

ENGAGING CITIZENS IN THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS. OPPORTUNITIES OF DIGITAL DEMOCRACY IN LATVIA

EDUARDS LIELPĒTERS¹

University of Latvia (Latvia)

ABSTRACT

The rapid development of internet and technologies in the 21st century is providing an opportunity for the development of digital democracy – citizen engagement in the decision-making process in an easier, faster and more contemporary way. The paper analysis Latvian public administration's attitude to the development of digital democracy in Latvia, looking into digital engagement as a possible solution that could foster the low rates of civic and political participation in Latvia. Research methods of the paper consists of an analysis of academic publications on digital democracy and political engagement, and survey to the representatives of the public administration in Latvia. Conclusions of the paper suggest that there are good preconditions for the development of digital democracy in Latvia, however, there is a need for a common regulation for how digital communication and online participation is coordinated. Public institutions should pay more attention to Latvian youth, educating them about public administration and political engagement, thus ensuring that gradually Latvian citizens become more knowledgeable about advantages and necessity to participate in the decision-making process of public administration in Latvia.

KEYWORDS: *citizen engagement, digital democracy, public institutions, social media.*

JEL CODES: I28, L86, M15, O31

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.15181/rfds.v29i3.1994>

Introduction

The level of citizen engagement in the decision-making process of public administration in Latvia is comparatively low. Around half of citizens vote in elections, thus determining to which political groups they are delegating their democratic power and to which direction the future development of the country will be organised. Nevertheless, even fewer citizens are participating in the day-to-day decision-making process, thereby, the final decision made by public administration is not always reflecting the needs and desires of citizens. Dissatisfaction with decisions made by public administration leads to a lower trust in the institutions and government in general. According to the Standard Eurobarometer 90, in Latvia, trust in the institutions is comparatively low: 32 percent of citizens in 2018 trusted public administration, 31 percent trusted Latvian Government, and 21 percent trusted Latvian Parliament (European Commission, 2018). There is a need to find new forms of participation and new types of communication channels that would be more attractive to citizens than current ones and foster citizen engagement in the decision-making process.

The purpose of the article is to examine digital democracy as a solution that could foster citizen participation in the decision-making process, therefore, helping to improve citizen attitude to the decisions made by public institutions and attitude towards the Latvian public administration in general. Accordingly, the object of the paper is citizen participation in the decision-making process of public administration in Latvia. To achieve the purpose of the article, several tasks are carried out: academic publications about digital democracy and political

¹ Eduards Lielpēters – PhD student at the University of Latvia, Faculty of Business, Management and Economics
Scientific interests: civic and political engagement and use of social media for educational and informative purposes
E-mail: eduards@klubsmaja.lv

engagement are analysed; current types of citizen engagement in Latvia are identified and evaluated; statistical information on citizen engagement in Latvia and the European Union is summarized and evaluated.

A survey was carried out to the representatives of the public administration, to evaluate public administration's attitude towards digital democracy in Latvia. Survey was conducted in April and May 2019 using online research survey software QuestionPro. A personal invitation to fill out the questionnaire was sent to the representatives of Latvian public administration who are responsible for communication with society and cooperation with citizens. In total, 55 fully or partially completed surveys were received. Sixteen respondents were from Latvian ministries, there were also respondents representing Latvian Parliament, Cross-Sectoral Coordination Centre, local governments and several other Latvian public institutions. In the questionnaire, each representative of the public administration was asked to provide an in-depth information on how his/her institution is using tools of the digital environment, such as the social media and smartphone applications to communicate with citizens and to engage them in the decision-making process. Respondents also evaluated different forms of participation and communication channels from the perspective of the institution they were representing.

1. Citizens and political participation

Maureen Taylor and Michael L. Kent described engagement as a “part of the dialogue, and through engagement, organizations and public can make decisions that create social capital. Engagement is both an orientation that influences interactions and the approach that guides the process of interactions among groups” (Taylor, Kent, 2014: 384). It has been nearly 30 years since Latvia gained back independence from the Soviet Union, hence, returned to democracy as well. But the country and its citizens are still learning the value of democracy and citizen engagement. In reference to foreign observers, democracy in Latvia is stagnating in the development and further improvements are needed. According to the Democracy Index 2018, published by The Economist Intelligence Unit, Latvia is evaluated as a “flawed democracy” with 7.38 overall score and 5.56 rate in political participation, which is the lowest rate in the Baltic States (Estonia: 6.67 and Lithuania: 6.11). Latvia has had similar results in this rating for the last decade with the lowest overall score being 7.05 in 2010 (The Economist Intelligence Unit Limited, 2019). According to the OECD Indicators of well-being, between all OECD countries, in 2017, Latvia was in the 26th place in the civic engagement & governance rating (OECD, 2019). According to the evaluation of global civil society alliance CIVICUS: “The civil society sector in Latvia is relatively small in size due to limited financing and limited popular support” (CIVICUS, 2018). In the National Development Plan of Latvia for 2014–2020, citizen engagement is mentioned in the context of a strategic objective “Belonging to Latvia: Cooperation and Culture” where the goal for civic participation index of the population is set to 19 percent for year 2020, 7.4 percent in year 2009 is recognised as a base value (Cross-Sectoral Coordination Centre, 2012). The possibility to reach better citizen engagement results in Latvia depends on financial resources, but also comprehension on the democratic process and purpose is still an area where much work is needed. According to analysis by Vittoria Marino and Letizia Lo Presti, the most often recognised benefits of civic engagement activities are: “Access, involvement and participation; collective actions; democracy; social wellness; trust and transparency; the legitimacy of decision making; informing; relationship and dialogue; and civic relevance and inclusion” (Marino, Presti, 2018: 291).

