

THE COMMUNICATION CAPACITY INDEX OF UNITED TERRITORIAL COMMUNITIES IN THE CONTEXT OF UKRAINE'S EUROPEAN INTEGRATION POLICY

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Abstract. *This article deals with the development of the communication capacity index of united territorial communities (UTCs), as the analysis of basic research on the communicative development of communities demonstrates the urgency of the need to measure this process. Therefore, in this work, researchers set the purpose of determining the Communication Capacity Index of UTCs in the context of Ukraine's European integration policy. To do this, the authors used the method of analysis of statistical data and passport characteristics and the comparative approach. As a result of the analysis of four communication levels (information, consultations, dialogue, partnership) of township UTCs in the Mykolaiv region, the UTCs with the highest and the lowest Communication Capacity Indexes (CCI) were revealed, and are outlined in tables and diagrams. As conclusions of this research, the specifics and regularities of the communication interaction of UTCs (in the example of township UTCs of the Mykolaiv region) are determined.*

Keywords: *communication, united territorial community, Communication Capacity Index (CCI), information, consultations, dialogue, partnership.*

Reikšminiai žodžiai: *komunikacija, vieninga teritorinė bendruomenė, bendravimo pajėgumų rodiklis, informavimas, konsultavimas, dialogas, partnerystė.*

Introduction

In order to implement the Association Agreement between Ukraine and the European Union, Ukraine is beginning a period of large-scale reforms, including decentralization, local self-government, administrative, and territorial reform. A fundamental aspect of these reforms is the ability of local communities to govern themselves, which must be ensured by a high level of communication.

The information openness of the authorities has to create ideal conditions for citizens to search for and obtain the information that is necessary for their livelihood and safety in some areas. In particular, this applies to local governments of united territorial communities (UTC).

Communication provides the conditions for monitoring the activities of local governments of UTCs by the local population, which provides opportunities to increase the efficiency of local governments. Communication is not only of social or political significance, but is also increasingly becoming a driver of the economic development of the UTC, the region or the state as a whole.

Communication for local communities is not just the exchange of information, but the process of uniting the local community to address issues of local importance, to foster a sense of territorial identity and ensure security stability.

The communication capacity of modern communities must take into account the needs of society in the electronic circulation of information. The public need to have trust in local governments and act as a reliable partner in making decisions of local importance. In conditions of the crisis associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, UTCs should provide the best possible internal communication through their websites and social media pages.

The next issues are actively explored in the scientific environment: the openness (transparency) of public authorities and the communication of their bodies in various areas, including the involvement of members of UTCs in making decisions of local importance. However, this is only one aspect of possible interaction. The following issues remain important: whether community members themselves are able to communicate with each other and other civil society institutions, and whether community members have a common identity with their community and want to take an active part in its life.

At the same time, we can be sure that the issue of communication in its general form generates a significant amount of interdisciplinary research. Thus, A. Hotun (2011) studied the basic concepts of communication in the political system of society, and T. Huzenko (2016), for example, analyzed the basic principles of the formation of communicative strategy in Kyiv. S. Shturkhet-skyi (2013) studied the development of communication strategies in local government in Ukraine, while N. Frolova (2019) considered the peculiarities of the use of social networks in the activities of public authorities. At the same time, the problem of communicative interaction (communication) at the level of territorial communities is only beginning to attract the attention of researchers, especially as a result of decentralization reform, which provided “the possibility to the UTC, or rather to the local population, for operative decision-making on community development” (Yevtushenko and Lushahina 2020, 397).

Analysis of basic research on the communicative development of communities shows the need to measure this process. In this case, we consider it appropriate to propose and calculate a UTC Communication Capacity Index that would demonstrate: factors on which the level of internal and external communication in the community depends; and what part this index plays in determining the capacity of the UTC in the social, economic, and political processes taking place

in its territory.

Thus, the purpose of the study is to determine the communication index of the capacity of UTCs in the context of Ukraine's European integration policy.

