

SCTMG 2021**International Scientific Conference «Social and Cultural Transformations in the Context of Modern Globalism»****DIGITALIZATION OF PUBLIC SERVICES IN STATES OF THE EURASIAN ECONOMIC UNION**

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Abstract

The paper is devoted to the development of public management in the regions of the EAEU member states in the conditions of digitalization of modern society. The main problem of the study is the contradiction between the need for effective integration of the EAEU member states in the field of digitalization of public management systems. The paper presents the results of the author's sociological research, including a questionnaire survey of the population of Belgorod region (N=500) and an expert survey of the representatives of the scientific and academic community of the EAEU member states (N=52). The analysis of empirical data made it possible to conclude that the system of socio-network interaction may become the basis for the future morphology of digitalization of public management at the Eurasian level. It is emphasized that only a small proportion of Internet users use modern information technologies for socio-political participation and communication with the authorities, which may be attributed to a low level of trust in digital technologies, as well as an insufficient level of specific abilities and skills for such activities. It is noted that the population as a whole sees a number of advantages in the digitalization of the public management system. The paper concludes that at present there is a need for a single model of digitalization of public management throughout the EAEU, which will allow combining successful developments in the field of digital technologies of all states participating in integration education as effectively as possible.

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1. Introduction

The process of establishing public management in the countries of the Eurasian Economic Union is quite controversial. On the one hand, this is caused by the asynchronous development of state institutions and civil society in the EAEU countries, and on the other hand – the need for a scientific understanding of the forms and models of public management. Quite often, public management does not stand out as a separate scientific industry in the EAEU countries, but exists at the junction of legal, economic, social, historical and political sciences. Nevertheless, the transformation of the society does not only require a new understanding of a dialogue, society and the state, but also a methodology and principles of public management in the Eurasian space.

The modern stage of social development is usually referred to as information, which implies the increasing role not so much of information and knowledge as of technologies that help to work with them. One of the most notable trends of the last decade is the digitalization of processes, which is gradually becoming an urgent need, a sought-after tool in many areas of society, including public management. It is at this level that social processes are regulated, including the digitalization process itself.

2. Problem Statement

The integration of the Eurasian economic space should be considered in the context of modern management technologies, which make it possible to use the full potential of the state, business, and society. The problem of the study covers various approaches to the definition of public management in the countries of the Eurasian Economic Union, differentiation in the process of digitalization of public management, and the difference in the methods of scientific understanding of state-building processes in general.

The problem of the study lies in the contradiction between the need for effective integration of the EAEU member states in the field of digitalization of public management and the lack of scientifically sound and tested technologies for interaction within international integration projects. Integration processes in the post-Soviet space are quite controversial. On the one hand, it is an attempt to restructure industrial, economic and socio-cultural ties, and on the other – a search for new geopolitical entities to support the national aspirations of new states.

3. Research Questions

The relevance of the problem of public management in digital society was reflected in a fairly large number of Russian and foreign works analyzing various aspects of the phenomenon (Asatryana et al., 2017; Jesuit & Paik, 2011; Mateia & Baiesiub, 2014, Murtazashvili, 2020).

The development of public management in the Russian Federation and the Eurasian Economic Union present a separate scientific interest (Bolshakova, 2019; Kupryashin, 2016; Luton, 2004).

An increasing number of scientific studies are devoted to the problems of digitalization of the sphere of public management and the introduction of modern information technologies in the processes of governance of society (Guendueza et al., 2020; Klijn, 2008; Nicolaa et al., 2016).

However, despite the significant scientific and methodological basis for research, the issue of integrating public management systems in the conditions of digitalization of modern society is not sufficiently covered in domestic science.

4. Purpose of the Study

Internal factors express cultural and civilizational characteristics of the EAEU member states, external factors express the features of modern world development and, above all, globalization and geopolitical contradictions. Many internal and external factors in the digitalization of public management determine the transformation of its forms, where the transformation is non-linear, contradictory, difficult to predict. Knowledge and consideration of these factors and trends are fundamentally important for the relevant assessment of real situations, forecasting possible vectors of their change, justification and adequate management decisions in the process of digitalization in the EAEU states. The social and technological support of the processes of digitalization of public management in the EAEU states provides for a consistent, phased transformation of public management models for further successful integration.

5. Research Methods

The study uses the methods of systemic, structural-functional and comparative analysis, theoretical modeling and generalization. The primary sociological information was collected through a questionnaire survey, an expert survey.

The questionnaire survey was carried out in February 2020 in Belgorod (N=500). It used a quota age-sex sample corresponding to the general population – the population of the Belgorod region.

The expert survey was attended by the representatives of all EAEU member states (N=52). The experts in the field of Eurasian integration, public management, digitalization of modern society were interviewed.