As seen in Figure 1, in Latvia, participation rates in elections are gradually decreasing. The participation rate for Latvian parliament elections has dropped from 71.90 percent in 1995 to 54.56 percent in the latest 2018 elections (Central Election Commission of Latvia, 2018). In the municipal elections, the lowest participation was in 2013 with 45.99 percent (Central Election Commission of Latvia, 2013), but in the latest 2017 municipal elections, 50.39 percent of eligible voters participated (Central Election Commission of Latvia, 2017). Traditionally, the lowest citizen interest in Latvia is in participation in the European Parliament elections – participation rates are below EU average (European Parliament, 2019A), except for 2009 elections when European Parliament elections in Latvia was conducted together with municipal elections. In the latest 2019 European Parliament elections, 33.53 percent of eligible voters participated (Central Election Commission of Latvia, 2019), which is the lowest result in Baltic states, with 37.60 percent turnout in Estonia and 53.48 percent turnout in Lithuania (European Parliament, 2019B).

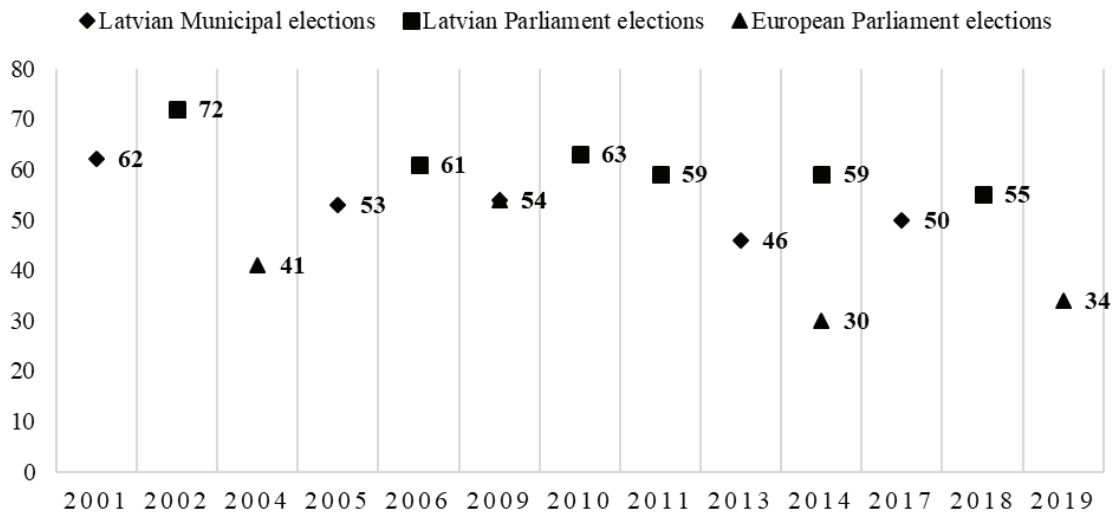


Figure 1. Citizen participation in Municipal, Latvian Parliament and European Parliament elections in Latvia, participation rate (in%)

Source: Author's construction based on data from the Central Election Commission of Latvia, 2019

Latvian citizens have a variety of options to participate in the day-to-day decision-making process and provide their opinion to public institutions – different surveys and consultations, public discussions, rallies and direct communication with local or national authorities. Nevertheless, Latvian public administration sees consultative bodies as the most favourable form of citizen engagement, for example, advisory councils where citizens are represented through a non-governmental organisation or lobby groups. It is estimated that in 2018, there were 170 consultative bodies in Latvian ministries (State Chancellery of Latvia, 2018). According to slightly older data, in 2014, there were 165 consultative bodies in Latvian ministries and citizens there were represented by 1128 different non-governmental organisations (Valsts Kanceleja, 2015). Nevertheless, it must be taken into account that Latvians are not widely participating in the non-governmental organisations in general – only around five percent of Latvian citizens are members of non-governmental organisations (Pārresoru koordinācijas centrs, 2017). Therefore, Latvian citizens are only partly interested in the election process and minimally engaging in the day-to-day decision-making process, thereby, there is a need for new methods and communication channels on how to interest Latvian citizens in the democracy and foster their civic and political participation.

Lars Hasselblad Torres stated that the six aims of citizen participation are: “Informing and educating the general public about important policy issues; Improving government decisions by improving the information flow from citizens to decision-makers; Creating opportunities for citizens to shape and in some cases, determine public policy; Legitimizing government decisions by ensuring that the voices of those impacted by government policy have been heard, considered, and addressed; Involving citizens in monitoring the outcomes of policy for evaluation; and Improving the quality of public life by restoring the trust and engagement of citizens” (Torres, 2007: 135). All of those aims are easier to reach by using digital solutions and providing citizens with access to open data that helps to adopt more thoughtful and qualitative decisions. John C. Bertot et al. are linking use of digital technologies with opportunities to improve citizen trust in government: “The combination of e-government, social media, Web-enabled technologies, mobile technologies, transparency policy initiatives, and citizen desire for open and transparent government are fomenting a new age of opportunity that has the potential to create open, transparent, efficient, effective, and user-centered ICT-enabled services” (Bertot, Jaeger, Grimes, 2010: 268). Although digital democracy is a highly discussed topic in academia for more than ten years, not enough attention is paid to it Latvia, however, in Latvia, there are several preconditions for a successful development of digital democracy.

