E-PARTICIPATION:
WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM ONE ANOTHER?

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E-participation is one of the most important factors ensuring the effectiveness of governance, especially at the local level, therefore, local self-government bodies should take steps to successfully implement participation. However, it should be noted that this process is not so easy, there are various factors that can both hinder and contribute to the successful launch of participation. In this paper, an attempt has been made to present the participation initiatives of some cities and accordingly to highlight what obstacles existed in the process, as well as what factors contributed to the success of the process.

Participation is a key dimension of governance and is one of the pillars of sustainable development[1]. With the development of information and communication technologies, the concept of e-participation emerged and gradually began to gain great importance and be widely used. Although e-participation initiatives are implemented at both national and local levels, in our paper we will consider only the local level. The reason for this is that innovations in e-participation largely come from the local level.

Among the e-participation initiatives at the local level, we consider it important to present the e-participation platform of the City of Madrid, known as Decide Madrid. Decide Madrid was one of winners of the 2018 United

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[1] https://publicadministration.un.org/egovkb/en-us/Reports/UN-E-Government-Survey-2020

Nations Public Service Award. In addition to the United Nations award, Decide Madrid can be considered successful, or at least as a benchmark e-participation initiative, because of its continuity after a change of government in the municipality and its internal and external institutionalization (the last stage of e-participation initiatives). This initiative includes some of the most popular e-participation tools (e-forum, e-consultation, e-voting and online participatory budgets) in a single platform created and managed by the city council. Until the end of 2018, more than 400,000 users were registered, with participatory budgets being the tool that has attracted the highest level of participation. The software created for this platform, Consul, has been adopted — or it is in the process of being implemented - in more than 100 institutions from 33 countries that build a collaboration network. Porto Alegre, the first city in the world that implemented participatory budgets in 1989, adopted Consul in August 2018 in order to implement its first online participatory budgets and online polls. Thus, the example of Decide Madrid can be considered a good practice of electronic participation and a source of inspiration for others.

So it would be useful to identify the critical success factors and the main barriers that are conditioning the performance of Decide Madrid. It can be done by using a triple classification: (1) distinguishing among contextual, organizational and individual level factors; (2) considering whether they are more related to the ICT component, public sector context or democratic participation; and (3) differentiating among the different stages of development of the initiative (adoption, implementation and institutionalization). A mix of success factors has been present in all the stages of Decide Madrid. This initiative had a smooth adoption, with no significant barriers at this stage. This smooth adoption was mainly due to a mix of strong political support, favorable ICT-related factors and environmental

pressure for transformation from stakeholders (normative isomorphism). The implementation has been the most critical stage, based on the number of success factors and barriers found. Its institutionalization was also favored by a good mix of success factors, the slow process of organizational change being the only significant barrier found.

The politicians and civil servants interviewed indicate three factors as being particularly relevant for the success of Decide Madrid: the high level of implication of the city council towards citizen participation, the method used to recruit the workers for that general directorate and the background of senior managers about citizen participation and ICTs. Therefore, individual and organizational factors, related to the public sector context and democratic participation dimension seem to have been the most important, as compared to contextual or ICT-related factors. The role of the Mayor was crucial in launching Decide Madrid, improving the coordination of the council areas and ensuring there was enough financial, political and managerial support to develop and run the platform. This confirms the importance of political leaders' support and the need to integrate citizen engagement with traditional structures and processes in local governments[2].

As for the barriers, organizational factors are the most critical in Decide Madrid. Most of them are related to the need to improve how the city council deals with some basic aspects related to democratic participation (e.g., transparency-related issues and feedback) and the slow process of organizational change inherent in the public sector context, although some barriers related to the ICT and democratic dimensions (lack of moderation or other mechanisms to organize debates and proposals and security concerns) have been found.

Although the citizens interviewed have been critical and sometimes have questioned the levels of participation and the effectiveness

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[7]   https://www.researchgate.net/publication/339459330_Decide_Madrid_A_Critical_Analysis_of_an_Award-Winning_e-Participation_Initiative

of Decide Madrid, both citizens and municipal staff consider that Decide Madrid is necessary, which supports the success of this initiative. This agreement among interviewees evidences the high motivation for e-participation and direct citizen participation for both the city council and the citizens, although it seems that both citizens and the city council need more time to adapt to online direct participation.