6. Findings

To date, the problems of public management have not yet had time to finally gain a foothold in the post-Soviet space. On the one hand, this refers to the almost universal digitalization of public life, and modern technologies are increasingly penetrating into all spheres of human activity. The “digitalization wave” covers an increasing number of those social and cultural institutions which representation outside the real space until recently was not possible, and here this primarily concerns the institutions of state and municipal administration, public authorities.

On the other hand, the authorities show maximum interest in the use of the most effective tools, including digital technologies. However, the speed of digitalization makes it difficult to develop a unified and integral policy towards new technologies, even on the scale of one state, not to mention international integration projects.

However, the problem of public management is caused by some differences between experts in the analysis of this concept. Thus, 85.2 % of experts noted that public management should be defined as a separate area of scientific knowledge. At the same time, only 50 % of the number of the interviewed experts considers that the concepts “public management” and “state and municipal management” are not the same (Table 01).

Table 1. Distribution of answers to the question “Are the concepts of “state and municipal management” and “public management” the same?”

n/n	Answer option	Republic of Armenia, %	Republic of Belarus, %	Republic of Kazakhstan, %	Republic of Kyrgyzstan, %	Russian Federation, %	Average, %
1.	Yes	62.5	42.3	30.8	44.4	36.4	37
2.	No	37.5	50	53.8	33.3	54.5	50
3.	Not sure	0.0	7.7	15.4	22.2	9.1	13

It is worth noting individually the fact that experts speak of identity primarily from those countries where public management has already been implemented into the regulatory system of the state. Thus, since 2018, the law “On Public Service” has been in force in the Republic of Armenia, while the concept of “public authorities” was for the first enshrined time in the Russian legislation only in recent amendments to the Constitution of the Russian Federation.

There is also lack of consensus among experts on how the concept of “public management” should be interpreted. Most of all, the respondents noted that this is “self-government taking into account the interests of society and each individual; the situation in which the subject of management and the object of management are a single and indivisible whole (society directly controls itself)” – 46.3 % and “delegation of power functions to an individual or group of people is carried out according to special established rules; the situation in which the object and subject of management may occasionally change roles during the election of authorities” – 33.3 %. The remaining options received the minimum number of responses (Table 02).

However, with each of the chosen definitions, the key emphasis is on involving the population (the object of management) in the implementation of joint activities with the authorities.

Regarding the introduction of digital technologies in public management, experts do not indulge in illusions. On the one hand, the introduction of digital technologies into the work of the authorities is carried out discretely, including at the level of individual regions, not to mention the national or Eurasian level. On the other hand, the introduction of state regulatory measures in relation to digitalization is technologically inconsistent with the realities of digitalization, which further undermines confidence in state regulation of the digital space.

According to respondents, it is the construction of a system of socio-network interaction that may become the basis for the future morphology of digitalization of public management at the Eurasian level. Under these conditions, the main emphasis should be on the creation of international network sites. Using the example of one of the international expert networks in the field of public management, the respondents were asked about the main effective areas of work of this platform.

Table 2. Distribution of answers to the question “What areas of work of the Interregional Network of Schools of Public Management of the EAEU should be developed first of all? (Please provide not more than 3 answers)”

n/n	Answer option	Republic of Armenia, %	Republic of Belarus, %	Republic of Kazakhstan, %	Republic of Kyrgyzstan, %	Russian Federation, %	Total, %
1.	Development of a database of experts in the field of public management	37.5	64	46.2	66.7	63.6	56.9
2.	Development and promotion of uniform educational standards in the EAEU space.	37.5	44	30.8	55.6	27.3	39.6
3.	Dissemination of information on activities and projects of school participants	12.5	32	30.8	44.4	27.3	26.4
4.	Search for partners to prepare and conduct joint research and grant applications	37.5	60	61.5	66.7	63.6	54.7
5.	Search for partners for academic mobility	25.0	44	53.8	55.6	36.4	39.6
6.	Organization and implementation of scientific and practical activities	37.5	36	38.5	33.3	27.3	32.1
7.	Participation in trainings, seminars and educational courses	37.5	40	53.8	44.4	27.3	43.4
8.	Search for information on leading scientific journals and conferences in the field of public management	12.5	24	46.2	11.1	27.3	24.5
9.	Not sure	12.5	8	0.0	0.0	18.2	11.3

Table 2 shows that experts identify many highly effective models of work in the field of socio-network interaction using digital technologies. However, the main of them is the fact that, according to the expert community, the digitalization of public management at the initial stage should be based on the integration and complementarity of the expert community, authorities, scientists, etc.

In the next block of the study we performed the analysis of opinions of the population recorded during a mass survey in one of the most typical and averaged regions of the EAEU – Belgorod region.

As already noted, the introduction of the concept of public management implies the involvement of new actors in management processes, namely, the population in cooperation with authorities becomes one of the participants in public management. Given the fact that most of the population does not have a clear understanding of the concept of “public management”, we focused on various aspects of digitalization in relation to the socio-political participation of the population in the life of the country and in access to power through digital technologies.

