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# DIGITAL DEMOCRACY IN EDUCATIONAL MANAGEMENT

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## *Abstract*

This paper analyzes scientific and applied aspects of a science-policy problem of digital democracy in educational management. The authors substantiate the urgency of schooling democratization in the contemporary society. Democratization of schooling is considered a factor of civil society development. Causes of state-community educational management crisis in Russia are exposed. Prospects of democratization of schooling are viewed through the enhancement of school board activity in a modern information society. The authors discuss digital technology capabilities for the protection of citizen's rights. They argue that the society does not adequately exploit a positive democratic potential of digital technologies to integrate the traditional forms of civic engagement into the innovative methods of direct impact on educational management. Based on modern scientific literature, this paper generalizes the experience of community initiatives and identifies prospects of a digital civil society. It exposes a potential of school websites in informatization of school management through the use of computer technologies for administrative decision-making, by ensuring a mobile feedback from the parental community and organizing discussion forums for parents, schoolchildren, and teachers. The authors propose directions for digital democracy in education. Besides the traditional methods of writing scientific papers the authors use the retrospective analysis of the state-community educational management practice and the analysis of websites using SEO tools.

**Keywords:** Digital democracy, civil society, schooling democratization.

## 1. Introduction

Democratization of schooling as a self-administering social institute which shapes the present and future generations of the country is an inseparable part of democratization of public life.

The issue of democratization of schooling was first raised during the Paris Commune when mandatory and free education was introduced. Such processes were underway at various development stages of the domestic educational system. Immediately after the October Revolution of 1917 the issues concerning decentralization of school management and student participation in school management emerged (Chelpanov, 1918). In the 1960s as the international teachers' movement gained momentum social rights of schoolteachers were discussed.

In the early 1990s as market relations and civil society foundations started to emerge, a humanistic paradigm of education was taking shape and social pedagogical movements were created, including those promoting a liberal educational idea [A.A. Pinsky]. The concept of school autonomy gained support and was stated in the 1992 Law on Education that declared a democratic, state-community character of educational management. One of the priority directions of the National Doctrine of Education in the Russian Federation was strengthening of social participation in educational management. Democratization of schooling was increasingly considered an educational value and a necessary condition for productive learning (Krylova, 2005). Student self-administration was viewed as a factor of democratization of schooling. The issues associated with nurturing social activity were resolved in the process of democratization of schooling. This period witnessed the birth of democratization of school management (Potashnik, 1990), primarily in the regions.

In the early 2000s some of the best practices of community participation in educational management emerged in the regions of the Russian Federation. One of the first regional models of state-community educational management was developed and implemented in the Republic of Buryatia in 2005-2007. The experience of internship sites of Buryatia, which implemented innovative forms of interaction between schools and local communities, the carrying out of social and socially significant open school projects and the development of new approaches to provision of quality education while implementing the Federal State Educational Standard of General Education found support in fifteen other subjects of the Russian Federation.

## 2. Problem Statement

Nowadays a contradictory situation has come about. Most schools report directly to municipalities, but being underfinanced and lacking a legal and regulatory framework local powers try to delegate their authorities in educational management to parents and local communities. In order to solve this problem "from above" the Ministry of Education and Science of the Russian Federation plans to transfer the authorities to manage education from municipalities to regional governments.

The topical character of the discussed issue is explained by a development of forms and directions of civic engagement in managing various social and economic processes in Russia. In recent years the initiatives in educational development are more actively manifested. The system of education in our country becomes more open and transparent.

Volunteer movements, charity and patronage, implementation of individual civic initiatives, engagement in the work of local self-administration, public oversight and public expertise activities are increasingly becoming common and modern forms of civic participation (Doklad …, 2016). Educational sphere is an efficient instrument of preparing active civil society actors. Wide-scale everyday real interaction of state and public administration actors is carried out at the school level educating over 13.3 million students. Therefore, the development of public participation in the management of the general education system is most important for shaping civic experience of Russian citizens.

