

HOW TO STRENGTH THE RELATIONSHIPS OF THE LOCAL MUNICIPALITIES WITH THE STAKEHOLDERS?

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Abstract

A key element for the development and construction of the living conditions in the local municipality is a participation of stakeholders and their assistance in the administration of public affairs. In democratic countries, the role of local municipality is changing during past decades. Its role is more focused on creating conditions for involvement of different actors in development activities, the creation of quality living conditions and participation in addressing issues of public life. The aim of the paper is to identify and analyse the relationships between local municipality and its stakeholders from the theoretical point of view and to verify it based on the results of research in 100 local municipalities of Slovak Republic. The first part of the paper contains the theoretical definition of relationship marketing and the relationships in the local municipalities. Consequently, we verified the composition of stakeholders in the local municipalities by the empirical research. In conclusion of the paper we propose the implementation possibilities of relationship marketing in local municipalities.

Key words

relationship marketing, local municipality, stakeholders, governance, Slovak Republic

JEL Classification: R59, R19, Z18

Introduction

The growing need to build partnerships by local municipality and to implement the managerial approach to its management is declared in several countries in Europe in national documents characterizing the position and reform of local government (e.g. UK - White Paper on Local Government, Ireland - Green Paper on local democracy). In democratic countries, the role of local municipality is changing during past decades. Its role is more focused on creating conditions for involvement of different actors in development activities, the creation of quality living conditions and participation in addressing issues of public life. The aim is to have an effective civil society, to foster cooperation and progress in the development of the managed area. One of the ways how to support the development of local municipality is an application of relationship marketing activities.

In the first chapter of an article, we will focus on the definition of the relationships of local municipality with its stakeholders and relationship marketing, in the second chapter the results of empirical research in local authority Slovak Republic are presented, which focused primarily on the characterisation of relationships in local municipalities. At the end of article the main findings of the research are summarized and we recommend the possibilities of relationship marketing implementation in the local municipality.

1. Relationships in the local municipality versus relationship marketing

In democratic countries, the reforms of public administration lead to decentralization of power and redistribution of responsibilities to the lowest possible level of government. In other words, it is closest to the citizens and other actors in the territory that are directly and indirectly influenced by its decisions. The lowest level of territorial public administration is a local municipality. From the modern local municipality is now expected to be characterized by openness, efficiency, to research the needs, to encourage active participation of stakeholders in decision-making bodies of public affairs and involve them in local community life. A key element for the development and construction of the living conditions in the local municipality is a participation of stakeholders and their assistance in the administration of public affairs (Navruz, Rose, Shelley, 2000, Council of Europe, VNG International, 2007).

Partnership and cooperation with stakeholders are the main terms connected with one of the newest approaches in the management of public sector - public governance (e. g. Bevir et al., 2003; Berry et al., 2004; Kickert et al., 1997 etc.). Public governance has developed as an alternative management approach to new public management, which takes into account more appropriate the specificities of public sector organizations (Kickert et al., 1997). This new approach to management in the public sector and the importance of co-operation are implemented in the

new program and strategic documents of the European Union for the period 2014 - 2020 (5th Report on Economic, Social and Territorial Cohesion, 2020, Territorial Agenda of the European Union 2020) and are supported at all levels of the EU, in particular by the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities and the Committee of the Regions (Council of European Local Municipalities and Regions, 2013).

The local municipality is in providing its tasks forced to build relationships not only with citizens, but also with various stakeholders belonging to the private, public and non-profit sector. Based on repeated interactions, i.e. repeated mutual active interaction of two or more subjects beyond the time required for the classical market exchange, is a relationship between stakeholders. The relationship requires at least two parties, which are in contact (Donaldson, O'Toole, 2007 Binek, Galvasová, 2008 Gummesson 2008, Egan, 2008). If the relationship between entities is developed in order to achieve a common goal, we are talking about cooperation. Entities share resources, do joint activities, share information in order to achieve mutual benefit (Čapková, 2004).

The basic and most common form of cooperation is a partnership, i.e. cooperation and seeking solutions based on common agreement and recognition of the importance of other subjects in achieving the objectives of the municipality. The object of common agreement is to determine the understanding of roles and tasks of partners, describes the common objectives with a view to obtain benefits for all stakeholders (Bušík, 2007). The basis for a successful partnership in local municipality is a participation of all subjects that affect local municipality or the local municipality influences them, i. e. participation of all stakeholders. Involving stakeholders for cooperation creates the initial precondition for the comprehensive development of the local municipality.