2. Development of digital democracy

As seen in Figure 2, in the last decade the use of the internet and social media has grown significantly in Latvia (Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia, 2019). However, household internet access in Latvia is below the EU average (89 percent in 2018) and below the access rate in Estonia (90 percent in 2018), but it is slightly above the access rate in Lithuania, which was 78 percent in 2018 (Eurostat, 2019). At the same time, it is important to consider not only the access to the internet, but also the speed of the internet, which is comparatively fast in Latvia. For the last five years, Latvian citizens are also actively using internet in their smartphones (56 percent in 2018), in the youth segment this proportion is even higher – more than 90 percent are using internet and social media via their smartphones. From the perspective of public institutions, this is good news because a significant portion of Latvian citizens are online almost all the time.

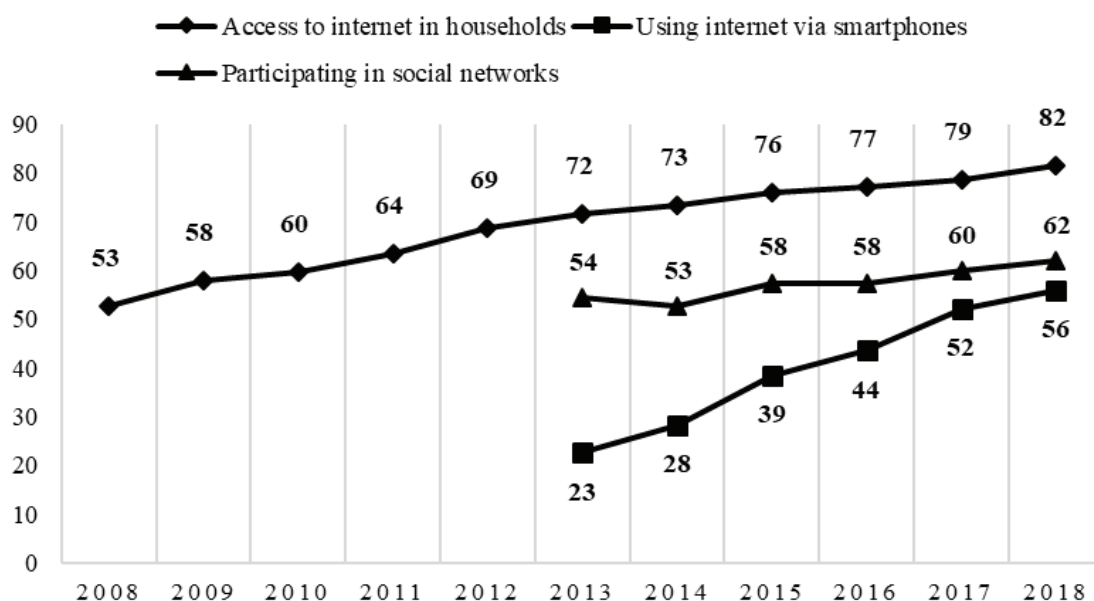


Figure 2. Use of internet and social media in Latvia (2008 until 2018), share (in%)

Source: Author’s construction based on data from the Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia, 2009–2019

It is not enough to have good preconditions, there is also a need for a strategy to successfully use the opportunities. As Taewoo Nam pointed out: “Technology is critical, but it is a tool, not a strategy,” and suggested that main strategies a public institution can use for citizen sourcing to acquire the wisdom of crowds are contests, wikis, social networking, and social voting (Nam, 2012: 15). It must be taken into account that for public institutions it is not easy to adapt to the fast-changing online environment. As John Carlo Bertot et al. indicated: “As new technologies that are currently unimagined will continue to emerge and be adopted by government agencies, the development of more responsive information policies that are based on principles that are not tied to specific technologies will be a vital step in ensuring that policies can remain relevant and useful to government agencies and members of the public” (Bertot, Jaeger, Hansen, 2012: 37). This is also a matter of attitude from the management of the public institution – whether the responsible managers are looking at the digital environment as an opportunity or as an encumbrance. In the case study about digitalization of services in the Dutch municipality, it was emphasized: “If top management is not willing to induce a continuously improving culture throughout the entire organization, this type of culture only becomes established temporarily at the periphery of the organization” (Gravesteijn, Wilderom, 2018: 741). Thereby, implementation of digital democracy innovations is closely connected to the knowledge and will of the public institution’s senior management.