However, initially, it shall be emphasized that the problem of lack of access to the Internet and digital technologies is decreasing every year and has now become obsolete. The study of the coverage of Internet users in Russia is carried out by the Federal State Statistics Service as part of the “Comprehensive Observation of Living Conditions of the Population” published in 2018. Thus, according

to Rosstat study, 72.9 % of the Russian population¹ uses the Internet to one degree or another. Besides, the 2020 Internet World Stats notes that approximately 80 % of the Russian population are Internet users² to any extent. Moreover, according to the results of the author's study conducted in 2020 in Belgorod region, 84.8 % of the population above 18 years old use the Internet. In this regard, the technological problem of digitalization of the communication process between the population and the authorities is practically losing its relevance.

Nevertheless, the results of the author's sociological survey show that only 15.4 % of respondents use the Internet and digital technologies for public participation in the life of the country (Table 03). More often, such technologies are used to satisfy consumption, leisure, communication, reading and discussing current news.

Table 3. Distribution of answers to the question “Do you use digital technologies and the Internet for socio-political participation in the life of the country?”

n/n	Answer option	%
1.	Yes	15.40
2.	No	69.80
3.	Not sure	14.80
	Total	100.00

At the same time, almost half of respondents believe that the development of digital technologies and their introduction into everyday life has provided new opportunities for public participation in the life of the country. Jointly, 49 % of respondents chose the answer options “definitely yes” and “more likely yes than no”. At the same time, only at least 25 % chose negative answers (Table 04).

Table 4. Distribution of answers to the question “Do you think that the active development of digital technologies has led to an increase in opportunities for socio-political participation in the life of the country?”

n/n	Answer option	Abs.	%
1.	Definitely yes	41	8.20
2.	More likely yes than no	204	40.80
3.	Something in between	131	26.20
4.	More likely no than yes	43	8.60
5.	Definitely not	81	16.20
6.	Not sure	0	0.00
	Total	500	100.00

This distribution allows making some hypotheses: firstly, most of the population is aware of the possibility of using digital technologies in certain areas of public management, and secondly, only a small proportion of Internet users use these technologies, which may be caused by a low level of confidence in digital technologies used with socio-political participation or insufficient level of specific abilities and skills for such activities.

The latter statement raises the direct question of differentiating the complexity of the use of digital technologies in relation to traditional Internet practices and socio-political participation.

¹ https://gks.ru/free_doc/new_site/KOUZ18/index.html (date of access 20.12.2020).

² <https://www.internetworldstats.com/top20.html> (date of access 20.12.2020).

Given that in Russian specifics the concept of “public management” is inextricably connected with the concept of “public power” enshrined in the Constitution of the Russian Federation, the respondents were also asked the question “Does the level of skills and abilities for using electronic devices and digital technologies affect a person’s access to power?” (Table 05).

Table 5. Distribution of answers to the question “Do you think that a person’s access to power is influenced by his level of skills and abilities for using electronic devices and digital technologies?”

n/n	Answer option	Abs.	%
1.	Definitely yes	52	10.40
2.	More likely yes than no	172	34.40
3.	Something in between	94	18.80
4.	More likely no than yes	71	14.20
5.	Definitely not	31	6.20
6.	Not sure	80	16.00
	Total	500	100.00

44.4 % of respondents believe that the level of their skills and abilities for using electronic devices and digital technologies affects a person’s access to power. The fact that the government is gradually moving to an online environment provides the population with additional forms of communication, allows it to more quickly solve issues bypassing time-consuming bureaucracy and, in general, increasing confidence in government bodies (Table 06).

Table 6. Distribution of answers to the question “If there are such advantages, then what are they?”

n/n	Answer Option	Abs.	%
1.	Simpler than traditional forms of communication	111	22.20
2.	Power reacts faster	151	30.20
3.	Higher efficiency	51	10.20
4.	More accessible response form	96	19.20
5.	Other	0	0.00
6.	Not sure	91	18.20
	Total	500	100.00

The respondents noted a fairly large number of advantages in building a dialogue with the authorities through digital technologies and the Internet. Thus, 30 % believe that the authorities respond faster to citizens’ requests due to the public nature of appeals. Besides, 22.2 % noted that electronic communication is simpler than traditional means due to partial overcoming of existing bureaucratic barriers (Table 06). Another 19 % complained about the general simplicity of answers, which reduces the number of difficulties for understanding the bureaucratise.

7. Conclusion

Thus, the results of the study revealed that the population as a whole is ready to use digital technologies both in the framework of public political participation and in establishing an effective dialogue with the authorities. On the other hand, the research and expert community sees the digitalization of public management as a resource and an opportunity that cannot only attract new actors to management processes and establish bilateral dialogue with the population, but also increase the ego

efficiency. However, the most significant possibility is to build a single model of digitalization of public management systems of the Eurasian Economic Union, which will make it possible to reach a new level of integration and synergistically use digital practices and developments formed in various countries of the Eurasian space.

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