The local municipality can develop relationships with the various entities with various reasons. An obligatory reason of the relationship is conditioned by existing legislation, which requires cooperation with entities, for example state administration, citizens, higher territorial units etc. Local municipality should primarily create these relationships and build on contracts and legislation, in particular under the Constitution, laws governing the role and responsibilities of local government, the provision of various public services. The emergence of those relationships is conditional by the tasks arising from the fields of competence of local municipality. In terms of commitment to the legal system there are a "mandatory and transferred areas of competence. Mandatory tasks are bind; they are prescribed and are prioritized to be fulfilled. The mandatory tasks have to be provided by the local municipality, but it can

decide itself how it provides them. The local municipality cannot get rid of these obligations, and is obliged to provide the necessary material and financial resources (Krnáč, Kožiak, Liptáková, 2008, p. 172-173). Delegated area includes tasks of state administration, which were transferred to the local municipality by specific legislation.

The specific cause of the relationship we mean the creation of partnerships and relationships with entities that are crucial for ensuring the implementation of legislative and defined tasks of local municipality by its production and action in the territory of local municipality or beyond. Local municipality needs to build these relationships, to ensure its tasks in a reasonable range. It includes the relationships with businesses, nonprofit organizations, labor, and other local authorities and so on. Those relationships are developed on the basis of contracts, agreements, joint actions and events. They have different nature and level. In particular they are contractual, institutional and transactional relationships.

The core of optional relationships is a voluntary principle. It is a relationship that is often formed on the initiative of the actors in the territory and their efforts to develop relationships with local municipality, to assist its development. The relationship is based on mutual interest in its development, in which neither side is necessarily forced to build them. This includes e. g. relationships with former employees, associations operating within the municipal territory, some businesses.

In terms of the organization degree a relationship of local municipality can be as "formal and informal partnerships" (Walzer, Jacobs, 1998, p. 105, Geddes, 2005, pp. 50-51). Formal relationships and partnerships of municipality to stakeholders are officially established and have legal bases. Informal relationships and partnerships are formed naturally and voluntarily to the development of interpersonal relationships in society. Stakeholders, interaction, cooperation, partnerships, their formation, construction and eventually termination of relationships are essential components of current marketing thinking, relationship marketing.

1. 1. Relationships marketing in public sector

From 90s 20th the issue of relationship marketing is researched mainly by the foreign experts. Primary, the concept of relationship marketing was oriented on the private sector, so the key actors were entrepreneurs. They use the activities of relationship marketing to attract the loyal customers. Therefore, for the first time customer relationship marketing (CRM) has been defined as the conceptually and methodologically sophisticated new area of this kind of marketing. Gradually, the professional public has also moved and

shifted its interest to build relationships with business partners, employees, government agencies or other strategically important partner; and marketing in the public sphere has been defined as partner relationship marketing (PRM).

By the subject of research, we can distinguish three main developed thought of relationship marketing – Nordic School developed in Nordic countries, Anglo – Australian group and North American expert group where belong also the school of IMP that established the theory of relationship marketing (Donaldson, O'Toole, 2007, Egan, 2008, Harwood, Garry, Broderick, 2008). Buttle (2008, s. 50-52) also added the Asian approach - Guanxi. But this approach is possible to implement only in specific Asian countries.

The term relationship marketing appeared in the paper of American professor Berry (1983), who is a representative of North American approach. As well as Hakansson (1982), Ford (1990), Lewitt (1991) a Turnbull (1996) he developed his ideas following the theory of industrial marketing. His approach significantly influenced the next development of relationship marketing. The second stage of this school is represented by Dwyer (1987), Heide (1994), Morgan a Hunt (1994).

The Berry's approach was developed also by the Nordic School (Gummesson, 1994, Grönroos, 1997, Lehtinen 1997, and others). They developed the relationship marketing on the principles of industrial marketing, services marketing, quality management and experience in building relations and networks in Northern Europe.