Notable example of e-participation platform is also Better Reykjavik, which won the Europe e-Democracy Award in 2011. Better Reykjavik is an online platform for the crowdsourcing of solutions to urban challenges launched by the Icelandic Citizens Foundation in May 2010. It has multiple democratic functions which can roughly be split up into three divisions: Agenda setting, Participatory budgeting and Policy crowdsourcing. The website gives residents of Reykjavik the opportunity to submit original ideas and solutions to municipal-level issues within the city. Citizens of Reykjavik are given the opportunity to submit, debate, and prioritize policy proposals and ideas. Moreover, it allows residents to vocalize, debate, and amend a variety of ideas which they believe are crucial, and gives the voters a direct influence on decision making. In 2011 a Participatory budgeting started within Better Reykjavik using the name Better Neighborhoods (later My Neighborhood). There Reykjavik residents and the city administration collaborate to determine capital allocation for construction and maintenance projects within the ten main neighborhoods of the city. Participation has increased steadily with new records reached almost every year. There are many innovative elements within the Better Reykjavik platform and one of the reasons for its success and general acceptance is its unique debate system which is based on users adding talking points and arguments for and against ideas instead of the traditional comment section which often goes into heated arguments and name callings with seldom

useful content which deters most people from participating but encourages extreme views and words. This debate system has been a part of Better Reykjavik since its inception. Better Reykjavik incorporates an Up/Down 'voting' system where users vote up and down not only ideas but also debate points from other users which results in a system that, without moderation or other administrative efforts, presents the city with a list of ideas that are prioritized by its users as well as with the best points (according to its users) for and against each idea. This makes it very easy for the city to evaluate which ideas are good and which not as they are in fact evaluated by the citizens. Other notable innovative elements are the possibility to use video and audio to record your ideas and debate points. This method attracts users that otherwise might hesitate to participate. This benefits both the city and its citizens as their opinions and expertise are used to improve the city.

Better Reykjavik uses machine translation as well as AI to recommend ideas and give smart notifications and a toxicity sensor to alert admins about abusive content although our debate system makes this rare. There is also an automatic classification of ideas[3].

The success of the Better Reykjavik program can be seen in the age demographics of its participants. There has been a steady increase in participation in all age groups and there does not appear to be decrease in participation or enthusiasm since the Best Party has been dissolved. Participants in the 26-35 and 36-45 age groups have the highest representation (approximately 25% for both groups). Interestingly, however, participants in the 16-20 and 21-25 age ranges are actually represented less than participants in the 50-60 and 61+ age groups with less than 8% representation for both of the former groups and between 8 and 15% for the latter groups. Based on this information, it can be inferred that the Better Reykjavik project was meant to encourage the participation of all age groups

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[3] https://oecd-opsi.org/innovations/better-reykjavik/?fbclid=IwAR2rDbGQsLlxpb7qLUbGTtQ_GzqXmexP7EOVQ9vil3xvordRyzy6N-Sct2RQ

in the democratic process and was not targeted towards any specific age group (e.g. young people).

Better Reykjavik's success has depended also on quick user-uptake and Iceland's strong tradition of online democratic participation.

Despite the unprecedented success and potential of BR in the context of global democratic movement, there are some limitations regarding its internal structure, and its long-term evolution. The BR policy-making process is essentially non-binding since the final decision rests in the hands of city councillors who decide which proposals get passed and implemented. Magnus Jonsson calls this process "advocacy democracy" instead of direct participation since the final decision is left to the discretion of the elites. In the current system of BR, citizens have developed policies to improve the quality of their everyday lives involving school field trips, pedestrian park and homeless shelters; they are largely precluded from taking on greater political and economic matters since those are usually managed by the specialists and experts in contemporary society.

