

Topic : Presentation on importance of social networks and information technology

Speaker : Lucia Franchini

**Ombudsman of Tuscany Region (Italy) and President of National Coordination of Italian Regional and Autonomous Provinces Ombudsman Institution
(Tuscany Region Ombudsman Office, Italy)**

The role of networked media, in particular Internet and social tools: the virtual office and the re-shaping of ombudsman services to the citizen

The ombudsman's objective is to contribute towards a development of public service culture with the following qualities:

- Fairness
- Dedication
- Commitment
- Openness
- Accountability
- promotion of the right to good public administration.

The ombudsman plays an important role as to the protection of democracy and has the duty to guarantee the good administration and the transparency. We must be very clear as the ombudsman does not use the traditional instruments of justice to solve the mistakes. Therefore it is a different instrument than the court, it is a complementary and, in a sense, alternative instrument for the respect of legality and human rights: the ombudsman is added to the law, but he/she goes **far beyond the law**. Indeed the ombudsman uses the laws as well as the principles, most of what is done by the ombudsman is **fair** and to be fair means to be beyond the mandatory law, to find solutions, to solve the problems with the address to instruments that go further what is foreseen by the law. The mission is to promote a culture of the service and this is possible with a special mentality: a set of principles that concern the behaviour and the way of thinking, a positive way for which in one conflict, opposition there is not a winning part and a losing part . The way of thinking of the ombudsman have to be **positive**, a way to solve a situation and it is not to be guilty or a fault; it is a strategy based on what is **accountability**, that means **to be responsible for what has been done**, a strategy to promote among politicians and administrators as well as among citizens. Another important principle along this culture of the service is **transparency**.

The ombudsman must insist on the transparency in the public administration but in order to convince **he must be at the same time transparent inside and to adopt a clear strategy for a proper communication with the public and the citizens.**

A good communications include three main principles:

- to give a good explanation
- to listen carefully
- to be open towards citizens

The media tools are ideally suited to the ombudsman's role. The ombudsman, by definition, has a human profile, he doesn't represent just another bureaucratic office.

For the purposes of effective exercise of Ombudsman's functions in the area of raising awareness of human rights, generating public understanding of a necessity to respect and ensure observance of human rights, creating human rights culture, as well as improving the level of knowledge of human rights issues, it is good to develop cooperation between the Institute of Ombudsman and mass media in the following areas:

1. Cooperation between Ombudsman and mass media in the area of building awareness of human rights among general public;
2. Promoting activities of Ombudsman with other national human rights institutions or with the world of No profit Associations;
3. Publishing results of human rights monitoring activities undertaken by Ombudsman;
4. Periodical legal publications play an important role in improving legal awareness of population, providing citizens with broad access to legal information, discussing urgent issues in the improvement of legislative and judicial systems.

The social media accounts are a great way to interact with the Office. The use of social media by the Office of Ombudsman is intended to encourage interaction between the users of these platforms. **Our activity through a social media presents a new way of operating, thinking and being understood.**

Social media is distinct from industrial media, such as newspapers, television, and film, which are created primarily for delivering information and entertain the visitor/consumer and generally require significant resources to publish information. Social media comprises relatively inexpensive and accessible tools that enable anyone (even private individuals) using them to publish or access information.

Through social media, the people can see that profile. We can speak to them directly and can let them know about our work, the results we've achieved, the difference we've made for others – thousands of people at a time, even if we are at home.

I have always believed that you cannot be an effective ombudsman unless you are a visible ombudsman. Your work gains credibility with exposure. This increases the ombudsman's power of moral suasion, which is the greatest power we possess.

INCREASED INTERACTION, TRANSPARENCY AND PRODUCTIVITY

Indeed, that is one of the hallmarks of our approach: The public face we present to the world, through our communications, is part of our way to proceed, it is part of our strategy from the beginning. We might call for complaints to come forward on a particular issue. We might seek out groups or individuals on social media who could have similar experiences or valuable evidence and it is an extremely efficient way to keep them informed about steps of our activity for example and maybe to receive help, indications and so on. We have possibility to make closed groups to discuss common subjects. We might let stakeholders know that an investigation is nearly done, or a report is nearly complete, or that we are about to hold a news conference.