Research

1. Methods

In the process of decentralization reform and the formation of UTCs, an important criterion for their emergence and development is the establishment of internal and external communication links, electronic document management, and a simplified system for obtaining the necessary information about UTC activities. Therefore, data from the following sources were used in the study:

- the main information portal of the reform of local self-government and territorial organization of power (decentralization) regarding the passport characteristics of UTCs;
- official UTC websites and official community pages on Facebook (which is the most widely used social network) to ensure public awareness of community events.

A comparative method was also used to identify similarities and differences in the communication ability of UTCs. Tables, diagrams, and formulas were used for the numerical interpretation of data.

2. Results and discussion

The best channels for internal and external UTC communication are the official community website and social media page. Having an official UTC website not only allows community members to focus on internal affairs, but also allows external investors to understand what the community is doing, how effective it is, and whether it is worth the investment. Another important aspect of the community's communication capacity is the ability to meet the information needs of young people, because the internet is the main source of information for them.

V. Dreshpak notes that communication in public administration "in general is a process of social interaction through messages, the content of which is public administration, the implementation of public authority and public policy" (Dreshpak 2015, 3).

Thus, communication is a process of transmitting and receiving information, which provides feedback through various means (channels of communication). In the context of the study of communication in territorial communities, we will consider the process of interconnection, interaction, and cooperation between the united territorial community, local governments, public authorities, businesses, NGOs, etc.

In our opinion, the evaluation of the level of UTC communication allows us to identify shortcomings in the UTC authority-population dialogue and to provide effective feedback between them, as well as to determine the communication potential of the UTC.

It is worth noting that effective communication depends on the proper organization of interaction between UTC local governments and the local community (joint development and public adoption of important decisions for the population of the UTC, budgeting, development and implementation of social target programs, etc.). There is a need to develop certain communication indices to determine the communication potential of UTCs (most effective and least effective) and to understand the factors that affect the level of communication in the UTC and which can increase the level of communication.

Taking into account these aspects, we propose to introduce the Communication Capacity Index of UTCs, which will be based on the best practices of public involvement in local decision-making. The Code of Best Practice for Public Participation of the Council of Europe describes

the levels of public involvement in policy-making processes in order of increasing intensity. They will be the basis for our index:

Information – the transfer of information; the local authority provides information to the public about certain events – for example, the adoption of a decision, the mechanism of public participation in the discussion.

Consultations – bilateral communication; the local government publishes a draft decision, and the public provides comments, remarks and suggestions in one way or another.

Dialogue (active public participation) – bilateral communication, during which the local authority can involve the public in working groups, expert councils, etc. in the process of making certain decisions.

Partnership – bilateral communication, when the local authority and the public exchange various resources (for example, the public helps to organize an event by involving volunteers) (“Kodeks krashchykh praktyk” 2009).

All of these levels are in a clear hierarchy and the transition to the next level involves the implementation of the previous one.

In addition, the current level of communication and best European practices shows that the availability of information on community activities to citizens plays a key role in the effective functioning of this community. In this context, we propose to consider the communication of township UTCs through their official websites and pages on social networks, including Facebook.

According to these levels, we will determine the index of citizen involvement in the communication process, which should include these components with their respective indicators, and give them values in ascending order depending on their complexity: public information (I = 1), consultations (C = 2), dialogue (D = 3), and partnership (P = 4).

Public information. The community must clearly understand that it can access the necessary information at any time, as this is the basis of all levels of further interaction. In many countries, there are constitutional guarantees of the right to access information, but they are not usually used unless there is special legislation to support them.

Public information channels are:

the official website of the local authority and media;

social networks, messengers, bots;

periodical e-mails;

telephone lines, where all interested persons can get the necessary information in the question-answer format.

For comparison, we will choose the township UTC of the Mykolaiv region, noting their brief characteristics (Table 1).

Table 1

General information of the township UTC of the Mykolaiv region

No.	Name of UTC	Area (km ²)	Number of united councils	Population
1	Arbuzynska	430.3	5	10,382
2	Berezanska	882.2	10	13,796
3	Berezhuvatska	1259.5	15	19,344
4	Bratska	707.5	10	12,122

5	Veselynivska	906.7	11	17,896
6	Voskresenska	326.9	5	15,113
7	Vradiivska	801.4	12	16,836
8	Domanivska	728.8	7	14,850
9	Yelanetska	1015.6	12	14,863
10	Kazankivska	1002.6	14	15,113
11	Kryvoozerska	812.8	16	23,825
12	Oleksandrivska	287.0	3	9,126
13	Olshanska	244.8	5	9,148
14	Pervomaiska	390.4	5	9,493

Source: Holovnyi informatsiyni portal, n.d.