Meanwhile, the analysis of state-community educational management bodies in Russia's regions carried out in 2009-2014 under the auspices of the Baikal Educational Forum showed that the majority of them are still at a development stage or exist only on paper. The following main reasons hamper the development of state-community management of general education: insufficient development of the legal and regulatory framework, low public motivation in managing an educational organization, authoritarianism of school headmasters, low level of legal culture and legal awareness in a considerable part of educational process actors as well as absence of digital democracy practice.

The study of the contemporary public participation practice in educational management shows that there is a problem of miscoordination and overlapping jurisdictions of state, educational and public institutions ensuring respect for the interests of man, society and state in educational sphere. Methods of public engagement in the development of strategic programs and projects in the regions, municipalities and educational organizations have not fully evolved, while insufficient attention is paid to raising the level of information transparency of educational organizations and developing public-private partnerships in educational sphere (Betto, van Waarden, 2017; Brian & Dan Mercea, 2011; Carrie L. Lobman, 2011; Goddard, 2004; Haberberger, 2017; Hindman, 2009; Miller, 2012; Muneera, 2015; Rasmussen, 2014; Saltman, 2016; Tanaka, 2001).

## 3. Research Questions

The above-stated problems lead to the necessity to address two research questions. What is the essence of the state-community educational management's crisis? What potential does digital democracy possess for addressing the crisis of democratization of schooling?

## 4. Purpose of the Study

This paper will analyze scientific and applied aspects of the development of the problem of using digital democracy in educational management.

## 5. Research Methods

Various methods of processing the contents of scientific texts were used in the preparation of this paper. They included the deconstruction method aimed at selection, comparison and interpretation of relevant quotes, diachronical method enabling the authors to mark the stages of schooling democratization development and content-analysis of the term "digital democracy." The retrospective analysis of activity of state-community educational management bodies in Russia's regions and the method of determining the

existing positions of a website in Yandex and Google through a number of search queries of the semantic core using SEO-instruments at Bel.ru were used for empirical data collection.

## 6.  Findings

Traditionally, democratization of schooling is associated with the strengthening of teachers' and students' rights. However, a broader understanding presupposes a renovation of educational process on the democratic principles. Thus, the educational democratism principle provides free access to the information, which is of interest to every actor of educational activity as it ensures real parity of all educational activity actors and so on.

Democratic principles in education are aimed at alleviation of authoritarianism, "humanization" of educational activity (Grinkrug, 2012), which in its turn influences the shaping of open relationships between schoolteachers and students, administration and parents. One of the results of schooling democratization is creation of school boards.

The governing board of an educational organization is considered a school of civic competence and an instrument of direct public participation in school management (Shkurov & Ponomareva, 2014). In social and pedagogical terms the school boards implement the children-adult co-administration principle in the management of their common life (Dneprov, 2006).

Engagement of high school students in a real school management does away with traditional bureaucratic "student self-administration" days, which has long become a sham and an advertisement banner on the school's bureaucratic façade.

The contemporary civil society develops under the conditions of digital revolution cardinally changing a format of the "man-man" and "man-socium" relationships. New information technologies allow maintaining people's communications regardless of spatial and temporal differences. High availability, low cost and a geographically neutral character of digital media enables a closer interaction, which is not impeded by social, economic, cultural, political, religious and ideological limits (Shvab, 2016). Using Internet media-services people get a chance to voice their opinion and participate in civil debates.

Penetration of new information technologies in all spheres of social life creates technical prerequisites for the development of civil society by ensuring a real provision of civil rights and responsibilities through free and timely access to information resources for the development of e-democracy (Lavrik, 2015).

Online communities become new subjects of civil society. Their activity helps to shape an "online civil society" in which online communication is used for rapid resolution of existing social issues.

Through new information technologies citizens have become more politicized. They actively engage in interaction with state institutions. In this way the modern society develops a practice of direct democracy.

Political systems more actively use computer and Internet capabilities for ensuring the democratic processes. According to the e-democracy concept new technologies enhance active citizenship (Bashkarev, 2008).

In Great Britain the influence of e-democracy (Boler, 2008) is visible in a transformation of the e-government system's "landscape" in accordance to the changes in the needs of citizens and businesses.

It is no secret that state power practices using modern Internet-based communications as instruments of administration and control (Rod'kin, 2016). At the same time digital democracy presupposes a downward connection between authority and society (Sedinkin, 2013). The development of the Internet allows to strengthen democratic citizen participation in state and municipal administration.

A network of public institutions serving as a platform for a dialogue between state and civil society functions in the Russian Federation. The sites of the civic dialogue aim to attract attention to vitally important problems of citizens. Here each citizen gets a chance to publicly express his or her civic stance and participate in civil society initiatives. The efficiency of these sites is ensured by modern information and communication technologies. In April 2013 the "Russian Public Initiative" electronic portal was launched and in three years it hosted 9.175 initiatives (Doklad, 2016).

Various public forums function in the information space of Russian civil society. Among them are the "Action Forum" of the All-Russian Public Movement "People's Front 'Za Rossiyu'" (ONF), All-Russian Civic Forum ("Local Self-Administration", "Public Oversight", "Social Assistance Quality", "Consumer Rights) and others. Still it is necessary to more actively use the democratic potential of digital mass media and not to fail to amalgamate traditional forms of active citizenship with innovative methods of direct influence on administrative decision-making.

Modern Internet communications are considered as the most important democratization element for political institutions (Avzalova, 2014) since they allow to significantly improve the quality of public services delivered and provide citizens with broader opportunities of participation in political and administrative decision-making.

Foreign e-government and digital democracy experience demonstrates marketization of economy, de-bureaucratization of administration and focus of the political system on citizen rights and needs (Efimov, 2015).

Internet becomes a new public place, which forms norms of behavior, limits of decency and traditions. It is a public tribune and a memory archive (Chernyshov, 2012) shaping the foundations of online civil society. Due to the Internet state borders become more transparent and the traditional understanding of citizenship, allegiance, and national identity gives way to a global community of citizens.

One might argue that the digital civil society, in which the most important human right and element of civil society is Internet access does exist in the modern world. The contemporary geopolitical system rests on information systems and technologies ("cloud data", wireless networks, augmented reality, etc.), which intensify the interaction between the global, local and individual perception of life.

School websites are modern instruments of openness (Val'dman, 2009) translating general and special features of an educational organization into the global information space. A school website as an Internet-office of an educational establishment in the worldwide web is positioned as a virtual image and a brief representation of a school.

Information and communication technologies make spatial boundaries of a school more transparent and modulate communication forms between each other, with parents and teachers. However, many school websites do not follow the requirements to section and subsection structure, which complicates navigation and search functions, breaks the uniformity of requirements, impedes openness and accessibility of customer information (Fomitskaya & Bubeeva, 2016).

The insufficient level of information transparency of school websites is caused by the fact that nowadays the demand for Internet resources of educational system is far lower than the offer by the state as a customer (Mertsalova, 2015). If the information transparency of the educational system is regulated from above without due regard to customer (parents) interests and opinions, and producers of educational services (teachers), then school website traffic as the most important efficiency indicator of an information resource will remain low.

The analysis of school websites shows that information support of public participation in school management will be limited to publication of the school board chapter, records of proceedings of school governing boards, addresses to philanthropists and so on.

We think that informatization of school management is one of the ways to boost popularity of school websites. It includes the use of computer technologies in administrative decision-making, provision of mobile feedback from the parental community, organization of parental, student's and teachers' forums and so on.