The last school is an Anglo-Australian approach stressing an integration of quality and marketing of customer services, strategic partnerships and examining the nature of relationships in marketing. The representatives of the approach include Christopher (1991), Ballantyne (1994), Payne (1996).

Those approaches to the relationship marketing are different in theoretical knowledge, which became the basis for their further examination. However, all approaches agree on the expansion of the study object of relationship marketing. The primary intent was to explore the relationship with the customer, gradually started to shift attention to other stakeholders.

One of the most wide definition of relationship marketing defines it as „creating, maintaining, and enhancing strong relationships with customer, employee, supplier, community, and shareholder of a business with the goal of delivering long-term economic, social and environmental value to all stakeholders in order to enhance sustainable business

financial performance.“ (Murphy a Wang, 2006, s. 8). By our opinion this definition is the most complex one.

Implementation of relationship marketing in the public administration has not been researched yet by many foreign experts. Public administration focuses primary its activities on the citizen, and is trying to absorb the new methods of business practice. Due to the decentralization of competencies and the application of the subsidiarity principle, the local municipality took efforts to implement new trends in New Public Governance at the lower levels of government. An emphasis was put on creating the control, monitoring mechanisms to ensure transparency in the use of public funds and to satisfy the citizens. They started to create conditions for the development of competition in the provision of public goods. It is changing the approach to the personnel management in the public sector, especially to its professionalization. It is preferred to use the new information and communication technologies (Bauerová et al., 2008). By the application of managerial-oriented approaches in the relationship between the citizen and the government causes to be perceived not only as a passive transaction. Citizens have the choice of public goods and in their providing it appears the elements of customer-oriented behaviour (Schellong, 2009). The result of the application of relationship marketing in the public sector focusing on the citizen resulted in CIRM – citizen relationship management.

The New Public Management model was followed in the last decades by the approach of "democratic public governance", which was developed as a partial criticism of NPM. Its basic principles include accountability, transparency, governance based on cross-linking stakeholders, co-production of public policy implementation and combination of several management approaches (Pasquier, Villeneuve, 2012). This approach does not emphasize only the citizen as a partner, but all entities that may affect the public sector or be affected by it, we can analogically find the elements of partnership relationship marketing.

The dynamic changes in the development of marketing and growing demands of stakeholders influence also the local municipality and its marketing. Increasingly, the emphasis is on the quality of public goods, individual access to citizens and use of marketing tools to promote sustainable economic, social and environmental development of the municipality. Due to the growing competition in the market of places and product market the conceptual relationship marketing can bring new opportunities for cooperation, progress and creating strategic

partnerships that would contribute to the further development of the municipality.

By adaptation and synthesis of Nordic School approach, Anglo-Australian approach and North American approach we define relationship marketing and its holder in terms of local municipalities as follows. The key holder of the relationship marketing is a local municipality, externally represented by the elected representatives - mayor, municipal /city council, staff of municipal office, eventually the other representatives of local municipality. Relationship marketing is understood as defining, creating, maintaining and, improving the mutually beneficial relations or possible terminating unfavourable relations of local government with the stakeholder in order to achieve sustainable economic, social and environmental values for local government and associated entities

The activities of relationship marketing can contribute to develop the area and achieve prosperity, improve the well being of residents and businesses, minimize the risk associated with the entry of the place to the market and promote the territory between competing territories" (Vaňová, 2004, p. 108).

The core of relationship marketing is to define stakeholders, t. j. persons, groups or organizations which directly or indirectly affect the operation of the organization, its activities, achievement of objectives, or also retroactively affect (Marasová, 2008). In terms of local municipality based on our prior research (results of its own research grants), as well as the results of the international project "Relationship marketing in micro and small enterprises and local municipalities" (Lukášová, Bajdak et al., 2009, p. 185) has been in defined following composition of municipal stakeholders: "citizens, a key entity of relationships in local municipality, other municipalities, businesses, other entities established by a local government, deputies, political parties, employees of local municipality, financial institutions, church, organizational associations, non-profit organizations, offices of the state administration, employment offices, media, universities and other entities with direct or indirect impact on government activities.". The composition of stakeholders is also adopted in our research, which results are presented in the next chapter.