There are several factors that must be considered when designing a strategy for implementation of digital tools for citizen engagement in the decision-making process. One of the most significant factor is regional context. Results of a study on the use of social networking sites for mobilizing activists in the USA, China and Latin America supported the notion that social media help people to be more active in political and civic arenas and help to promote dialogue, however, authors of the study pointed out that: “Activists in China and Latin America assigned more importance to the usefulness of social networking sites in fostering debate, while survey respondents in the United States were significantly more confident in their power to solve society’s problems. (...) cultural settings frame the use of social networking sites for collective action, as activist efforts vary across countries and activists cannot ignore their regional realities – as well as their own patterns of thinking and acting in regard to activism” (Harp, Bachmann, Guo, 2012: 313). Although digital environment and social media are global, people who are using them must be comprehended from the local perspective, in the case of Latvia, those could be specific peculiarities of Latvian behaviour, comparatively small population, communication habits and attitude to public institutions.

A very important regional factor is knowledge and skills of political participation and the use of digital tools in general. In the study on Facebook groups and offline and online political engagement, it was emphasized that: “Online political groups that are facilitated through social network sites platforms such as Facebook perform many similar functions to their offline counterparts. Online political group membership is positively related to offline political participation but appear to fall short on (...) political knowledge. (...) while the groups offer many applications that members can use to feel engaged and politically empowered, the group wall discussion falls short of quality deliberation and offers little substantive information sharing” (Conroy, Feezell, Guerrero, 2012: 1544). Similarly, in the study by Halpern and Gibbs, it was concluded: “Although discussants are not using social media to “attack” other citizens, most of them are not debating rationally or deeply in this media”, thereby “political exchanges in social media may be more superficial in nature, rather than being characterized by in-depth debate or deliberation, and calls into question their efficacy” (Halpern, Gibbs, 2013: 1166). In the study on e-participation in Canada, the importance of educating citizens on new ways of participation and use of digital technologies was pointed out: “Government should pay close attention to this issue and focus on the ancillary factors to enhance citizens’ technological and psychological capability to use online government service. Online service should be flexible, easy to navigate and download, and fully available. At the same time, citizens should get technological tips regarding the handling of technological interfaces associated with e-Gov and the mental motivation to use the system” (Shareef et al., 2011: 28). Furthermore, it is important to consider not only the level of knowledge and skills of citizens who will be using those digital democracy tools, but also the level of knowledge and skills of the employees of the public institutions who has to use this information channel to foster citizen engagement in the decision-making process.

3. Engaging citizens in the decision-making process

Citizen view on their possibilities to provide their individual input in the decision-making process of public institutions was evaluated in a survey that was carried out in 2018 by the State Chancellery of Latvia. Respondents of this survey evaluated their opportunities to participate in the decision-making process as 5.86 on average (in the scale from 1 to 10). Although half of the respondents considered that, in Latvia, various opportunities exist for an individual person to provide his/her opinion to the public institutions, disbelief of citizens in their ability to influence social and political processes is mentioned as an obstacle that hinders wider involvement. Results of the survey point out the lack of feedback from the public institutions as one of reasons for this disbelief (State Chancellery of Latvia, 2018). The digital environment could help to improve the current level of citizen engagement and satisfaction with decision-making process. Also, digital development of Latvia and representation of Latvian public administration in the digital environment creates a notion that Latvia can be used as a positive example how country can use the opportunities of citizen participation in the 21th century. However, a closer look at the online activities of Latvian public administration

and analysis from the perspective of their ability to engage citizens in the decision-making process rises a question whether these opportunities are used successfully. Therefore, to be able to understand what improvements should be made, it is important to understand the viewpoint of the public administration on digital representation and its connection to citizen engagement.

Table 1. Types of communication channels used by Latvian public administration to identify and gain opinion of citizens

<i>n</i> = 32	Age group:	<15	16–19	20–24	25–34	35–44	45–54	55–64	>65
Social network Draugiem.lv		1	2	0	0	1	4	4	3
Social network Facebook.com		2	10	19	26	28	20	16	8
Social network Instagram.com		3	12	13	10	8	7	5	4
Social network Twitter.com		0	2	10	23	27	23	16	7
Social network Youtube.com		1	9	13	19	20	18	11	3
Home page of the institution		5	14	19	24	27	26	25	20
Consultative body / Advisory committee		0	1	5	13	15	17	16	9
Participation portal		1	1	1	2	3	2	2	0
Smartphone application		3	6	6	6	5	3	2	1
Public consultation		4	7	12	14	16	18	17	14
Online survey		4	8	12	14	15	13	12	7

Source: Author’s survey to representatives of the Latvian public administration, 2019

To evaluate public administrations’ attitude towards digital democracy in Latvia, the author carried out a survey to the representatives of the public administration. As seen in Table 1, Latvian public administration is already using different types of communication channels to identify and gain opinion of citizens. Institutions are represented in various social media portals and, for each of them, it is possible to recognise that representatives of the institutions have selected slightly different age groups as a primary audience. It is a positive result that shows that public institutions have a notion on different audiences they are working with. However, according to the results of questionnaire, the most often used channel still is the home page of the institution.

