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COMMUNICATION AND STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT CHALLENGES IN SEA AND EIA

IZAZOVI KOMUNIKACIJE I UKLJUČENJA DIONIKA U POSTUPKE PROCJENE UTJECAJA

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Objectives, purpose and methodology of research

- **RESEARCH OBJECTIVES:**
  to survey the opinion of authorized practitioners on how **communication and stakeholder engagement** should be organized and conducted in SEA and EIA processes
  to **identify** most critical communication challenges they face during these processes

- **PURPOSE OF RESEARCH:**
  raise **awareness** of the importance of communication and engagement practices in processes
  help develop future **recommendations and guidelines** related to communication in processes

- **METHODOLOGY**

27 Respondents (practitioners)

17 Questions (+2 demographic)
Anonymous online survey

Years of experience

<5	14.81%
5-10	44.44%
10-20	25.93%
>20	14.81%

No. of processes

<10	22.22%
10-30	37.04%
30-50	18.52%
>50	22.22%

Hypotheses:

H1: Communication and engagement are important for processes
H2: Communication challenges are versatile and there are many sources of influence
H3: Developers should actively include communication in project planning and implementation
H4: Authorized practitioners should be actively involved in communication strategy development and its execution

Q1: Strategic, planned communication is important for processes
(average grade; scale 1-5)

4.15

Q7: Communication success in processes in Croatia
(average grade; scale 1-5)

2.48

Q8: Communication success of practitioners in processes in Croatia
(average grade; scale 1-5)

2.89

Conclusion: **Communication is important, but success of past communication is questionable (i.e. there is conscious need for improvement)**

Q6: What is the influence of stakeholders' statements and communication content in process communication? (multiple answers enabled; average grade on scale 1-10)

Local and regional administration	**8.33**
Authorized body for process implementation	**8.26**
Media journalists and editors	**7.89**
Developer (investor)	**7.70**
NGO's & activists	**7.59**
Authorized practitioners	**7.30**
Politicians	**7.22**

Replies are almost equally distributed

Q17: What are the most frequent reasons of lack of communication activities in processes?
(multiple answers enabled)

Conclusion: **Various stakeholders have significant communication influence in processes.**
Lack of resources, experts and reluctance remain major causes.

Q9: What are the causes of communications problems in processes?

(multiple answers enabled; average grade)

Lack of public trust in state institutions	**9.30**
Lack of public trust in developer (investor)	**9.07**
Fear of the unknown	**8.52**
Public resistance to new projects	**8.44**
Lack of public trust in practitioners and experts	**7.59**

Q13: What are the most serious communication challenges for practitioners in processes?

(multiple answers enabled)

Conclusion: **Lack of trust in institutions, developer and experts perpetually remains the major problem. Hostile environment and external agents cause serious challenges.**

Q3: Who is the most responsible for communication in processes?
(multiple answers enabled, scale 1-10)

TOP replies:
Authorized practitioner
Authorized body for process implementation
Developer (investor)
Experts included in study development

Q4: Who should devise communications strategy?
(single answer)

Developer (investor) in cooperation with practitioners and external consultants	**44.4%**
Authorized practitioner in cooperation with external consultants	**22.2%**

Q5: When should communications strategy be devised?
(single answer)

During the planning phase of the project	**81.4%**
During the development of the study	**22.2%**

Q16: Should the developers contract communications strategy from practitioners?
(single answer)

YES, depending on the type of project	**81.4%**
YES, for all projects	**22.2%**
NO, it should not be a part of practitioners' contracts	**14.8%**

Conclusion: **Practitioners, state bodies and developers share responsibility for communication. Strategies should be developed in cooperation. Developers should mostly contract communication strategies with practitioners.**

Q10: Major communications trends that influence process communication?
(multiple answers enabled)

Fast exchange of information, easy to manipulate information
Emergence of non-expert content influences projects
„Fabricated news" phenomenon influences public perception

Q11: Influence of communication channels development?
(grade 1-10)

6.93

Q12: Present state of communications expertise of practitioners?
(single answer)

Some know-how and skills, we are aware of necessary improvements	**48.15%**
Significant know-how and skills, only specialist improvements are necessary	

Q14: Skills practitioners should improve?
(multiple answers enabled)

Public presentation skills in hostile situations	**92.59%**
Stakeholder engagement knowledge and skills	**70.37%**
Rhetorical and argumentation skills	**66.67%**
Media relations skills	**55.56%**

Conclusion: **Various technical and content developments influence communication in processes. Technological development is mostly positive. Practitioners should develop presentation, engagement, argumentation and media skills.**

Discussion, Conclusions

- **RESPONSIBILITY:** Influencers are many, but those responsible for planned, strategic communications are primarily developers and practitioners (cooperating with communications consultants). Communications strategies should be conceived in early stages of study development. It would be positive if communication is the contracted part of practitioner's project.
- **CHALLENGES:** Are multi-faceted and diverse and probably cannot be solved simply by applying simple skills increase. It is possible that increased skills and know-how would not significantly change end-results, but would change quality of processes.
  *Practitioners define successful communication predominantly as:
  - Increase of understanding and awareness of project and issues
  - Strenghtening of dialogue culture
  - Increased expert information on issues in public
- **AREAS OF IMPROVEMENT:** Practitioners see necessary development of public presentation skills, especially for difficult and hostile situations during public presentations. Rhetorical and argumentation skills, but also stakeholder engagement knowledge are also perceived as key areas. Media skills should be developed, but no social media communication (?)
- **For years now, pracitioners face similar challenges and „pain points" in communication. There is, however, an increased awareness of its importance and that subjects in processes should take responsibility.**

We thank all the respondents who participated in our research.

Thank you for your attention!

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