2. Empirical research on relationships in the local municipalities of the Slovak Republic and discussion

Based on the literature review we conducted primary research aimed to verify the composition of defined stakeholders of local municipality, characterize their

relationship with the local municipality as well as to identify marketing activities that can be applied in these relationships. Because of the article scope we will focus on one part of the research - the relationships of local municipalities and stakeholders, and then we outline how to implement relationship marketing.

The empirical research was carried out by the method of interview in the form of questionnaire in 100 local municipalities of the Slovak Republic. The research was done during the previous elected period in local municipalities 2010 – 2014. The quotas were a region and a size category of local municipality. The respondents were mayors or their deputies, or the heads of the municipal authorities.

At the beginning of research, we examined the awareness of local municipalities in SR in the field of relationship marketing. The concept of relationship marketing was for a large proportion of respondents' unknown term (49%). 51% of respondents are aware of the concept, and only 44.89% (in absolute terms 22 respondents) of them use the term in work. The rest of respondents know it, but do not use it (55.11%, or 29 respondents).

We researched also the knowledge about content of relationship marketing. Respondents had the opportunity to select one of the eight options and only one option was correct. The correct meaning of the term, i.e. relationship marketing contains relationships with all stakeholders in the community and beyond, was answered by 68% of respondents. Incorrect definition was marked by 29% of respondents and 5% of respondents did not reply. Of the 51 respondents who are familiar with the concept of relationship marketing, the proper definition marked 71.43% of respondents (in absolute values 35 representatives of municipalities). The proportion of representatives of local municipalities, who are familiar with the concept, and use it, can define correctly the essence of relationship marketing is 15% of the total sample of 100 local authorities.

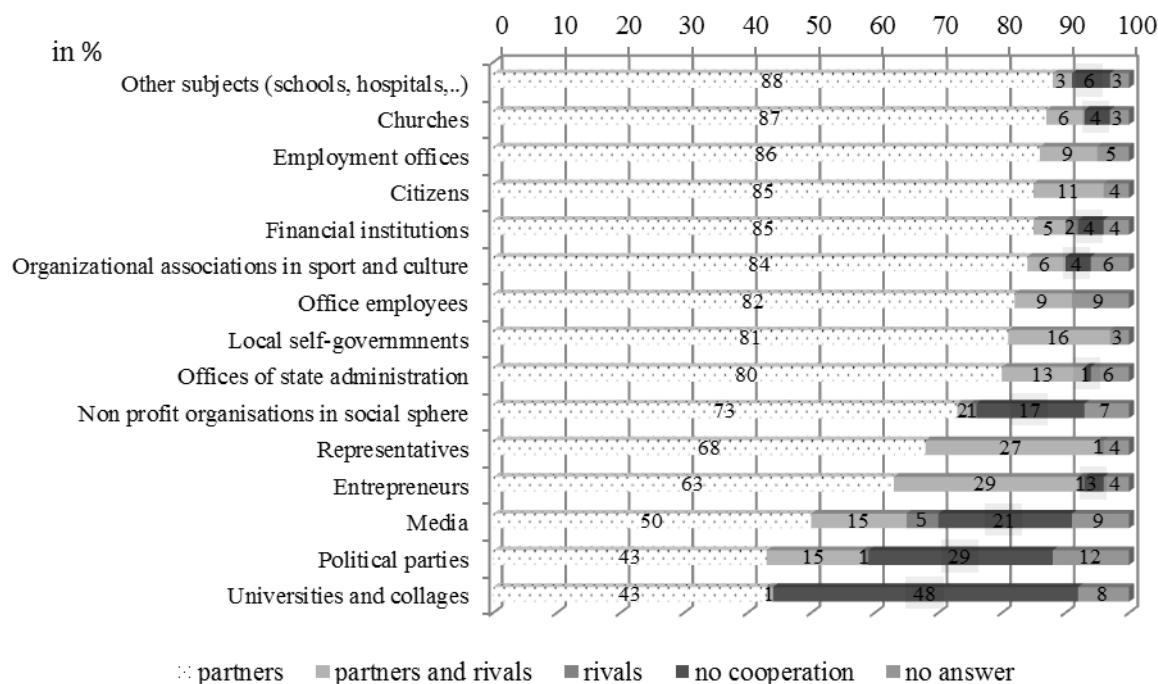
The results of these questionnaire answers point to the fact that representatives of selected municipalities in Slovakia have a partial knowledge about the new management approach that is relationship marketing. Only a minority of them will implement it in real terms. The reason may be a lack of educational qualification of local elected representatives.