The first level – public information – is the simplest, and should be provided a priori. If there is no first level of communication in the UTC, then there can be no other level of communication. We determine the main parameters to be the availability of the UTC website (it has to be active, with relevant information), Facebook page, e-mail and telephone lines. If all components of the first communication level are available, the UTC receives the highest **Information Indicator (I) = 1**.

Considering these communities, we can conclude that all of these UTCs have their own active websites that have useful links, contact numbers and e-mail addresses. It is worth noting that most websites have only one phone number without specifying the person responsible for communication, which reduces the quality of the communication process.

The search for the website and social network page of the Kryvoozerska UTC was problematic, because the website of the township council (Ofitsiyni veb-sait Kryvoozerskoi selyshchnoi rady, n.d.) is not indexed in Google and can be found only through the link on the official Facebook page (“Kryvoozerska selyshchna rada” 2021). Also, on Facebook, there is a page not of the community, but of the township council. The contact phone number is mentioned on the gromada.info (n.d.) website, but the e-mail address is posted only on the social network page, which greatly complicates the search for the necessary channel to obtain information. However, as all four components are available, the Information Indicator (I) of Kryvoozerska UTC is **(I) = 1**.

Communication on social networks, in particular Facebook, is also carried out in these communities. However, such communication has different options, including: the community’s own messages, reposts of official information from various official sources, and user comments on pages that repost information from the pages of public authorities. According to N. Frolova (2019), the optimal presence on Facebook should include 4–5 publications per day.

A more complex level – consulting – involves two-way communication on a particular project or decision (this includes consultations, proposals, inquiries).

We can set the **Indicator of Consultations (C)** by reviewing draft decisions submitted for public discussion on the official website of the UTC. All UTC websites have a feedback form in the Contacts section, but the authors argue that this is insufficient to fully represent the Consulting level. In order to consult with the community and take into account their comments and suggestions, the site should have an appropriate section which contains information on the issue that is submitted for discussion with the community. Here we also encounter problems, because if this information is available on websites, it is often placed chaotically in different sections and is quite

problematic to find.

For example, on the website of the Arbusynska township UTC in the section “Appeals” there is a form for the proposals and appeals of citizens (Ofitsiyni veb-sait Arbusynskoi hromady, n.d.). This type of consultation is effective when the community is sufficiently informed and actively involved. That is, the first level of communication must be provided. In this case, the consultations indicator for the Arbusynska UTC is $C = 2$.

Now we will consider the website of the Bereznehuvatska UTC. There is no separate section for community consultations on the UTC website, but in the section “Development Plan” (Ofitsiyni veb-sait Bereznehuvatskoi hromady, n.d.) there is a questionnaire for businesses and residents regarding their vision of the community development strategy. Therefore, $C = 2$.

On the website of the Veselynivska UTC there is a section entitled “Discussions” (Ofitsiyni veb-sait Veselynivskoi hromady, n.d.) where a link to the feedback form and e-mail for comments and suggestions of citizens can be found, so again $C = 2$.

On the website of the Voskresenska township council, in the section “Announcements” (Ofitsiyni veb-sait Voskresenskoi selyshchnoi rady, n.d.), there are messages about suggestions and comments of the community about UTC projects – $C = 2$.

On the website of the Domanivska UTC in the section “Together with the community” the decision “On approval of the Regulations on public consultations in Domanivka township council” is posted, and in the section “To the attention of citizens. Public discussion” projects and programs for public discussion can be found. Therefore, $C = 2$.

On the official website of the Kazankivska community in the section “Available community” (Ofitsiyni veb-sait Kazankivskoi hromady, n.d.) a notice can be found regarding conducting electronic public consultations, indicating the relevant e-mail address of the Kazankivska township council. In addition, information on the results of the public discussion can be found in the Public Participation section, and on the planning of community meetings in the Advertisements section. Therefore, public consultation can be carried out in electronic form via email and through the direct meetings of citizens, so $C = 2$.