The "Forum: School Kids on Schools" can be used as an example. It informs all stakeholders about the opinions of the schooling actors on the quality of education and equipment of schools, quality of meals, culture of interpersonal relations, culture of school administration and culture of schoolchildren. Based on the SEO tools data website traffic amounts to 100.000 to 250.000 visitors a month. The most important topics of the parental forum are "Where to file a claim against the school headmaster?" (423 replies and over 190.000 views), "What to about unlawful collection of fees at school?" (353 replies and over 118.000 views), "What does the parents' committee do?" (90 replies and over 73.000 views).

Ulanovka.ru, the largest Internet-forum of Buryatia, has a section where participants discuss schools and where the communication between schoolchildren and teachers takes place. Here the most popular topics are "Choice of schools" (about 72.000 views), "Search for tutors" (about 19.000 views), "Unlawful fees at school" (over 11.000 views).

As we see, the problem of school corruption may be one of the directions of school board activity. In particular, the modern practice of organizing extra-curricular educational activities presupposes collection of donations from parents resulting in corruption conduct of teachers (Vanyukhina, Skorobogatova & Saglam, 2014). Unlawful fees have long become an everyday reality impeding the enforcement of citizen's rights to free and affordable education.

The development of corruption in education is connected with the unlimited bureaucratic interference into the educational sphere (state educational standards, performance appraisals and accreditation of educational institutions). In our country a new business took hold: numerous scammers making huge amounts of money on making and distributing Unified State Exam tests. The activity of public institutions in education management should be directed toward prevention of corrupt conduct and reduction of corruption risks at school.

The community may render sufficient influence in the prevention of corruption. School boards may become public bodies that launch anti-corruption subculture of an educational organization as an element of the school's legal culture including anti-corruption philosophy and a social and psychological protest against traditions of voluntary donations and corruption loyalty (Syuzeva, 2015).

The modern potential of the state-community educational management should be directed toward shaping of a citizen anti-corruption culture (Solomin, 2013) reflecting their civic engagement. In this connection regional experience presents a number of interesting examples:

- Open Internet lesson "What is school corruption? How to fight it?" (project of the Ulianovsk regional branch of the All-Russian NGO "Association of Lawyers of Russia");

- creation of blogs in an effort to assist customers of educational services (parents and legal representatives of schoolchildren) and members of school self-administration to make sense of what is going on in an educational institution, prevent negative situations and attain a good level of education and upbringing of children (according to SEO tools the "Inspector of People's Education" blog has from 150.000 to 160.000 visitors a month). As observers note, over the recent years many particularly egregious corruption facts were exposed exactly through blogs.

- in Moscow's schools there is a practice of corruption alert. Regulatory and legal acts and documents in the sphere of countering corruption, anti-corruption booklets and checklists;

- carrying out of anti-corruption lessons and extra-curricular activities ("Together against corruption") aimed at nurturing active citizenship and teaching schoolchildren active methods of countering corruption. Students propose to create Internet-portals and anti-corruption hotlines where anybody can leave information about officials who ask money for their assistance, provide proof and evidence of corruption activity (Mukhametov, Klevtsov & Ablyazova, 2017).

However, the problem of corruption in the activity of the state-community educational management bodies has not yet attracted enough attention. It is possible to create a body, which, like the Center of Public Procedures "Business against Corruption", would be able to work in three directions: 1) consideration of parental and student claims via mobile devices (rapid deployment); 2) exposure and discussion of topical issues of educational service provision on official Internet-forums (informational direction); 3) development of suggestions to enhance educational management in online project community (project direction).

## 7. Conclusion

One of the aspects of the contemporary schooling crisis is the crisis of state-community school management. The development of public administration practices in modern information society is possible within the context of digital democracy. Its advantages include rapidity and horizontally-oriented feedback. Public institutions existing in Russia do not use the entire potential of information technologies. Democratization of schooling in the contemporary society presupposes active implementation of the democratic potential of digital communications.

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