In defining the stakeholders of local municipalities of the Slovak Republic and the nature of the relationships of local government with the stakeholders we followed the theoretical review (Lukášová, Bajdak et al., 2009, p. 185). Firstly, we aimed to identify the relationship between local

municipalities and stakeholders. We examined whether local municipality perceives the selected stakeholders as a partner, a partner, but also a rival, just as rival or non-cooperative subject. Additionally, we introduced also a category of "not mentioned". We

found that on the basis of our approach we covered all stakeholders of the local municipality. The stakeholders and their relationships with the local municipality present Graph 1.

Graph 1: Stakeholders of the local municipality in the Slovak Republic



Source: own processing based on primary research results.

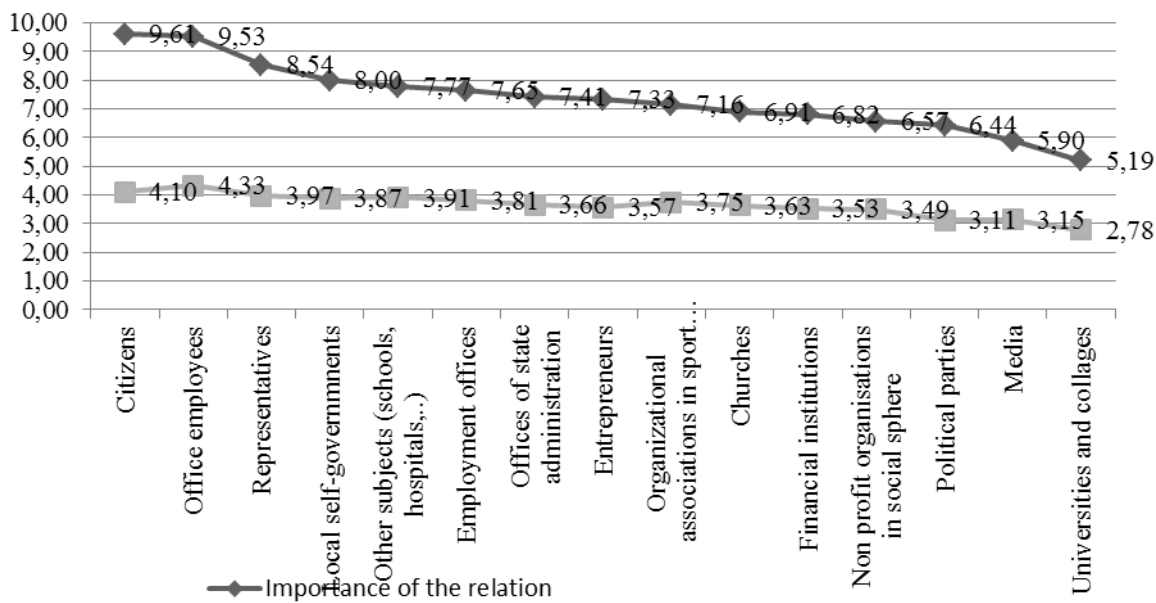
Graph 1 shows that by the respondents the local municipality developed with the researched stakeholders particularly a partnership, beside the relationship with colleges, universities and political parties. 43% of respondents consider colleges, universities as partners, but 48% of them does not cooperate with them (1% of respondents perceives them as a partner and rival, 8% of respondents did not provide the type of relations). Political parties are perceived as partners by 43% of local governments, 29% of them do not cooperate with them, as partners and rivals are they perceived by 12% of respondents, 15% did not provide any answer. Purely partnership is the most dominant in relationships with a group of stakeholders - schools, hospitals and other (88%), with the church (87%), with the employment offices (86%), with the citizens and financial institutions (85%). Stakeholders as rivals are perceived by local municipality minimally (5% in the case of the media, financial institutions 2%, 1% of entrepreneurs, other entities, non-profit organizations, associations, offices of state administration, employment offices, representatives and political parties). Local

municipality does not cooperate in the greatest extent with colleges and universities (48%), political parties (29%) and media (21%).

