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E-PARTICIPATION: THE ROLE AND IMPORTANCE OF CITIZEN PARTICIPATION IN THE PROVISION OF PUBLIC SERVICES

Е-УЧАСТЬ: РОЛЬ ТА ВАЖЛИВІСТЬ УЧАСТІ ГРОМАДЯН У НАДАННІ ДЕРЖАВНИХ ПОСЛУГ

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The article talks about e-participation, which is considered one of the main indicators of e-democracy, which is of great importance in management, and its importance, at the same time, the e-participation approach of countries in international practice and the work done in the direction of the development of e-participation in the Republic of Azerbaijan. In recent times, e-participation in the globalized world has become an important field in e-government and e-administration, where one of the important points is the spread of information and communication technologies around the world as a factor supporting electronic participation of citizens. E-participation is not only informing citizens, but also involving citizens in the decisionmaking process in public administration. This, in turn, supports transparent, efficient and democratic management in order to achieve the common goal, and ensures the participation of citizens in management. E-participation, in particular, enables citizens to more easily express their opinions on local and regional issues, as well as to make decisions objectively after applying a wide discussion process. In order to increase the effectiveness of electronic participation, the importance of key indicators such as security, user information and activity, integration, information transparency and interactivity was emphasized. At the same time, as an important direction of development in public administration, as well as the relevance of studying electronic participation, which is one of the main categories of electronic democracy, it is also important to keep it in mind as a priority area for its application and implementation in e-government. The article analyzes the procedure for the implementation of e-participation in the Republic of Azerbaijan, the policy conducted in this field and the application of the appropriate form by examining the international experience. As a result, the final opinions formed from the analyzes of electronic participation, as well as, the current situation in the direction of the development of electronic participation in the Republic of Azerbaijan, suitable suggestions and recommendations were given.

Key words: citizen participation, e-participation, e-service, portal, open government.

У статті йдеться про електронну участь, яка вважається одним із основних показників електронної демократії, що має велике значення в управлінні, та її важливість, водночас, підхід країн до електронної участі в міжнародній практиці. та робота, виконана в напрямку розвитку електронної участі в Азербайджанській Республіці. Останнім часом електронна участь у глобалізованому світі стала важливою сферою електронного урядування та електронного управління, де одним із важливих моментів є поширення інформаційно-комунікаційних технологій у всьому світі як чинника підтримки електронної участі громадян. Електронна участь – це не лише інформування громадян, а й залучення громадян до процесу прийняття рішень в державному управлінні. