

THE IMPORTANCE OF VISUAL COMMUNICATION OF URBAN PLANNING INFORMATION PUBLISHED BY LOCAL PUBLIC ADMINISTRATIONS

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Abstract: *In recent years, social networks have become more and more influential in the daily lives of people of all ages. People ask, inform themselves and express their opinion much more freely than in the past.*

Therefore, public administrations, both local, county and national, have understood the importance of their presence on social networks and try to maintain, at least to a certain level, the relationship with citizens, publishing various information of interest about their activity.

The present paper is intended to be a critical analysis, based on various real cases, of the communication of information to citizens published by local public administrations. The main purpose of this analysis is to highlight the importance of using visual communication in the transmission of information.

Keywords: *visual communication, opinion, public administration, urban planning information*

1. Introduction

In last years, social networks have become more and more influential in the daily lives of people of all ages. People ask, inform themselves and express their opinion much more freely than in the past.

Therefore, public administrations, both local, county and national, have understood the importance of their presence on these social networks and try to maintain, at least to a certain level, the relationship with citizens, publishing various information of interest about their activity.

For some public administrations, the media coverage of information about their daily activities has become a priority and they have employed at least one person to deals with publishing information on social networks, as well as the image of the public administration and the mayor. This person, the press officer, manages absolutely everything related to the image of the public administration and the mayor that they want to present to the citizens.

And because a picture is worth a thousand words, press officers in public administrations rely heavily on visual communication of information, especially on social media because the information is presented clearly, concisely and is much easier for citizens to understand.

The present paper is intended to be a critical analysis, based on various real cases, of the communication of information to citizens published by local public administrations. The main purpose of this analysis is to highlight the importance of using visual communication in the transmission of information.

2. Materials and Methods

Visual communication represents “the practice of using visual elements to communicate information or ideas”. (Smiley, 2021)

Steven Pinker said that “We are visual creatures. Visual things stay put, whereas sounds fade.”. We agree with this statement, and we want to complete it because we believe that the texts fade in time or are not easily understood, especially in this world where everything is fast and absolutely everyone considers that time is limited.

Studies have shown that information transmitted through images is processed 60,000 times faster than text, and 70-75% of people respond much better to images than to text (Kleemeier, 2016).

Also, it is well known that the use of visual communication is:

- to represent information graphically
- to share information in less time
- to improve comprehension of information
- to help organizations stand out
- to establish quick emotional connections
- to facilitate understanding by bridging the gap between concepts and words.

With the development of technologies, applications and social networks, the ways of visually transmitting information have diversified considerably. These include Overhead Transparencies / Projector Slides, Memos, Blackboard or Whiteboard, Videos, Slide Presentations, Paper Handouts, Print, etc. (ezTalks, 2022)

Advantages and Disadvantages of Visual Communication

Visual communication is very important in some areas, and its advantages cannot be ignored. The most important advantages are:

- deliver information more directly (Nishadha, 2021)
- more flexible than verbal communication
 - an image makes sense to everybody despite cultural, geographical, ethnic or language differences among people (Nishadha, 2021)
- brings clarity to oral communication (Prasanna, 2022)
- makes an impact on the audience
 - an image has a higher chance of evoking an emotional response in a person than a set of words, written or spoken (Nishadha, 2021)
- increase the credibility of the message
 - “Seeing is believing” - a way to win people trust (Nishadha, 2021)
- good and effective for illiterate receiver (Prasanna, 2022).

The disadvantages of visual communication cannot be ignored either, and we mention some of them:

- it cannot be used on detailed information (Prasanna, 2022)
- it could be costly to prepare graphs, charts, cartoons (Prasanna, 2022)
- is an incomplete method to transmit information (The Business Communication, 2021).

3. Results and Discussion - Visual communication of urban and landscaping planning information published by local public administrations

Public administrations, both local, county and national, have understood the importance of their presence on social networks and try to maintain, at least to a certain level, the relationship with citizens, publishing various information of interest about their activity.

Visual communication is often used by press officers working in public administrations. They are aware that most of the time the impact is maximum on the readers only when the information is transmitted through the images.

Because we are interested in what is happening in the community where we live, two of the authors of this paper have followed the information made public by three public administrations in the last year: Alba Iulia City Hall, Teiuș City Hall and Ciugud Town Hall. Our interest was focused on the way in which these local public administrations transmit information from the area of urbanism and landscaping.

In this paper, as we mentioned above, we will present and analyse some concrete examples of information communicated to citizens by local public administrations. We choose two relevant examples.