Analysis of the age groups that representatives of the public institutions are mentioning as target audience to each channel, one can observe that most of the channels are used to communicate with citizens 25 years or older, raising a discussion on who is responsible for citizen knowledge on political participation and how one can become an active citizen when public institutions are not actively communicating with them while they are younger than 25. Often, family or school is seen as the environment where young citizens get their knowledge on civic and political participation. As Marie K. Heath pointed out: “Educational technologists should consider the role of citizenship in public schools and consider the role of critical theorists and educational technology. Technology integration in schools should help students develop a sense of identity, place, community and mattering in order to allow students to drive their own learning through affinity spaces, connected learning and participation” (Heath, 2018: 353). At the same time, web 2.0 and social media allows communication without intermediators, thus, public institutions could communicate with youth online and become one of those who are educating youth on civic and political participation as well. Yet, as seen in Figure 3, when representatives of public institutions were asked to evaluate in the scale from 1 to 10 different activities that could foster citizen engagement (where 1 is minimal influence on engagement; and 10 is very important support for engagement), from public administrations’ perspective, the most valued activities are educating young people in schools (8.17 arithmetic mean) and informing citizens in mass media on their opportunities for civic and political participation in Latvia (8.1 arithmetic mean).

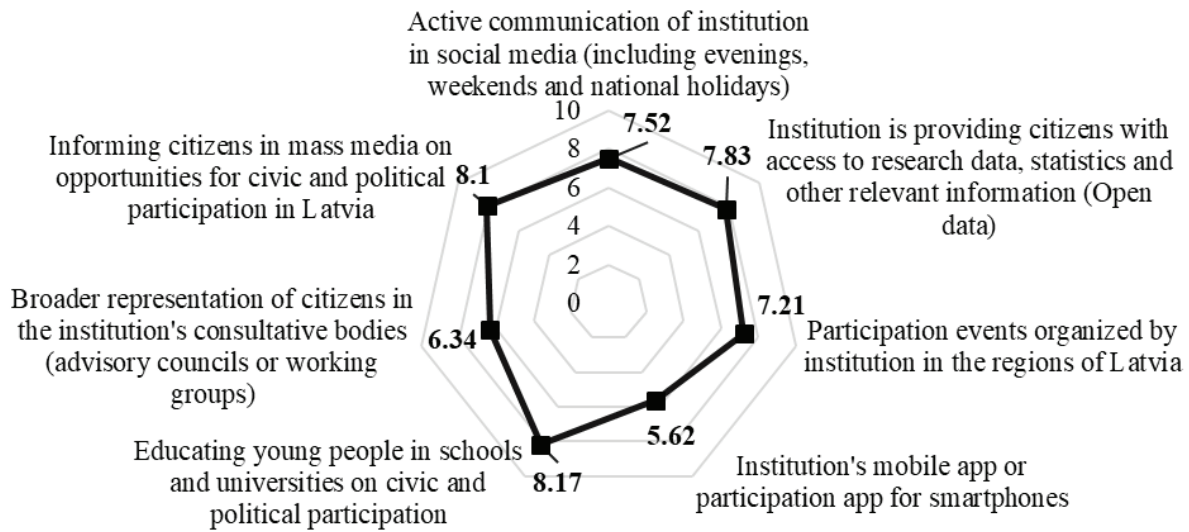


Figure 3. Responses of representatives of Latvian public administration evaluating activities that could help foster civic and political engagement

Source: Authors' conducted survey to representatives of the Latvian public administration, 2019, $n = 32$

Although smartphone application could be one of the most effective ways to reach citizens, as it reaches citizens directly and immediately, it is rated with 5.62 arithmetic mean which could be explained by the low number of existing examples of such applications made by public institutions in Latvia, resulting in not enough experience on this type of direct communication.

One of the biggest advantages of the digital communication is the speed of information exchange and feedback. Representatives of the public institutions were asked to evaluate how fast the feedback made to public institutions social media content can reach the responsible persons in the institutions. As seen in Figure 4, survey results indicate that, in most situations, valuable information from social media followers reaches the responsible persons of the institution in less than three hours (84 percent) and, in half of the institutions (48 percent), in less than one hour. This is a very good result as one of the core characteristics of social media is a fast exchange of information – if the institution is capable to meet this condition, it helps to build a better connection with social media followers and gain their trust for future situations when fast exchange of information with institution will be needed, for example, in emergency situations. Additionally, to understand the current communication habits, in the questionnaire to representatives of the Latvian public administration, respondents were asked to identify the fastest way for an individual person to reach an institution in case there is a specific information that citizen wants to deliver to the representative responsible for this matter. Answers showed that, according to current habits of information exchange in the institutions, digital communication with citizens is often accepted: more than half of the respondents mentioned e-mail or social media as an advisable channel for communication. However, communication habits vary a lot: several institutions indicated that an official application to the representative still would be the best choice to guarantee that citizen opinion is noticed.

