

First NALAS IT and PR Meeting in Ohrid, 6-8 July 2008

In an effort to network its member associations on multiple levels, NALAS gathered Information Technology (IT) and Public Relations (PR) experts from the member associations in Ohrid, between 6 and 8 July 2008. The meeting was part of the activities of the NALAS Task Force on Association Development. In addition, the meeting was an effort to establish new communication channels for exchange of information between NALAS Knowledge Centre and the member associations.

Both the IT and PR staff enjoyed very interesting presentations on current practices and strategies, one such delivered by Mr Patrizio Fiorilli, Head of press and communication at CEMR. NALAS presented its current and fore coming activities, as well as its NALAS Knowledge Centre. The participants presented the current status and recent developments at the member associations.

The discussion led to development of a matrix of common services provided by the associations of local authorities in South-East Europe. It was concluded that most associations include news, information on the projects, newspapers, web pages and press conferences in their services to their members and wider public. The whole matrix is given below.

	SCTM ¹	ZELS ²	NAMRB ³	UMMR ⁴	AAM ⁵	NLAMM ⁶	ALVRS ⁷
Newspaper (monthly)	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Committees	X	X	X	X			X (just established)
Weekly Briefs		X					
Web Page:	X	X	X	X	X		X
- News	X	X	X	X	X		X
- Project Information	X	X	X	X	X		X
Library (Advisory Centre)	X		X	X	X		
Municipal Database	X	X	X		X	Laws	Laws
Press Conferences	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Forums	X	X	X	X	X		
Annual Report	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Mailing Lists	X	X	X	X			X
Board Meeting Reports		X	X	X	X		
Communication Strategy	X	X	X				
IT/PR Capacity	3+1	1/1	2/1+1	Outsrc	1		1+ outsourced
Training of Newly Elected Officials		X	X		X		
Handbook	X	X	X		X		
Day of Dialogue with Central Government			X		X		
MP-LG Media Annual Meeting		X	X		X		
Video conferences				X			
Radio Show							X

Table: Matrix of common services provided, tools used and PR/IT capacities at the NALAS members

It was identified that all members share similar challenges at the information departments:

- Unavailability of Information in English
- Insufficient Information on donors
- Access to wide audience
- Conservative vs. innovative approach
- Crisis management
- Insufficient use of evaluation tools

¹ Standing Conference of Towns and Municipalities, Serbia

² Association of the Units of Local Self-government of Republic of Macedonia

³ National Association of Municipalities in the Republic of Bulgaria

⁴ Union of Municipalities of the Marmara Region

⁵ Association of Albanian Municipalities

⁶ National League of Associations of Mayors from Moldova

⁷ Association of Towns and Municipalities of Republic of Srpska

- Limited resources
- Access to internet by final users (LGA members)
- Existence of more than one association at national level (in some countries)
- Lack of IT know-how at both LGA and LGA members' level
- Maintenance of municipal database

Common needs

The participants worked together to identify the common needs of two types of communication:

1. Between the associations of local governments, the partner organizations and NALAS and
2. Between NALAS and local government associations.

The results are given below.

LGAs, members, partner organizations, NALAS communication

A part of the LGA members, municipal officials and servants, the group identified many additional target groups for this type of communications. Just about all government bodies are affected: parliament, ministry of local authorities, national government, sectoral ministries, national agencies, regional administration etc. There are many international institutions targeted as well, within the EU, at bilateral and multilateral levels, CEMR and similar organizations active in the field of local self-government, NGOs active in the local or national level etc. The private sector is also identified as a potential target group.

When it comes to the communication with members, two target groups that require different tools and types of information were identified: politicians at local level (elected and appointed persons), and professionals employed in municipal administration. While the first group has need for brief, summarized information and promotion and marketing of their activities and success stories of their municipalities, the other group requires more detailed, expert articles and information, and tools for permanent exchange of experiences with their peers.

LGAs-NALAS communication



The group identified the needs for improving the LGA-NALAS communication by following three questions: To whom (identification of target audience), what (identification of content) and how (identification of communication channels). Seven content groups were identified: News, Best practices, Know-How, Newsletters, Links and resources, Databases and Library. These groups require different communication channels, so the following needs were identified:

Content syndication mechanisms (RSS, XML and others) that enable automated exchange of information between the LGAs and NALAS. This, however, requires dynamic websites with databases at the local government associations, so some websites will need to be upgraded. Content will be flagged whether or not to be published on the NALAS webpage.

Library: in order not to duplicate existing activities, NALAS will communicate directly to current libraries that collect documents from the member LGAs. For example,

documents published on LOGIN will automatically be indexed in the NALAS Knowledge Centre.

Best practices: NALAS will collect best practices from the members using various mechanisms, including uploads at the intranet, email communication etc.

Twinning: NALAS will connect to the twinning database yet to be provided by CEMR for information on twinning for the local authorities in South-East Europe.

Trainings: Training materials will be collected and distributed at the NALAS Member Services system.

The Road Ahead

Proposals for NALAS actions in PR field

The PR group discussed possible further joint actions and identified common priority areas. It was agreed that NALAS should:

- Organise workshops for LGAs' PRs, with lecturers from EU LGAs, EU Committee of the Regions and similar institutions, PRs from EU and regional towns and municipalities, and journalists (1 guests, or at some occasions, 1 journalist from each NALAS member country) - on the topic of:
 - a. LGA identity and Advanced PR Tools and Tips (top priority)
 - b. Impact assessment (top priority)
 - c. Crisis management
 - d. Municipal PR networking at National Level
 - e. Media appearance for Executive Officials (of LGAs)
 - f. Contact with journalists
- Collect PR literature:
 - g. LGA publications on PR and examples of PR tools
 - h. PR literature produced by relevant international and national organisations
- Explore possibilities for using radio for LGA promotion (in the framework of NALAS Communication Strategy)
- Organise cultural events on SEE, including multimedia events at the website (in the framework of NALAS Communication Strategy)
- Organise distribution of awards for:
 - Best municipal PR in SEE
 - Best LG journalist in SEE

The NALAS PR Team that will work on development of NALAS Communication Strategy was formed, and it constitutes of ZELS representative (Vesna Arsova), SCTM representative (Vladimir Jovanovic), NAMRB representative (Maria Kumanova) and NALAS representative (Marija Susic). Both PR and IT network will be consulted during preparation of the Strategy.

Proposals for NALAS actions in IT fields

The **IT experts** discussed the information technology needs at the associations. The discussion resulted with ideas for potential joint activities for addressing some of the most pressing IT issues. These activities may include:

Standardization and certification: Develop a toolkit with recommendations for better development, usage and maintenance of IT at the local authorities. Propose security standards, including physical security. Provide certification of the LG infrastructure and methodology.

Education: Provide trainings for member LGAs, provide training on proper transfer of information, spread knowledge on open source software.

News and information: Provide current IT news, discuss new changes in the IT field.

Technical activities: Develop open source platform for all municipalities, establish FTP servers for exchange of documents, provide help on building better websites and develop IT infrastructure, both hardware and software, for the LGAs and their members.

Participants

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