Analyzing the website of the Oleksandrivska UTC, we find the section “Public Consultations” (Ofitsiyni veb-sait Oleksandrivskoi hromady, n.d.), which contains a form for face-to-face consultations. In turn, on the website of Olshanska UTC there is a section “Public discussions”, where there are advertisements for public consultations. Therefore, $C = 2$.

The website of the Berezanska UTC does not have a separate section for “Public discussions”. However, in the section “News” (Ofitsiyni veb-sait Berezanskoi hromady, n.d.) there is an announcement of the Mykolaiv regional public administration for proposals of community members concerning implementation in the Mykolaiv region of the social project “Active parks – locations of healthy Ukraine”.

The website of the Bratska UTC is minimally informative. There are no sections on community consultation. The situation is similar with the following UTCs: Vradiivska, Kryvoozerska, Yelanetska and Pervomaiska. Therefore, in all of these united territorial communities, the consultations indicator is zero ($C = 0$). In this case, the possibility of transition of these communities to the next levels (dialogue and partnership) is excluded. Therefore, we can immediately determine the Communication Capacity Index of these communities, which will be equal to 1 ($CC_i = 1$). (Table 2)

Considering the second component (consultations) on community websites, we can make the conclusion that some sites have various effective forms (online questionnaires, links to internet

portals, etc.) of consulting with the community. However, most of the UTCs only have announcements about the date and time of consultations with the community in the council, a link to an email address, or a feedback form without any instructions. There is no single form for online consultation with the community and stakeholders.

Considering the third component – **dialogue (D)**, which entails active public participation – we need to ascertain the involvement of the public in working groups, expert councils, etc. in the process of making certain decisions. This level is quite complex and involves rather high standards of communication between local governmental bodies, local authority, businesses, volunteers, patrons and the community itself. Accordingly, those township UTCs that received a zero score at the previous level will not appear in this category.

The main component for this level is the availability of information on the website on the forming of temporary working groups or expert councils and relevant regulatory documents confirming this information.

In the section “Documents” of the Arbuzyńska UTC there is the main document of development – “Strategy of sustainable development of Arbuzyńska township united territorial community for 2019–2026”. This states that local governments, together with community members, formed a 40-member working group to prepare a draft of the Strategic Development Plan of the UTC, which was established in accordance with the Order of the Head of January 31, 2019 (“Stratehiia staloho rozvytku Arbuzyńskoi” 2019). Therefore, the **Indicator of Dialogue** of Arbuzyńska UTC receives a value of **D = 3**.

The protocols of the meeting on the establishment of a working group with the involvement of community representatives to develop a Strategic Development Plan for the Bereznehuvatska UTC are posted on the community website. Therefore, the component of dialogue is estimated at **D = 3**.

The website of the Voskresenska township council (as a representative of the UTC) posted Order No. 99-r of June 30, 2017 “On approval of the Regulations of the working group for the development of the Strategic Development Plan of Voskresenska township council” (“Stratehiya rozvytku” 2019) for 2019–2021 with the indication of the group, which includes community representatives. Therefore, **D = 3**.

As for the Domanivska UTC, the community website, in the document “Strategy for Sustainable Development of Domanivka United Territorial Community of Mykolaiv Region for 2018–2026” (“Stratehiia staloho rozvytku Domanivskoi” 2018), describes in detail the working group with public involvement. A similar situation is observed in the Kazankivska UTC. Therefore, these communities receive an indicator value of **D = 3**.

On the website of the Oleksandrivska UTC, in the section “Useful information”, there are decisions of the council on various programs of UTC development with the involvement of citizens in decision-making. For example, “Program to support associations of co-owners of apartment buildings in carrying out major repairs, reconstruction and technical re-equipment of apartment buildings of Oleksandrivska township council for 2019–2021” (“Prohrama pidtrymky obiednan” 2019), “Anti-corruption program of Oleksandrivska township council for 2020–2023” (“Antykoruptsiina prohrama” 2020), etc. Therefore, **D = 3**.

