterion in the following directions:

- Existence of a criterion;
- Self-descriptiveness of the criterion (qualitative or quantitative);
- Urgency of the self-descriptiveness of the criterion;
- Availability of the given criterion for a user.

It's clear that in the absence of the given criterion on the "pages" of the website its estimate will be 1 point, and in the presence of the given criterion on the "non-specialized" pages of the website its estimate will be average, let's suppose 5 points. If the information on the given criterion has become out of date, then the estimate will be 3 points.

Our chart will look like this:

Sample of the chart²

No	Names of the website sections	Name of the local administrative unit and its website
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² Note:

- I used the list of the criteria of Gegharkunik regional branch office. I suggest expressing the given criteria more briefly.
- It would be more reasonable to express the finite point values for each website (the line "Total sum of points") in percents taking the finite value of all criteria for 100% (that is the weight of each criterion in the a priori 10 points).

In our example the total weight of the 4 criteria should be equal to 40, and in the real percent ratio it will be:

- The regional administration of Gavar town $100 \cdot 36 / 40 = 84,0\%$
- Elderly council of Sevan town $100 \cdot 21 / 40 = 52,5\%$
- Elderly council of Tchambarak town $100 \cdot 23 / 40 = 57,5\%$
- Rural community Tsovinar $100 \cdot 12 / 40 = 30,0\%$
- Rural community Vardenik $100 \cdot 14 / 40 = 34\%$

By the abovementioned way we can assess the weight of each website in percents. From here we can group the websites by each marz, considering that all the websites which have high percent of estimate (at least starting from 70%) will be in the first group, the websites having the percent of estimate from 40% to 70% will be in the second group and all the other websites will be in the third group.

This is one of the methods of assessment of websites of different administrative territorial units. If you can suggest other method, I'm ready to discuss it.

		The regional administration	Elderly council of Sevan town	Elderly council of Tchambarak		Rural community	Rural community Vardenik
1	Normative acts (or their links), which regulate the functions of the local government (self- government) organ	9	5	7		3	3
2	Information on the on-going (implemented) programme	10	3	4		4	5
3	Information on the conducted financial audits	10	5	7		3	3
4	Information on officially implemented events.....	7	8	9		2	3
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	Total sum of points	36	21	23			12	14

3. The next direction of the monitoring is the study of technologies of running their websites by each administrative territorial unit (it's in the case when there is no model technological scheme).

3.1. It's necessary to clarify the following questions on each administrative territorial unit, the website of which are in the first and second groups:

- Which official of the government (self-government) organ is responsible for running and placing information on the pages of its website?
- How often the pages of the website are refreshed (according to the importance of the given information for users)?

- By what decree are the relations regulated between the “administrator” of the given website and heads of the corresponding organs of government (self-government) responsible for accuracy and actuality of the information presented on the pages of the websites?
 - Are there model staff-lists for running the websites?
 - What are the sources of funding of the activities of the websites administration?
 - Which official in the local government (self-government) organ is responsible for the control over the functioning of the website?
 - How often and how is the administrator of the website accountable for the quality functioning of the system?
 - What regulatory instructions, orders, normative acts of the local government (self-government) organ provide the functioning of the website?
4. The next problem, which, in my opinion, is not less important than the functioning of the website, is the problem of its efficiency.
- 4.1. The given problem has at least three ways of examination, namely:
- Generalized cost of development and maintenance of website for various administrative territorial units for each marz with further expert assessment on the expediency of these costs;
 - Whether the website corresponds to the requirements of transparency and publicity of the officials’ activities.
 - Raising the level of the population’s awareness on the activities of the organs of government (self-government). To what extent does the website provide the population’s awareness on social, cultural-spiritual, administrative and informational situations characterizing the given administrative territorial unit?

For that purpose it’s necessary to form a focus group from the inhabitants of the given administrative territorial unit involving representatives of various social estates, namely:

- The employees of educational institutions;
- Employees of healthcare institutions;
- Government employees;
- Civil society representatives;
- Students;
- Peasant farmers;
- Housewives and pensioners;
- Others.

It's necessary to form a series of questionnaires allowing consider both the specific opinion of the representatives of various social estates and the "general" consumers on the activities of the given website.

It's recommended to conduct the so-called "instant field observations" with the help of your volunteers, that is street survey among the population through a brief questionnaire only with "yes" or "no" answers.

Moreover, you must generate the focus group representatives' or other website users' desire to making suggestions on improvement of the informational support of the population.

Each regional branch office of the Sakharov Centre has its like-minded partners-NGOs and other CSSs with which you collaborate. Try to involve them in this work.

Sincerely,

Levon Nersisyan

P.S. I hope that my suggestions will have been taken into account while presenting the general plan of the monitoring till August 20, 2015.