Case 1 - Teiuș City Public Administration

The idea for a paper in which we want to highlight the importance of visual communication in the presentation of information by local public administrations to their citizens, appeared following a post that can be seen in Figure 1. This post was published by a resident of the city Teiuș, a small town located on the banks of the Mureș River, Alba County, Romania. The post, introduced on a well-known social network, was published in the first part of March 2022 and refers to the cutting of trees in the park in the centre of the city. He asked if other people in the city had seen what was happening in Central Park and asked the local public administration for explanations.



Figure 1 Negative posting of a citizen regarding the landscaping works (especially the cutting of trees) that take place in the central park of the city

In a very short time, many residents of the city reacted to this post and commented. The percentage of negative comments regarding the cutting of trees as well as the works that take place in the park was overwhelming (more than 90%).

Unfortunately, for five days the local public authorities did not react and did not comment. Unfortunately, the works for the restoration and arrangement of the park were not properly presented on the spot either, and in this five days, the frustration of the inhabitants increased.

A small part of the negative comments made by the inhabitants of the city can be seen in Figure 2.

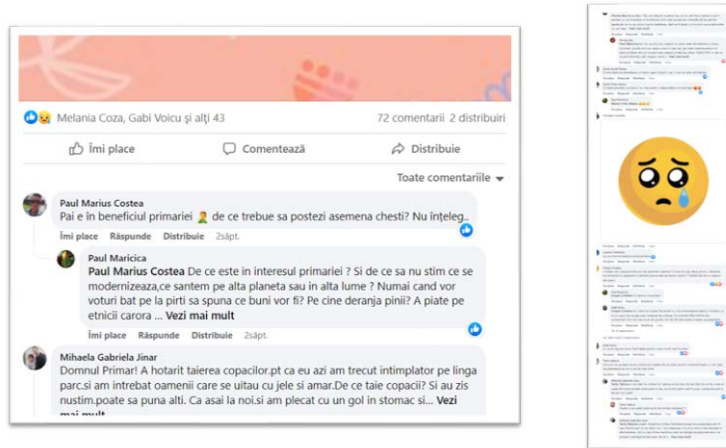


Figure 2 Predominantly negative comments on the post mentioned in Figure 1

Five days after the aforementioned post, the mayor of Teiuș made a post on his personal account, on the same social network in which he explains what works are to be done in the park, and this post is accompanied by some images - graphic representations made on a computer, in a special modelling program.

In a very short time, this post receives over 300 positive reviews and congratulatory comments. Figure 3 shows the post of the mayor of Teiuș. In this image the number of appreciations and comments are highlighted.

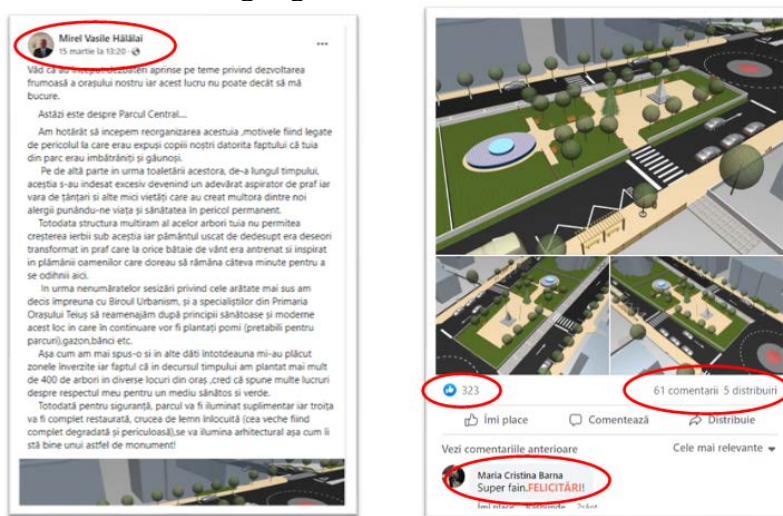


Figure 3 The mayor's explanation accompanied by images. The post received predominantly positive messages from citizens and over 300 appreciations gathered in a very short time

Case 2 - Local public administration of Ciugud commune, Alba County

Ciugud commune from Alba County is well known on the entire territory of Romania due to the special projects conceived and realized at high standards, in the last years by the commune City Hall.

Figure 4 shows how this local public administration communicates the information regarding the projects carried out by the mayor's office.

In 2018, the mayor's office publishes, on a social network, on the account of the mayor's office, an information regarding the plan for arranging a recreational area on the bank

of the Mureş river. The area will include a pier, various sports fields, promenade, and picnic areas.

