Information and Communication Technologies as a Condition of Effective Political Management

Elena S. Karsanova¹, Oleg S. Volgin², and Alexey V. Kolpakov³

¹ State University of Management, Moscow, Russia
e_karsanova@mail.ru

² Moscow State Institute of International Relations (MGIMO-University), Moscow, Russia
oleg.volgin@gmail.com

³ University of Nevada, Reno, USA
akolpakov@unr.edu

Abstract. The aim of the paper is to investigate correlation between the development of information-communicative technologies and effectiveness of political management.

Methodologically the authors based their research on the methods of humanities and social sciences with the axiological bias. They focused their attention on human-centered aspects of social-technological innovations which determine internal links and determinations of different elements of information-communicative technologies and their influence on the system of political management.

The results of investigation became disclose of the key tendencies of information-communicative technologies, the risks they cause to robust human contacts in society and the degree of their influence on the effectiveness of political processes.

Conclusion. The use of information-communicative technologies can bring to different results due to the quality of political institutions and the aims of political elites. The general trend of the process that makes power more open in the condition of unpreparedness of political authorities to lead well-coordinated political management (due to formal coordination of their strategies, the lack of stable feedback with the citizens and undeveloped mechanisms of e-democracy) may have the chance to negatively influence on the effectiveness of political management.

Keywords: Keywords information-communicative · Technologies · Political management · Information-oriented society

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1 Introduction

The concept of Smart City has been substantially changed over the last decade from the perspective of strategic approaches. Governments of the vast majority of countries have realized that master plans and “top-down” initiatives do not guarantee the achievement of the goals set. Integrated approaches that take into account objective needs of the community, constitute a driving force on the way towards success. In other words, today the term “Smart City” is in literal sense more and more seldom directly associated with the spread of IT technologies: the focus has shifted to the efficient use and development of human capital.

New urbanistic technologies are on the agenda, because, as E. Townsend rightfully mentioned, “the current revolution (primarily in the IT field) may well result in gaining control over cities of previously unthinkable size – 10, 20, 50 or even 100 million people” (Townsend 2019). However, if there are opportunities for control, there are also opportunities for governance; therefore, it is safe to say that such giant conglomerates will emerge; in fact, they are already emerging. In these conditions, local innovations are rapidly becoming global these days. We cannot know exactly what kind of form these conglomerates will take: in some places, they will appear as “New Manhattans” in Tokyo, Seoul, or Jakarta style, with extremely high population density, while in other places, on the contrary, they will spread out as single-storey or two-storey mansions in a huge area. One way or another, these cities will be distinguished by a high density of social ties and business activity of the population. This will result in a dramatic change in administrative and political management, creating new opportunities for democratization and transparency of management processes. The primary areas of these changes can be observed even today.

The use of electronic technologies is becoming a major trend for political institutions around the world in the current millennium, making it possible to optimize and improve the quality of management activity. The key advantages of the large-scale implementation of information and communication technologies primarily include consistency, rate of exchange of information. Modern networking and digital capabilities multiply the speed of decision-making by times, while simultaneously reducing the time interval from the formulation of the corresponding policy decision to its sociopolitical effect.

Modern explosive rates of information field development not only generate significant challenges for political management, but also actualize the issue of the impact of information and communication technologies on efficiency of management activities in general. It is information technologies that have sufficient potential to act as an efficient factor in enabling a “feedback”, cooptation of society in the processes of elaborating and making important social and political decisions.

2 Background and Methodology

The empirical base of the research includes the UN yearbooks such as “World Urbanization Prospects”, “World Population Prospects”, papers of foreign authors presented on the international theme-based website “Smart City”, which is daily
updated with current information on various aspects of creation, functioning and development of smart cities in various regions of the world, as well as Russian websites such as the website of the Government of Moscow, the Ministry of Economic Development and Trade, the Institute for Urban Economics, etc. The theoretical and general methodological basis of the research consists of the works of researchers concerned with regulatory mechanisms of political management: Atamanchuk (1999), Vasilenko (2018), Degtiarev (1996), Shabrov (1998), et al. The next block that deals with the issues of development and potential of the information-oriented society, is represented by the works of Artamonov (2019), Lysenko (2019), Townsend (2019) et al.

The system approach has been selected as the main methodological framework for analyzing various aspects of the impact of information and communication technologies on efficiency of political administration. The comparative analysis provided an opportunity to compare the primary significant characteristics of the introduction of information and communication technologies in various countries internationally.

Based on these theoretical approaches and sources, the authors set forth their own vision of the relationship between the use of information and communication technologies and the level of efficiency/inefficiency of political management. Taking into account the abstract nature of part of indicators of effectiveness/ineffectiveness of political management, the authors of the research define this term according to two indicators and evaluation criteria: 1. Degree of satisfaction of society with the activity of political institutions, degree of political participation, trust and support for governing actors; 2. Statistical indicators of the standard and quality of living of the population.