As any other organisation or company, public institutions should control their public communication to maintain consistency and certain level of quality. Nevertheless, there are various possible solutions to control communication. Data in Figure 5 indicate internal regulations that affect content creation for Latvian public institutions social media accounts. Accordingly, the most often used internal regulation is informal rules / communication habits (in 34 institutions), then comes communication guidelines (in 26 institutions) and work descriptions (in 25 institutions). This created a situation where each institution is speaking to citizens according to their own rules and in their own specific voice. The communication would be more comprehen-

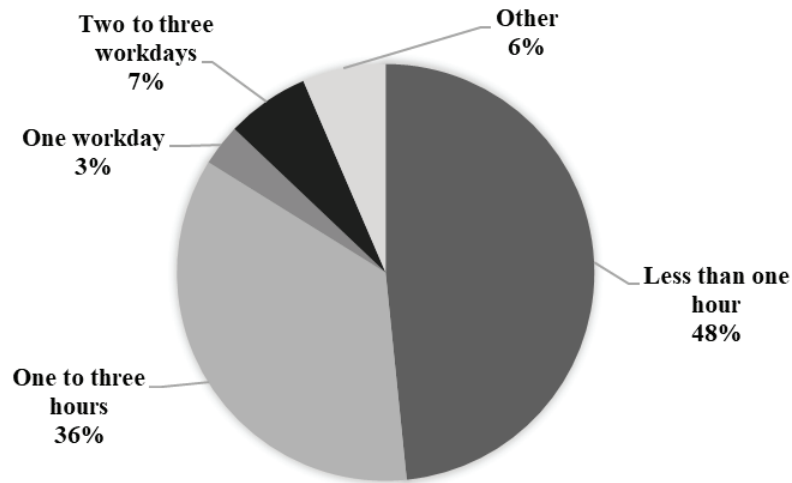


Figure 4. Distribution of responses on question If followers of your institution's social media account make valuable contribution to the content published by your institution – how fast this information reach responsible persons in your institution?

Source: Authors conducted survey to representatives of the Latvian public administration, 2019, n = 31

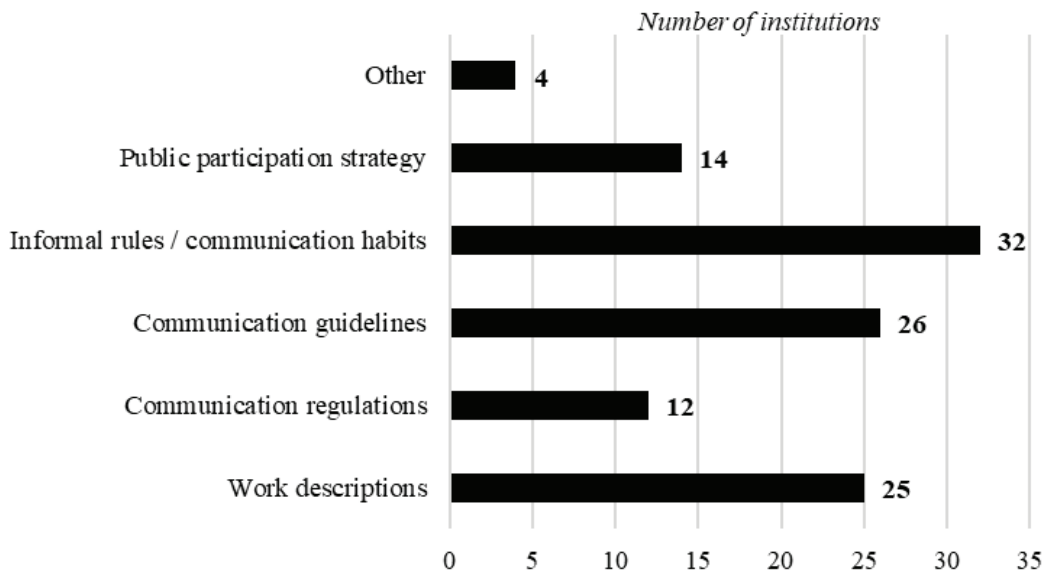


Figure 5 Internal regulations in the Latvian public administration institutions' influencing creation of social media content by the institution (respondents could select more than one option)

Source: Authors conducted survey to representatives of the Latvian public administration, 2019, n = 55

sible to citizens if all Latvian public administration institutions communicated according to the same rules to ensure a unified image of the public institutions and to ease gathering of information from public institutions, communication with them, and participation in the decision-making process.

In the survey to representatives of Latvian public administration, respondents were asked to evaluate the necessity for a common regulation by state on how the institutions are communicating with citizens online. In the scale from 1 to 10, where 1 is not necessary and 10 is definitely needed, respondents evaluated the necessity of common regulations with 5.71 arithmetic mean. Although responses were very heterogenous, there were several evaluations both for 10 and for 1 as well. Thus, it can be observed that there are various and even diametrically opposite attitudes to the digital communication in Latvian public administration that was also seen in the previous question on the current internal regulations. Therefore, it is in the hands of senior management of Latvian public administration whether the institutions will successfully use the opportunities for citizen engagement provided by digital environment.

Conclusions

Latvia provides an interesting example to study political participation and opportunities of digital forms of participation. On one hand, Latvians are still learning how democracy works and how important political engagement is for daily decision-making process of public administration. On the other hand, Latvia is experiencing a rapid digital development, thus offering an easily accessible digital environment as a place where public administration and citizens can meet and cooperate. The challenge for public administration in Latvia is to use this situation for a benefit and foster political engagement in Latvia.

Latvian public institutions are already using digital opportunities, they are represented in social media, there are open data projects and, also, a few applications for smartphones. However, there is no common national regulation on how the communication with citizens should be organised online and there is no common strategy on how this digital communication can be used to foster citizen engagement in the decision-making process of public administration. According to results of the survey to representatives of the Latvian public administration, communication guidelines and regulations in different institutions vary a lot. If there was one common strategy or a national legal regulation for digital communication of public institutions in Latvia, it would help citizens to perceive all public institutions as a unified public administration and facilitate the understanding on how citizens can participate in the decision-making process.