As for the Veselynivska and Olshanska united communities, we do not find information about community involvement in expert councils or working groups. Therefore, **D = 0**.

Thus, as for this indicator, we can conclude that this level is quite problematic (Table 2), because the websites do not provide much information about the projects on which expert groups

or temporary working groups should work and, accordingly, about the results of their activities. In essence, we receive information from the reports of already completed programs.

The fourth level – **partnership** – provides the highest level of communication between different institutions and the community, and the availability of joint projects with international organizations, businesses and NGOs.

Thus, on the website of the Arbuzyńska UTC we find information that the UTC cooperates with the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) according to the DOBRE program – aimed at the development of local self-government. Therefore, **P = 4**.

As for the Bereznehuvatska and Kazankivska UTC, we do not find clear information on the website about partnerships with any institutions, so **P = 0**.

The document “Action Plan for Sustainable Energy Development of the Voskresenska United Territorial Community until 2030”, posted on the website of the township council, states: “The Voskresenska United Territorial Community has joined the Agreements of Mayors – an initiative of the European Commission to unite European local authorities in a voluntary association to joint fight against global warming” (“Plan dii staloho enerhetychnoho” 2019). Therefore, **P = 4**.

The Domanivska UTC cooperates with the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) according to the DOBRE program (“Proekt Dobre”, n.d.). The Domanivska UTC is the only one among fourteen UTCs that has a Communication Strategy for the development of the UTC for 2019–2026 (“Komunikatsiina stratehiia” 2019). The document was created as part of the USAID-funded program “Decentralization Brings Better Results and Efficiency (DOBRE)”. The Domanivska UTC also participates in the Polish project “Application of evaluation in the process of effective management of the united community”, which is implemented by the foundation “The Democratic Association East” together with the East Ukrainian Center for Public Initiatives, and is funded by the program “The Support of Democracy” (“Ukraincko-polskyi proekt” 2017). Accordingly, the level of partnership of this community acquires the highest level: **P = 4**.

As for the Oleksandrivska UTC, the official website contains programs for the development of various areas of UTC activity with the involvement of civil society partners. For example, the Program “Development of Youth Policy in Oleksandrivska UTC for 2020–2022” (“Rozvytok molodizhnoi polityky” 2020) provides for cooperation with the Youth Public Council, NGOs, and participation in various grants. In addition, the community works with USAID on the DOBRE program. The program is implemented through an international consortium led by Global Communities, one of the partners of which is the Foundation for the Development of Local Democracy (Fundacja Rozwoju Demokracji Lokalnej (FRDL)) from Poland (“Stratehiia rozvytku hromady” 2017). Therefore, **P = 4**.

General characteristics for communities and indicators are shown in Table 2.

Table 2
Communication indicators of UTC

No.	Name of UTC	Information (I=1)	Consultations (C=2)	Dialogue (D=3)	Partnership (P=4)
1	Arbuzyńska	1	2	3	4
2	Berezanska	1	0	0	0
3	Berezhnevatska	1	2	3	0
4	Bratska	1	0	0	0
5	Veselynivska	1	2	0	0
6	Voskresenska*	1	2	3	4
7	Vradiivska*	1	0	0	0
8	Domanivska	1	2	3	4
9	Yelanetska	1	0	0	0
10	Kazankivska	1	2	3	0
11	Kryvoozerska*	1	0	0	0
12	Oleksandrivska	1	2	3	4
13	Olshanska	1	2	0	0
14	Pervomaiska	1	0	0	0

* UTC, the website of which is represented by the website of the township council

Source: Author's work, 2021

The fourth level is the most difficult to achieve, but shows how much the territorial community is able to develop economically and in the direction of socio-political achievements. This level shows how actively the community participates in attracting grant funds for its development, and how effectively it is able to cooperate with civil society institutions, businesses and international organizations. As a result of the study, we see that only four communities out of fourteen have reached the fourth level (Table 2 and Figure 1).