3 Results

The current international situation, complicated by the coronavirus pandemic, is qualitatively changing the things people expect from Smart City. Today, it is clear that it is not just a city filled with electronic gadgets, not only a comfortable place for people to live in, but a place that guarantees people the maximum security. If a nation/city claims the “smart” status, it must demonstrate a prompt reaction to the fundamental changes and challenges facing contemporary society. In this regard, it may be noted that the same pattern can be observed for many who claim the status of “smart” actors – the need for the maximum democratization of the system of government, the maximum awareness of people with regard to the actions of the authorities, the real situation in health care, economy, education, legal and administrative innovations of the authorities, as well as other essential aspects of urban living.

In recent years, before the outbreak of the coronavirus epidemic, there was a widespread belief that electronic means of communication, without which democratic forms of management could not be developed today, could (and certainly would) become the tools for increasing control over society on the part of the authorities, an uncontrolled tool of the “Elder Brother” that will further intensify bureaucratization of governance and reduce the space of personal liberty of citizens; today, however, we can see that recession forces the authorities to be primarily concerned about the personal
well-being of the people; the authorities demand from citizens to respect the private space of others not only in words, but also in deeds.

The demand for the inviolability of private space is not new and, in principle, one cannot imagine a contemporary society, which many call a capitalist and/or consumer and/or human capital society, without it. But in an information-oriented, intelligent society, the principle of the protection of private space acquires some new dimension, since technologies give people the ability to obtain increasingly comprehensive information about their city and its citizens. The essence of this dimension is the demand that was formulated by I. Kant as a sign of a high civic awareness, which, in a crisis mobilization of society, becomes an imperative the authorities themselves directed to citizens: “There is nothing more sacred in the world than the rights of another person” (Kant 2000). Thus, the authorities themselves encourage citizens to protect their fellow citizens. This, whether the authorities want it or not, unfailingly “boosts” the democratization of society, promotes the formation of a socially responsible awareness among people.

700 cities from 146 countries were represented at the International Congress of Smart Cities in Barcelona that was held under the slogan “Together We will Build Cities of Dreams” on November 19–21, 2019. During the Congress, five categories were identified, according to which their success in “smart” urban development was measured: digital transformations, urban environment, mobility, governance and finance, inclusiveness and cooperation. Back then, a few months before March 11, 2020, when the World Health Organization (WHO) announced the coronavirus pandemic, all five categories appeared to be equally important. Today, however, we can objectively assess the quality of the smart living environment of people according to one criterion only, the last one – creation of a legal, economic, information and ecological environment in cities that would ensure the highest level of inclusiveness and cooperation.

In point of fact, this last criterion test turned out to be the first criterion, because it was here that the fundamental specifics of a democratic society consisting in the fact that it is a society of contradictions, became fully apparent. It has emerged that the public sphere, the very environment in which the demand for democracy, contradicts to the administrative, political, economic and technological areas of society. These contradictions, given that all parties stick to a rational approach, do not evolve into antagonistic, but still cannot be resolved without some intellectual and moral effort of all parties.

And the first contradiction to be brought to notice because of its greatest importance is the contradiction between the public sphere and the administrative authority. We can find examples of this contradiction in any “smart” city. Thus, a perfect example is the “One Atlanta” program, initiated by the Mayor of Atlanta Keisha Lance Bottoms, who believes that Atlanta cannot become a Smart City with a twenty-fold gap in the living standards of its diverse population categories. According to the Mayor of Atlanta, this problem that most of the city residents perceive as a problem of social justice, and thus a problem of effective social cooperation, can only be solved democratically. The “One Atlanta” program combines efforts of public and private sectors with the university community to elaborate a common platform of interaction between public and private sectors. The authorities understand that education is becoming a key condition for the
participation of various social groups in the economic and social life of the city. In this regard, the Georgia Cyber Centre, costing more than US$ 100 million, was set up as a public-private partnership. In this center, teaching personnel and trainees carry out educational activities dealing with computer knowledge, cybersecurity and digital economy, which are accessible to the widest possible audience of citizens.

The issue of the effectiveness of political management in the context of information and communication technologies cannot be considered without reference to categories such as “political participation” and “feedback”, because the presence of a real “operating” “feedback” mechanism between the managing and managed entity is the determining factor of the management activity result. The “feedback” mechanism can act not only as a means of obtaining latest information, but also as a tool for accommodation of interests and prevention of politico-social conflicts. The disregard of current policy needs of the society, the lack of open procedures of accommodation of interests and “feedback” mechanisms in relationship with the authorities largely determined the collapse of the political system of the Soviet Union. Political participation in the context of information and communication technologies shall be understood to mean electronic interaction between public authorities and citizens, aimed at involving them in the process of preparing/making a state decision, finding out the opinion of population on the key vital problems and issues.

From the perspective of budget costs, the promotion of political participation and formation of “feedback” channels compared to the maintenance of conventional communication channels, means an increase in operating costs. However, the end result will reveal significant cost and time savings due to the substantial reduction in the cost of maintaining the state/municipal employees who collect and process the data. However, given the formal approach, information and communication technologies are able to preserve the stability of the conventional model of relationships between government agencies and society by inertia.

The global experience of the implementation of information and communication technologies demonstrates that sociopolitical, economic and ethnocultural peculiarities of certain countries have an instrumental influence on this process due to specifics of political culture and relations of power, practical implementation of “feedback” models that differ from each other, and electronic participation.