It is not exactly clear what the project will accomplish in the long term since the organizers do not have a detailed plan of how the BR project will be applied on a national scale and used to further broader reforms. The organizers make it clear that the main objective of the BR project is to empower ordinary citizens while detaching itself from any type of clear political label. The project's lack of long-term planning speaks to its spontaneity and the fact that it is a bottom-up, autonomous movement. There is a real possibility that the BR project will lose its momentum once the country's economy improves and people's enthusiasm for the project dies down. Landemore refers to a fickle public that oscillates in its opinion according to economic conditions as one of the possible reasons why the Icelandic constitutional reform experienced a decline in public support. Yet there is still ground for optimism. The organizers have made a wise decision to institutionalize the project from

the very beginning, making it less vulnerable to changes in political scene and public opinions. The municipal structures and the relationship between government and the citizens have been fundamentally transformed. The BR project is here to stay. The organizers have created a precious legacy for the future generation to take advantage of and to expand upon.

It would also be useful to present the e-participation experience of two Swedish cities. Sweden's first e-petitioning system was launched in 2008 in the city of Malmö in southern Sweden. The most significant factor for the success of e-petitioning systems is said to be the extent to which public authorities take petitions seriously when preparing an institutional response. However, a research-based evaluation in 2010 concluded that the local authority had big difficulties handling input from the citizens. Just like in Gothenburg, broadened participation was achieved in quantitative terms with about 200 e-petitions the first year. But the political and administrative decision makers refused to give a formal response to petitioners, which the petitioners themselves had taken for granted.

After 16 months the actual participation in the Malmö petition system added up to 210 initiatives and 5,500 signatures. The high number of proposals the first months has decreased and settled at a level of about ten proposals per month, while the average number of signatures per initiative indicates a small increase over time. If we compare the result with the situation in the British city of Bristol, we can draw two conclusions. Firstly, the number of initiatives is significantly higher in Malmö. Bristol recorded 28 e-petitions during the first period, between September 2004 and January 2006. Secondly, the proportion of signatures per initiative is significantly higher in Bristol, which registered 9,590 signatures during the same period. These differences might be due to differences in design. In Malmö, the process is less formalized than in Bristol; there are no requirements related to the wording of petitions or to municipal

review and feedback. The Malmö model thus implies lower thresholds for those wishing to write petitions, but also weaker incentives for those who want to sign[4].

When asking the petitioners what convinced them to participate in the Malmö Initiative, they state that simplicity is key. Also the competitive element of collecting signatures is important, as well as petitions' ability to generate publicity online and in local media. The critical point is, however, the extent to which this is a real opportunity to get answers on pressing political issues when they arise. A survey among petitioners shows that more than 80% of the respondents "expected the politicians to read the petition", and more than 70% expected feedback on the handling of the petition and that the relevant committees and / or the council would be informed. However, the actual response is not commensurate with these expectations. Several leading politicians opposed a formalized process in which they would consider the petitions in an accountable manner with reference to the argument that the parties' power to set the agenda may be weakened. When the petitioners were asked whether they had received a response from municipal politicians, only 13% answered "yes". For citizens, this may seem like a paradoxical call: "We may not listen, but tell us what you think!"

In late 2004 the city of Gothenburg launched an online forum in relation to a large redevelopment project as part of an innovative effort to break with traditional structures for policy-making and planning. The renewal of the city's Södra Älvstranden area was characterized by two challenging traits. Firstly, considerable responsibilities for the project were outsourced to a company. Ävstranden Utvecklings AB (ÄUAB) was owned by the municipality, and its board consisted of key politicians in Gothenburg and "heavyweight" representatives of commercial interests in the city. This company was given the responsibility of managing the redevelopment of Södra Älvstranden and bringing together investors willing to invest in the project and buy real estate in the area. The basic financing concept was this: a part of the area was planned, developed and then sold to private stakeholders. The money raised through that process was then used to plan and redevelop the next section of the area. In this way, the redevelopment project would have a minimal financial impact on taxpayers .

Secondly, the project aimed at broadening and deepening citizens' participation. Since the municipality was critical about how urban planning was handled by its planning department, also the mission of enhancing citizen participation was "contracted out" to ÄUAB. The following dialogue with citizens comprised two components: an online forum and an exhibition at the City museum. Activity on the online forum was limited in the early phases, but increased as the process continued: by November 2006, 980 posts had been registered on the forum. The contributions focused on city life, housing, transport, the environment and the participation process. In addition, the forum had such features as "question and opinion of the week" and "advice to the editors". Many contributions were direct proposals and opinions about how the new city space ought to be used. The discussion in the forum was vibrant and included heated debates on a multitude of issues.