Regarding the definition of the Communication Capacity Index UTC (CC_i), we propose the following formula:

$$CC_i = I + C + D + P$$

I – Information Indicator

C – Consultations Indicator

D – Dialogue

P – Partnership

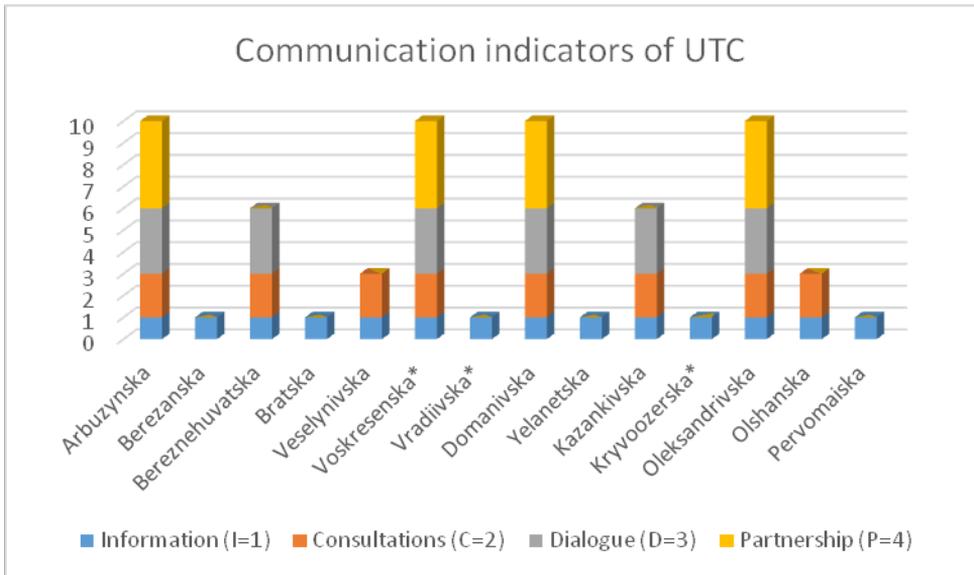


Figure 1. Communication indicators of UTC

Source: Author's work, 2021

Thus, as a result, we can see that six communities have the lowest Communication Capacity Index $CC_i = 1$ (Berezanska, Bratska, Vradiivska, Yelanetska, Kryvoozerska, Pervomaiska) and only four communities have the highest $CC_i = 10$ (Arbuzynska, Voskresenska, Domanivska, Oleksandrivska). This is illustrated in detail in Table 3 and Figure 2.

Table 3

Communication Capacity Index (CC_i)

No.	Name of UTC	Information (I=1)	Consultations (C=2)	Dialogue (D=3)	Partnership (P=4)	Communication Capacity Index (CC_i)
1	Arbuzynska	1	2	3	4	10
2	Berezanska	1	0	0	0	1
3	Berezhnuevatska	1	2	3	0	6
4	Bratska	1	0	0	0	1
5	Veselynivska	1	2	0	0	3
6	Voskresenska*	1	2	3	4	10
7	Vradiivska*	1	0	0	0	1
8	Domanivska	1	2	3	4	10

9	Yelanetska	1	0	0	0	1
10	Kazankivska	1	2	3	0	6
11	Kryvoozerska*	1	0	0	0	1
12	Oleksandrivska	1	2	3	4	10
13	Olshanska	1	2	0	0	3
14	Pervomaiska	1	0	0	0	1

* UTC, the website of which is represented by the website of the township council
(Source: Author’s work, 2021)