The list of stakeholders defined by theory was confirmed fully by the research results. We covered all relevant groups of stakeholders. However, the rate of cooperation with some stakeholders is emerging, especially in case of universities and colleges. Nowadays, when the new ideas and innovations are the drivers of economic development, it is inevitable to development the cooperation between public, private, non-profit sector and universities as a source of innovations and higher added value.

In researching the relationships of local municipalities we continued by assessing their importance and quality. The importance indicates the desired level of relationships and quality of relationships gives a realistic level of relations on a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 meant the least important relationship, respectively the least quality and 10 most important, respectively best quality of relationship. The comparison of these two studied aspects presents the graph 2.

Graph 2: Importance and quality of stakeholder's relationships with local municipality



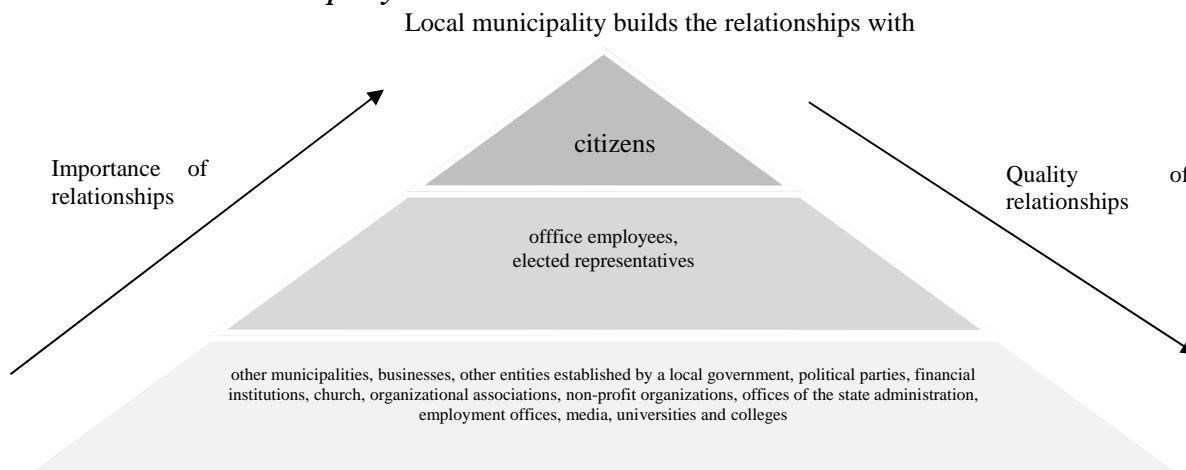
Source: own processing based on primary research results.

Graph 2 shows the order of relationship importance in the local municipalities of SR as follows: citizens; office employees; representatives; other municipalities; other entities - hospitals, schools; employment offices; state administration offices; entrepreneurs; organizational associations in sports and culture; church; financial institutions; non-profit organizations in the social field; political parties; the media; colleges and universities. In terms of quality, i.e. the real situation in the relationships in the local municipalities of the Slovak Republic, the order of stakeholders is following: office employees, citizens, representatives, other organizations - hospitals,

schools; municipalities, employment offices, organizational associations in sports and culture, state administration offices, church, financial institutions, businesses, non-profit organizations in the social sphere, media, political parties, colleges, universities.

The comparison of quality and importance of relationships with stakeholders signals the great differences in the potential and real state of art of relationships. The differences are the most dominant in the relationships with citizens, employees and elected representatives. The interrelationship between the quality and importance of relationships in the local municipality presents picture 1.

Picture 1: The interrelationship between the quality and importance of relationships in the local municipality



Source: own processing based on primary research results.

In Picture 1, we see that the key stakeholder is a citizen for local municipality. Within the relationship marketing is a dominant tool to the citizens marketing communication, which task is to provide information to citizens but also to mobilize them and to involve them participate in public affairs. To the most frequently used marketing communication activities we include event's organisation by local municipalities (e. g. Open day, St. Nicholas for children), organization of sporting and cultural events, presenting information on notice boards, websites of municipalities, informal personal communication (Petříková, 2012).