The way communications evolved between different actors was the most interesting aspect of the Gothenburg participatory experience. On the one hand, the ambitions were high when it came to creating new arenas for open communication; the activities at the city museum and the Internet debate indicate this. On the other hand, the experiment was characterized by an absence of formal decision-makers. The decision to keep the politicians out of the debate was made by the leadership of the political parties, seemingly influenced by contemporary public management philosophies in which party

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[4]   https://www.researchgate.net/publication/256666996_Case_Studies_on_E-Participation_Policy_Sweden_Estonia_and_Iceland

politics is considered irrational, contributing to locked-in positions, and a hindrance to problem-solving. Another interpretation would be that politicians, by distancing themselves from the participation process, reserved a right to take an independent decision in the end. In any case, the informal citizen participation process became disconnected from the formal decision-making arenas, and potentially worthwhile interactions between these arenas were lost. The decision-makers were unable to communicate important considerations for enabling the formulation of "realistic proposals" and the citizens could not relate to the decision-makers' preferences and priorities. Instead, the "dialogue" was limited to a communication that can be compared with that of a child (the citizen) asking for sweets and the responsible parent (the decision-maker) referring to limited resources and difficulties implementing the request instead of actually engaging in a discussion.

In the end, the impact of citizen participation on the actual decisions was limited and it became clear that citizens and decision-makers had different perceptions about what "game" was being "played". Citizens taking part in the online debate and those interviewed for the evaluation report expressed expectations about an open process where participating citizens have the ability to influence the process. Such expectations were not unfounded—there are several examples of the term "influence" being used in information materials and advertisements that urge citizens to participate in the process. Representatives from ÄUAB and the planning department, however, presented another picture. They stated that the dialogue was characterized by extended public deliberations that constituted "foreplay" or an "additional element" that preceded the formal planning process and the implementation. Consequently, the participation process was more about a diffuse contribution to planning rather than a more direct influence over the future development of

Södra Älvstranden. From this perspective, citizen participation was more about sharing problems than about sharing power.

Thus, by examining the e-participation experience of a number of the aforementioned cities, we can outline what factors should be considered in order for e-participation initiatives to be successful and not fail. E-participation has a number of stakeholders, among which local self-government bodies and citizens are particularly important. It should be noted that the role of both local self-government bodies and citizens is very important, but the primary role still belongs to local self-government bodies. Let's try to explain below what the reason for the above-mentioned is. Implementation of e-participation in the city implies that local self-government bodies launch e-participation platforms, and citizens begin to participate. However, it may happen that residents do not actively participate. In this case, local self-government bodies can ensure public participation through its pur-poseful actions. In other words, if residents are passive and do not actively participate, government bodies can change the situation. However, even if the demand side is provided and the supply side does not take appropriate steps, participation will not have meaningful results. In this context, it is important to note that the consistent and purposeful steps of local self-government bodies at all stages of e-participation initiatives to ensure the active participation of the population are equally important. In other words, other factors may be important at the initial stage of the implementation of the e-platform, and other factors may already be important at the launch stage. Among the important factors at the initial stage, we can mention the active awareness of the population, the simplicity and ease of use of the e-platform and a number of other factors, and already at the launch stage, it is especially important to provide feedback to the population, give a response, provide them with information about whether their proposal has been considered and how useful it has been. However, it should be

noted that in addition to the above, there are many other factors that determine the effectiveness of e-participation.

Studying the experience of e-participation of the city of Yerevan, which is the capital of the RA and the largest city of the country, let's try to find out if the platform was successful and what steps should be taken by the local self-government bodies of the city of Yerevan to face the obstacles. In 2019, Yerevan Municipality created the "Active Citizen" e-platform, which aims to ensure better and closer contact with citizens and implement participatory governance. On this platform, Yerevan residents can voice their problems, present new ideas and suggestions.