Results of the survey to representatives of the Latvian public administration indicated that, for now, citizens are seen as target group for engagement in the decision-making process mostly if they are 25 years and older. To strengthen the rate of citizen engagement, it is important to think long term, thus, to educate youth about civic and political engagement. An example could be a social media page or a smartphone application specifically designed for communication with youth, educating them about democracy, public institutions and the importance of participation in the decision-making process of public administration. Therefore, public administration could ensure that later there will be grown-ups that understand the value of political engagement and are motivated to participate in the decision-making process. Youth should also be already engaged in decisions of public administration that are directly connected to the regulations and initiatives for youth sector.

The paper was supported by the national research programme “Latvian heritage and future challenges for the sustainability of the state” project “Challenges for the latvian state and society and the solutions in international context (INTERFRAME-LV)”

References

- Bertot, J. C., Jaeger, P. T., Grimes, J. M. (2010). Using ICTs to create a culture of transparency: E-government and social media as openness and anti-corruption tools for societies. *Government Information Quarterly*, Vol. 27, p. 264–271.
- Bertot, J. C., Jaeger, P. T., Hansen, D. (2012). The impact of polices on government social media usage: Issues, challenges, and recommendations. *Government Information Quarterly*, Vol. 29(1), p. 30–40.
- Central Election Commission of Latvia. (2013). 2013. gada 1. jūnija pašvaldību vēlēšanas – Vēlētāju aktivitāte. Available at: <http://www.pv2013.cvk.lv/activities.html>
- Central Election Commission of Latvia. (2017). 2017. gada 3. jūnija pašvaldību vēlēšanas. Available at: <http://pv2017.cvk.lv/Activities>
- Central Election Commission of Latvia. (2018). 13. Saeimas vēlēšanas – aktivitāte. Available at: <https://sv2018.cvk.lv/pub/Activities>
- Central Election Commission of Latvia. (2019). Eiropas parlamenta vēlēšanas 2019. Available at: <https://epv2019.cvk.lv/pub/aktivitate>
- Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia. (2019). Science and ICT. <http://data.csb.gov.lv/pxweb/en/zin/>
- CIVICUS. (2018). *Latvia – overview*. Available at: <https://monitor.civicus.org/newsfeed/2018/04/01/latvia-overview/>
- Conroy, M., Feezell, J. T., Guerrero, M. (2012). Facebook and political engagement: A study of online political group membership and offline political engagement. *Computers in Human Behavior*, Vol. 28(5), p. 1535–1546.
- Cross-Sectoral Coordination Centre. (2012). *National Development Plan of Latvia for 2014–2020*. Available at: https://www.pkc.gov.lv/sites/default/files/inline-files/NDP2020%20English%20Final__1.pdf
- European Commission. (2018). *Standard Eurobarometer 90. National Report – Latvia*. Available at: <http://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/ResultDoc/download/DocumentKy/85301>
- European Parliament. (2019A). *2019 European election results – Latvia*. Available at: <https://www.election-results.eu/national-results/latvia/2019-2024/>
- European Parliament. (2019B). *2019 European election results – National results*. Available at: <https://election-results.eu/national-results-overview/>
- Eurostat. (2019). *Internet access of households, 2013 and 2018*. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Digital_economy_and_society_statistics_-_households_and_individuals
- Gravesteyn, M., Wilderom, C. P. M. (2018). Participative change toward digitalized, customer-oriented continuous improvements within a municipality. *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, Vol. 31(3), p. 728–748.
- Halpern, D., Gibbs, J. (2013). Social media as a catalyst for online deliberation? Exploring the affordances of Facebook and YouTube for political expression. *Computers in Human Behavior*, Vol. 29(3), p. 1159–1168.
- Harp, D., Bachmann, I., Guo, L. (2012). The Whole Online World Is Watching: Profiling Social Networking Sites and Activists in China, Latin America, and the United States. *International Journal of Communication*, Vol. 6, p. 298–321.
- Heath, M. K. (2018). What kind of (digital) citizen?: A between-studies analysis of research and teaching for democracy. *The International Journal of Information and Learning Technology*, Vol. 35(5), p. 342–356.
- Marino, V., Lo Presti, L. (2018). Increasing convergence of civic engagement in management: a systematic literature review. *International Journal of Public Sector Management*, Vol. 32(3), p. 282–301.
- Nam, T. (2012). Suggesting frameworks of citizen-sourcing via Government 2.0. *Government Information Quarterly*, Vol. 29(1), p. 12–20.
- OECD. (2019). *OECD Economic Surveys – Latvia*. Available at: <http://www.oecd.org/economy/surveys/Latvia-2019-OECD-economic-survey-overview.pdf>
- Pārresoru koordinācijas centrs. (2017). *Nacionālā tīstības plāna 2014–2020. gadam un Latvijas ilgtspējīgas attīstības stratēģijas līdz 2030. gadam īstenošanas uzraudzības ziņojums*. Available at: <https://www.pkc.gov.lv/lv/valsts-attistibas-planosana/nacionalais-attistibas-plans/nap2020-merki-un-istenosana>
- Shareef, M. A., Kumar, V., Kumar, U., Dwivedi, Y. K. (2011). e-Government Adoption Model (GAM): Differing service maturity levels. *Government Information Quarterly*, Vol. 28(1), p. 17–35.
- State Chancellery of Latvia. (2018). *Results of the survey Public participation in state and local government. Presentation by State Chancellery of Latvia in connection with the 29.08.18 conference “Informēšana->līdzdarbība”*.
- Taylor, M., Kent, M. L. (2014). Dialogic Engagement: Clarifying Foundational Concepts. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, Vol. 26(5), p. 384–398.
- The Economist Intelligence Unit Limited. (2019). Democracy Index 2018: Me too? *The Economist*. Available at: <https://www.eiu.com/topic/democracy-index>
- Torres, L. H. (2007). Citizen sourcing in the public interest. *Knowledge Management for Development Journal*, Vol. 3(1), p. 134–145.
- Valsts Kanceleja. (2015). *2014. gads sabiedrības līdzdalībā faktos un skaitļos*. Available at: https://www.mk.gov.lv/sites/default/files/komunikācijas_files/nvo_infografika_25-02-2015.pdf