The post (which can be seen in figure 4a) was accompanied by computer-generated images that captured the future layout of the area. The post received over 500 positive reviews, over 50 congratulatory messages and gathered 200 distributions.

Information on the ongoing project has been communicated to residents and a post on this topic can be seen in Figure 4b. The information is supplemented by images from the construction of the pier and the arrangement of the area in question.

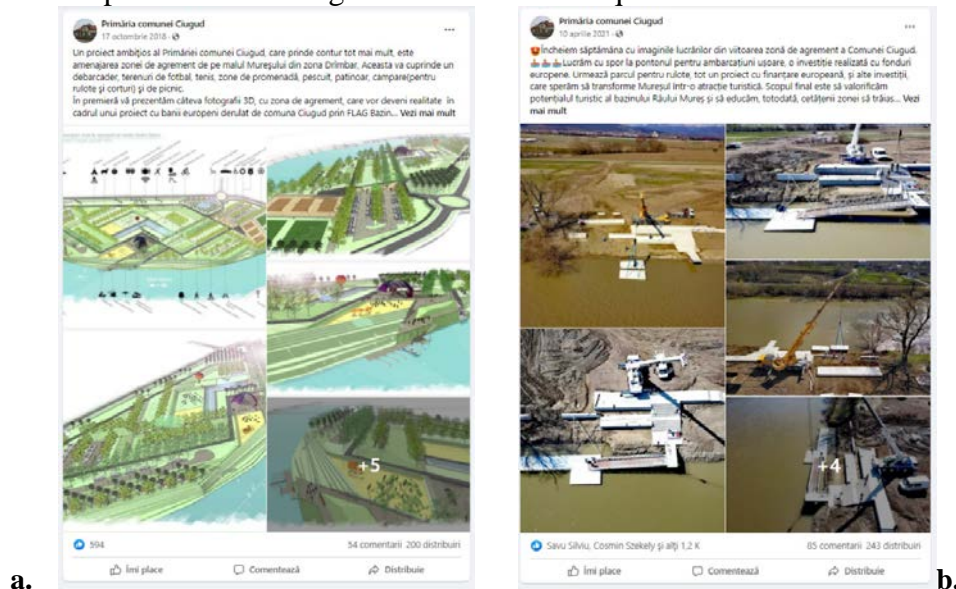


Figure 4 a. Presentation of a new project for the development of a recreational area in Ciugud commune, Alba County, Romania, accompanied by images from the technical documentation – 2018; b. Information on the stage of works for the arrangement of the recreational area, accompanied by representative images – 2021

Analysis of the two cases presented

We will not keep the order of the case presentation and we will analyse the second case presented. This is a case that falls into the "YES" category. The mayor's office of Ciugud commune has an official account on the social networks and from that account it publishes the information regarding the activities carried out by the public administration. The posts are coherent, concise and, as we noticed, following the commune's mayor's office account, they are always accompanied by images, with a special emphasis on communicating information with adjacent images. Regarding the presentation of the landscaping project near the Mureş River, it was done correctly, making it known to the citizens, right from the project phase what is to be done in the future. The posts during the constructions and arrangements bring an extra confidence to the citizens of the commune that what is happening is beneficial for them, and this is reflected in the large number of appreciations, messages, and distributions of the post.

The first case, (that of the restoration of the central park in Teiuş) falls into the "NO" category, and the reasons are obvious:

- they did not announce the intention to carry out the park restoration project
- the works for the restoration of the park have started without announcing the inhabitants regarding what the public administration wants to achieve

- the explanations of the public administration came late, only five days after the notification of the citizens of the city
- the explanations were presented by the mayor of the city on his personal account and not on the official account of the mayor's office.

From the critical analysis of the reasons why this first case presented falls into the "NO" category we can highlight the importance of publishing information on urban projects and landscaping by public administrations. Informed residents support good public administration projects in exchange for uninformed citizens who attack certain decisions and demand explanations (rightly so).

4. Conclusion

The importance of visually communicating information is obvious. The urbanism and landscaping information transmitted by the local public administrations to the citizens through visual elements attract attention, are credible, are strong and become unforgettable, in the collective memory of the community.

By comparison, if "Advertising is a key to attracting your consumer and making them buy a certain product." (Ijaz, 2018), the public administrations use the transmission of information in the most attractive way in order to benefit from the support of the citizens.

Our strong opinion is that the communication of information in the public administration, especially for urban planning and landscaping projects, must be done using visual elements. It is also necessary to publish the information in advance, before starting the field work so that the citizens are informed about the project that is to be created and its purpose.

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