The advantage of this e-participation platform is that the entire process is open, that is, the issues raised and the proposed solutions are visible to every citizen who accesses the platform. As another positive aspect of the e-platform can be highlighted the fact that citizens can vote for the solution of the problem they are concerned about, thereby revealing to the local self-government bodies the will of the majority of citizens. In addition, as an advantage of the platform, it can be noted that all proposals and voting results are recorded using Blockchain technology, which confirms the reliability of the data and excludes falsification.

However, it is clear from studying the platform that there are a number of gaps. Thus, at the beginning, it should be noted that this e-platform does not provide extensive opportunities for participation, it contains only one tool for electronic participation, which is not enough for success. Besides, the number of citizens registered on the platform, the number of submitted proposals and opinions is small. In addition, proposals were submitted by Yerevan citizens only in 2019, just when the platform was launched. Let us add that according to the results of the survey conducted by us among the citizens of Yerevan, it becomes clear that most of the residents are not even aware that such a platform for participation exists. Thus, it can be concluded from the study that there is a lack of strong political will of Yerevan local self-government bodies, there are no clearly targeted steps and a long-term strategy of electronic participation, due to which the launch of the platform failed at the initial stages.

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Արաքսյա ԲԱՐՍԵՂՅԱՆ
«Ամբերդ» հետազոտական կենտրոնի կրտսեր հետազոտող, ՀՊՏՀ, ասպիրանտ

ՔԱՂԱՔԱՅԻՆ ՏՆՏԵՍՈՒԹՅՈՒՆ
ԷԼԵԿՏՐՈՆԱՅԻՆ ՄԱՍՆԱԿՑՈՒԹՅՈՒՆ. ԻՆՉ ԿԱՐՈՂ ԵՆՔ ՍՈՎՈՐԵԼ ՄԻՄՅԱՆՑԻՑ

Էլեկտրոնային մասնակցությունը կառավարման արդյունավետությունն ապահովող կարևորագույն գործոններից է՝ հատկապես տեղական մակարդակում, ուստի տեղական ինքնակառավարման մարմինները պետք է ձեռնարկեն համապատասխան քայլեր դա հաջողությամբ իրագործելու համար: Սակայն, հարկ է նշել, որ այս գործընթացն այնքան էլ հեշտ չէ. կան տարբեր գործոններ, որոնք կարող են և՛ խոչընդոտել մասնակցության հաջող մեկնարկը, և՛ նպաստել դրան: Հոդվածում փորձ է արվել ներկայացնելու որոշ քաղաքների էլեկտրոնային մասնակցության նախաձեռնությունները՝ ընդգծելով, թե ինչ խոչընդոտներ են եղել դրանք իրականացնելիս, ինչպես նաև անդրադարձ է կատարվել այն գործոններին, որոնք նպաստել են գործընթացի հաջողությանը:

Հիմնաբառեր. էլեկտրոնային մասնակցություն, էլեկտրոնային հարթակներ, քաղաքացիների մասնակցություն, էլեկտրոնային մասնակցության նախաձեռնություններ, էլեկտրոնային մասնակցության գործիքներ, հաջողության գործոններ, ձախողում, տեղական մակարդակ

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ГОРОДСКАЯ ЭКОНОМИКА
ЭЛЕКТРОННОЕ УЧАСТИЕ: ЧЕМУ МЫ МОЖЕМ НАУЧИТЬСЯ ДРУГ У ДРУГА?

Электронное участие является одним из важнейших факторов, обеспечивающих эффективность управления, особенно на местном уровне, поэтому органы местного самоуправления должны предпринять шаги для успешного внедрения участия. Однако следует отметить, что этот процесс не так прост, существуют различные факторы, которые могут как препятствовать, так и способствовать успешному запуску участия. В данной статье была предпринята попытка представить инициативы по участию некоторых городов и, соответственно, выделить, какие препятствия были в этом процессе, а также какие факторы способствовали успеху процесса.

Ключевые слова: электронное участие, электронные платформы, участие граждан, инициативы электронного участия, инструменты электронного участия, факторы успеха, неудачи, местный уровень