PILIEČIŲ ĮSITRAUKIMAS Į SPRENDIMŲ PRIĖMIMO PROCESĄ. SKAITMENINĖS DEMOKRATIJOS GALIMYBĖS LATVIJOJE

EDUARDS LIELPĒTERS

Latvijos universitetas (Latvija)

Santrauka

Sparti interneto ir technologijų plėtra XXI amžiuje sudaro galimybes vystyti skaitmeninei demokratijai: piliečiams lengviau ir greičiau įsitraukti į sprendimų priėmimo procesą. Straipsnyje analizuojamas Latvijos viešojo administravimo institucijų požiūris į skaitmeninės demokratijos plėtrą Latvijoje, nagrinėjant skaitmeninį įsitraukimą, kaip galimą sprendimą didinti žemą pilietinio ir politinio dalyvavimo Latvijoje procentą.

Latvijoje piliečių įsitraukimas į viešojo administravimo sprendimų priėmimo procesą yra gana menkas. Maždaug pusė piliečių balsuoja rinkimuose ir taip nustato, kurioms frakcijoms jie deleguoja savo demokratinę galią ir kur link kryps būsima šalies plėtra. Kasdieniame sprendimų priėmimo procese dalyvauja dar mažiau piliečių, taigi galutinis viešojo administravimo sprendimas ne visada atskleidžia piliečių poreikius ir norus. Nepasitenkinimas viešojo administravimo sprendimais lemia mažesnę pasitikėjimą institucijomis ir šalimi apskritai.

Straipsnio tikslas – aptarti skaitmeninę demokratiją, kaip sprendimą paskatinti piliečių dalyvavimą sprendimų priėmimo procese, taip keisdamas piliečių požiūrį į viešojo administravimo ir apskritai institucijų priimamus sprendimus. Tyrimo metodai: akademinų publikacijų skaitmeninės demokratijos ir politinės veiklos temomis analizė bei Latvijos viešojo administravimo atstovų apklausa, atlikta 2019 m. balandžio–gegužės mėnesiais internetine tyrimų apklausos programine įranga „QuestionPro“. Latvijos viešojo administravimo atstovams, kurie yra atsakingi už bendravimą su visuomene ir bendradarbiavimą su piliečiais, išsiųstas asmeninis kvietimas užpildyti klausimyną. Gražintos 55 visiškai arba iš dalies užpildytos apklausos: šešiolika respondentų – iš Latvijos ministerijų, kiti respondantai atstovavo Latvijos Parlamentui, Tarpsektoriniam koordinavimo centrui, vietos valdžios institucijoms ir kelioms kitoms Latvijos viešosioms įstaigoms.

Klausimyne kiekvieno viešojo administravimo atstovo prašyta pateikti išsamią informaciją, kaip jo įstaiga išnaudoja skaitmeninės aplinkos galimybes, tokias kaip socialinė žiniasklaida ir išmaniųjų telefonų programos, siekdama bendrauti su piliečiais ir įtraukti juos į sprendimų priėmimo procesą. Respondentai vertino skirtingas dalyvavimo formas ir komunikacijos kanalus, žvelgdami iš atstovaujamos institucijos pozicijų.

Straipsnio išvadose teigiama, kad Latvijoje sąlygos plėsti skaitmeninę demokratiją yra puikios, trūksta tik bendro reguliavimo, kaip Latvijoje koordinuojamas skaitmeninis bendravimas ir dalyvavimas internete, be to, valstybinės įstaigos turėtų daugiau dėmesio skirti Latvijos jaunimo švietimui, informuoti apie pilietinį ir politinį įsitraukimą. Taip pamažu Latvijos piliečiai sužinotų, kaip galima dalyvauti Latvijos viešojo administravimo sprendimų priėmimo procese.

PAGRINDINIAI ŽODŽIAI: *piliečių įsitraukimas, skaitmeninė demokratija, viešosios įstaigos, socialinė žiniasklaida.*

JEL KLASIFIKACIJA: I28, L86, M15, O31.

Received: 2019-08-25

Revised: 2019-09-15

Accepted: 2019-10-01