The example of Atlanta (United States) is indicative of the increased focus on the potential of the use of mobile devices for closer interaction between public authorities and citizens, as well as for the creation of an extensive network of transparent control over society and provision of information security. The main resources of information and communication technologies in the United States have been mobilized to provide high-quality public services to citizens. The difficulties faced by the authorities in the United States in the process of learning of information and communication technologies by regional authorities, seem to be common to many federal governments due to the specifics of their political and territorial system – these difficulties are associated with the formation of a single platform for interaction between federal subjects and the federal center.

Chinese version of the implementation of information and communication technologies is different. It differs in the dominating position of central government, which has all necessary resources for locking access to the technology market for legal entities
and individuals which generates profit, being inconsistent with the general informational message of the Communist Party of China.

China’s political elites are prone to ambivalent assessment of the expanded capabilities of electronic technologies in the interaction between government agencies and society: the realization of a powerful efficiency factor of the information and communication technologies, on the one hand, and the risk of destabilization of the political system in a regulatory environment, on the other hand. The Political Elites of the Celestial Empire, despite their understanding of potential threats and political risks, tend to view information technologies not only as an instrument for the accelerated growth of the country’s economy, but also as a way of reaffirming the legitimacy of the Communist Party, raising the country’s profile in the international community.

National and regional projects “Russian Public Initiative”, “Active Citizen”, “Our City”, “Moscow. Smart City-2030” represent a domestic example of the successful practical use of digital technologies, political participation and “operational” feedback mechanism with reference groups.

The Capital City Project “Smart City – 2030” focuses on the service components of an urban environment, increasing the efficiency of managing the municipal resources through the widespread introduction of high digital technologies, advanced ideas and engineering solutions.

In the format of summary indicators of strategy “Smart City – 2030”, it is proposed to be guided by the quality of life index and urban environment quality index which will enable most objective evaluation of achievements across the six areas of the strategy (urban environment, digital mobility, human and social capital, digital government, security and ecology, urban economy). The Quality of Life Index allows comparing and evaluating the indicators of specific regions from the perspective of the ability of certain cities to meet the objective needs of the population in accordance with accepted standards and norms of living (Danchul 2019).

Today, digital technologies are successfully operating in almost all life-supporting areas of the metropolitan area. It is difficult to exaggerate the social effect of the use of open data – accessibility of previously “confidential” state/municipal information enables commercial/non-profit companies and organizations to create various applications for electronic devices, minimizing the time expenditures associated with searching for users of these electronic products.

Of course, the facts of the functioning of such information resources in our country can and should be treated as useful and necessary channels for building a dialogue and “feedback” with the society, co-opting citizens to the process of making socially important decisions and policy decisions. However, being the resources for monitoring citizens’ initiatives, these projects, despite the results of electronic votings, provide that only government agencies are entitled to make decisions, since the mechanisms of “e-democracy” are not supported by the legal base.

If we comparing domestic and international experiences of the use of information and communication technologies in providing a “feedback” and involving citizens in the process of development of important social decisions, the first thing that draws our attention is the dominance of projects inspired by the State in our country. The practice of foreign States, by contrast, demonstrates the promotion of private projects and initiatives which receive State support in the process of their development. As an
example, we can cite several projects that are similar to the capital city project “Our City”: the SeeCLikFix project in the United States that became international, the FixMyStreet project in the United Kingdom, several projects in Austria, etc.

According to the Report on the results of the implementation of the “Public Government” system and prospects for its development until 2024, the Russian Federation gets ahead of many foreign countries in terms of the number of instruments and mechanisms of openness of the system of public administration. However, it must be emphasized that the organization of the system of provision of government information and the fact that the public authorities are “open” are not identical to the concept of “governance effectiveness”. It appears that it is the extended involvement of civil society and business sector in state/municipal strategic planning, strict adherence to the principle of “feedback” between the authorities and the society, that will allow Russia to strongly compete with the leading world powers.

In general, the peculiarity of Russian practical implementation of information and communication technologies is manifested in nuancing of the two technological areas: the provision of open electronic access to open data/metadata, information and consultation portals and resources of the public authorities; provision of public services in electronic form.

4 Conclusion

The impact of information and communication technologies on efficiency of management processes is stipulated by a wide range of factors and depends on the goals and forms of their implementation, as well as on the qualitative composition of the political elite and state institutions. Depending on the goals of political management, the active use of information and communications technologies may become an instrument for either increasing or decreasing efficiency of the management process.

In the context of public access to information, political elites become the most vulnerable from the perspective of assessment of their activity and criticism on the part of community and opposition, and may opt for a strategy of discretionary access to information. Preferences of political elites with regard to access to information awareness of society may change and be stipulated by the ratio of costs and benefits associated with the access to this information, depending on what is riskier – providing information that compromises public authorities or limiting access to such information.

Otherwise, when government agencies and political elites express a common interest in a coordinated policy towards implementation of institutional transformations with simultaneous use of mechanisms of openness of public authorities, information and communication technologies can significantly contribute to the growth of effectiveness of political management.

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