The next steps after the identification of stakeholders is to build a database of all relevant stakeholders with detail information that are necessary to build relationships systematically. The relationship marketing highlights the importance of databases, especially as a tool used to collect data, analyse them and suitably use to satisfy the needs of stakeholders. Databases of the stakeholders is in the Slovak local municipalities insufficiently addressed. There exist a central register of citizens, the local municipalities keep their own registers, but the operation systems which work with data about citizens or other stakeholders are poorly connected and inflexible. A similar situation exists in the field of e-government and the provision of electronic services. For several years, the central government presented its intentions, which should support the development of e-government and mutual interconnection of registers, but the situation has not changed significantly, by other words, just first steps in the long implementation process were done.

3. How to strength the development of relationships with stakeholders?

First of all, the local municipalities should use all legal available tools that involve the stakeholders into the municipal activities. More and more popular are various participative forms of decision making in public affairs. A good example is a participatory budgeting, where the stakeholders decide about the use of public funds. The citizens can create their own projects to develop city/town in which they live, but also can independently decide which projects will be actually funded (e.g. in Banská Bystrica). The other example is a participative planning (or collaborative planning), an approach based on involving of stakeholders to the strategic planning process from the starting point to the final stage of reaching consensus. The participation at the planning process should contribute to inform, validate and legitimize the plan. Throughout its implementation the community should be informed about the degree of plan implementation

and there are usually regular public sessions for strategic plan monitoring and evaluation. An ideal model of collaborative planning is one in which stakeholders representing the differing interests meet for face-to-face dialogue, and collectively work out a strategy to address a shared problem (Innes, Gruber, 2008).

In relationships to staff and elected local representatives local municipality should implement in terms of the relationship marketing theory the tools of internal marketing. Internal marketing is considered to be an important tool of employee's management. It is used partially and not conceptually worked out in local governments. Internal marketing focuses on development of communication, responsibility and putting through of united objectives. The basic task is to build awareness of internal and external customers and to remove functional barriers of effective organization creation (Michalová, 2004). Local municipalities should create through internal marketing the relations with their employees and elected representatives, as primary customers of local government. It is necessary to implement the perfect communication, education of employees and improvement of provided services oriented on individual approach to customer. Quality of internal structure of organization and quality of municipal management are important aspects as well. Intent of internal marketing is not only to communicate vision, mission and objectives of organization to all bodies and organizations of local government, but also to motivate employees to try to achieve and identify with them and so gradually build and constantly strengthen loyalty of employees. Result of internal marketing in public administration should be an employee who ready responds in contact with customer and diagnose him. He/she is a specialist in his/her field, is able to solve concrete situation, to understand customer's problems, is communicable, creative and capable and cares for own visage. (Petříková, Sýkorová; 2011).

In relationships to other stakeholders, local municipality uses as a dominant instrument - formal and informal marketing communication. With respect to specifics of stakeholders, e.g. non-profit organizations, sports clubs, cultural institutions, support local businesses, the local municipality can also use a price as a tool of relationship building. It can include the lower rates for local taxes, more favourable rent for premises. As well as in the relationships with citizens we see the possibility of developing relationships in the effective use of databases, their utilization in the process of stakeholder involving in the activities of local municipality and in the public affairs, but this activity is not in hands of municipality, but is strongly influenced by the priorities of national government.

Conclusions

Relationship marketing has developed in the private sector as a consequence of progress in new technologies and techniques, increasing the claims of customer and other relevant stakeholders. Gradually, there have appeared the possibilities to implement relationship marketing in the public sector including local municipalities.

Relationship marketing in Slovak local municipalities is relatively unknown and the representatives of local governments do not realise the benefits and tasks of relationship marketing in managing territories. The basis of relationship marketing is to define the stakeholders; with whose the municipality should develop the relations. We can confirm that the composition of stakeholders of local municipalities, based on the theoretical knowledge and empirical researches are the same. But there appears the great

gap in quality and importance of these relationships for the local municipality.

The most important stakeholders are citizens. That is why the core of the relationship activities is oriented on them. In practice, it includes mainly the various forms of communications. In relationships with the employees and other elected deputies the local municipality represented by mayor should implement the tools of internal marketing. The relationships with other stakeholders should be strengthening relevantly following the specifics of stakeholders and importance for the local municipality (e. g. the reduced taxes, reduced fees for renting premises). However, globally we see a great gap in the utilization of databases as a core of relationship marketing and development of electronic services.

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