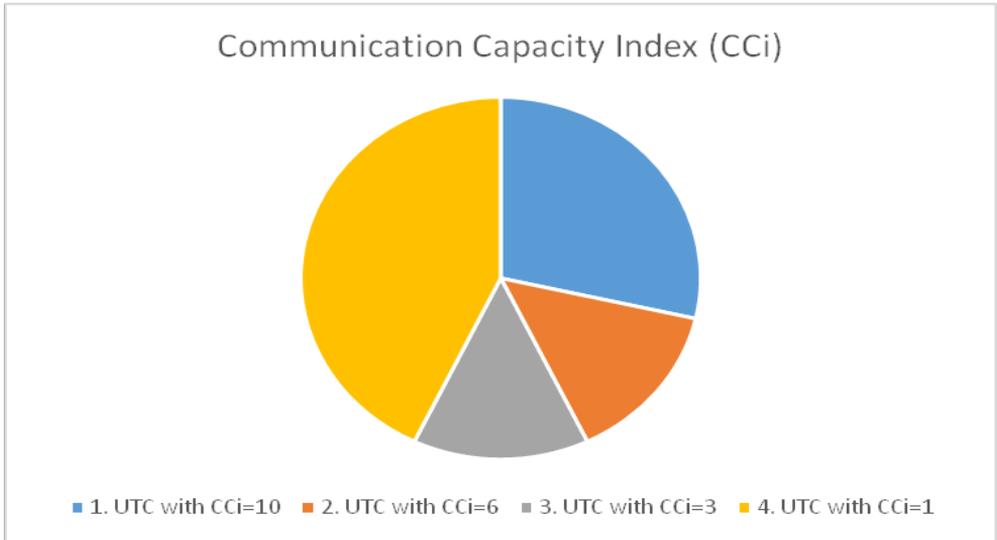


Figure 2. Communication capacity index (CC_i)

Source: Author’s work, 2021

3. Conclusion

1. If we compare the initial data of UTCs (Table 1) and the obtained results (Table 2), we see that the Communication Capacity Index of the UTC as an indicator of the communication potential of the community partly depends on the number of merged councils in the UTC (communities with the highest level unite, on average, 5 councils per UTC, while the average in the UTC with the lowest level is more than 10 councils per UTC). In general, it should be noted that UTCs with a lower Communication Capacity Index are characterized by a larger average size of their territory (22.5% more than the UTC with the highest CC_i) and a larger average population (73.3% more than UTC with the highest CC_i).

2. The Communication Capacity Index may depend on the community’s ability to communicate through information, consultation, dialogue and partnership. The information level is the simplest form of communication, and without it the work of the community is simply impossible. However, the partnership level shows a high level of communication of the community and its ability to attract investment and non-budget funds and participate in competitions for grants and

various community development projects. This can be ensured by the active participation of citizens in local decision-making.

3. The study of the communication of township UTCs shows that in the field of UTC territory management the issue of communication interaction (through information, consultations, dialogue and partnership) between government bodies and the UTC population is extremely topical.

4. The Communication Capacity Index proposed in this study allows the openness of UTC governing bodies to be characterized, and in fact it characterizes the level of trust of the local population regarding the activities of UTC bodies.

5. Bilateral communication is a guarantee of successful interaction between local governments, local people, business structures, investors and civil society institutions.

6. The evolution of a UTC from information (the simplest form of communication) to partnership (the highest level of communication) involves the active participation of the population in local decision-making and the ability of the UTC to attract non-budget funds for community development. That is, the main function of UTC communication is the struggle for resources: human, financial, investment, etc.

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JUNGTINIŲ TERITORINIŲ BENDRUOMENIŲ KOMUNIKACIJOS INDEKSAS UKRAINOS EUROPOS INTEGRACIJOS POLITIKOS SĄLYGOMIS

***Anotacija.** Straipsnis skirtas suvienytų teritorinių bendruomenių komunikacinių gebėjimų indeksui sukurti. Jame, analizuojant bendruosius bendruomenių komunikacinio vystymosi pagrindinius tyrimus, parodoma, kad reikia skubiai išmatuoti šį procesą. Todėl šiame darbe tyrėjai siekia nustatyti suvienytų teritorinių bendruomenių pajėgumų komunikacijos indeksą Ukrainos Europos integracijos politikos kontekste. Tam autoriai taiko šiuos metodus: statistinių duomenų ir paso požymių analizės metodą, lyginamąjį metodą ir kt. Išanalizavus keturis Mykolajivo srities teritorinių bendruomenių komunikacijos (informavimo, konsultavimo, dialogo, partnerystės) lygius, buvo nustatytos atitinkamos jungtinės teritorinės bendruomenės, turinčios aukščiausių ir žemiausių komunikacijos indeksą, kuris atsispindi lentelėse ir diagramose. Atlikę tyrimą, autoriai nustatė suvienytų teritorinių bendruomenių bendravimo sąveikos ypatumus ir modelius (gyvenviečių, sujungtų teritorinių Mykolajivo regiono bendruomenių pavyzdžiu).*

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