BENEFITS OUTWEIGH THE OBSTACLES

From experience, I can say that the benefits of using social media and new technologies have far outweighed the risks and costs. Many of the fears that public officials have expressed regarding these technologies have been unfounded and if there are some examples of mistakes that have been made, these are generally attributable to failures of using the media, not failures of the medium or technology.

Certainly there are areas of legitimate concern. We don't accept formal complaints through social media, for example, because of confidentiality. We remind our citizens not to share too many personal details. We must notify the competent authorities if someone uses the network tool for reprehensible actions and at the sole individual satisfaction, especially when the victims are children: it is a new task for us like also to prevent theft of identity and recognize this offense.

They might be limited by ability, income, geography or government policy. We can't assume that social media reach everyone. But neither should we assume that these technologies are the tools of only the young, the educated and the elite.

In my experience, for instance, I tried to encourage people without computer or computer skills through agreements with associations that could help these people by giving them information and giving them the opportunities to access in their offices

Using social media and new technologies has increased our visibility, our productivity, our ability to gather evidence, our connection with stakeholders, our interactions with traditional media and our reputation as an innovative, approachable, effective office.

From a relatively small investment of time and staff, and a modest investment in technology, we have obtained enormous benefits. We have saved money on self-promotion, travels for speeches and investigations, and events reaching new audiences and attracting more people who need our help. We have also gained an ability to listen to people's concerns outside of the formal complaint process, allowing us to better have the ombudsman's role as a barometer for the activity of Public Administration.

From that perspective, using interactive media is not just a choice for the modern ombudsman – it's a duty.

Now I introduce you our technology choice about interactive media: National database : Di.As.Pro. an open software for working together in virtual way and more the use of twitter:

- Diaspro: a work flow for a new operative way for Italian Ombudsmanship
- Twitter: lead to an informal way to communicate for helping the rapid spread of news and allowing to contact more people, especially young people

Principal functions of Diaspro:

- Workflow
- Electronic record(dematerialization)
- Electronic documents in pdf that are automatically delivered by e-mail
- Possibility to work by remote workstation through Internet protected connection
- Different control panels according to subject involved (Ombudsman, Ombudsman staff, Secretary Ombudsman Staff, Front Office Staff)

Digital databases:

- Applicants and Public Administrations
- Classifications of cases
- Digital copy of letters entering and sent by the office
- Juridic documents (shared) and generic documents relating cases

Ability to track workflow:

- Staff can check cases she/he had assigned
- Ombudsman or manager can check all office work at glance
- Records of cases aren't moving, they are all shared on line
- Automatic backup
- Reports and statistics
- Possibility to publish reports on Ombudsman website
- Possibility for the applicant to check his own case and to leave message to the functionary who has it in charge (by previous registration on line)

The system utilities help our work in order to be more efficient and flexible like e.g. date and update in real time, who do what, to share documents with other, possibility to adequate software to different and several offices, electronic signature and so on. Another important function is to facilitate the process management, in which way? The possibility to define standard procedures, internal check instruments, availability of statistics on the website, possibility to access electronic file and to interact with the people, remote access to data.

Lastly we improve the opportunities of cooperation among Ombudsman offices (expecially Regional offices) indeed through networking is possible

- Share techniques of solution of similar cases
- Share different regulatory rules of the case examined
- Share studies, jurisprudence and so on about a certain subject
- Collect data in order to have reports to Parliament

In short time we think it'll be possible to request accreditation to the workflow (Diaspro) and so the user can follow the path of their practice online. In this case we are thinking to activate also appropriate **app**, a mobile application that's designed to perform a specific function directly for the user or, in some cases, for another application program.

Twitter. It is a perfect tool that enables to communicate quickly to the public and the target audience and it is important to constantly listen and watch the conversations on Twitter for becoming an active part of the online community. This is particularly true both when it comes to prevention or when it is time to react: prevention is always better than reaction. Twitter is part of a broader communication strategy and allows us a variety of channels to be used to listen and also to share with employees, citizens, institutions, and association.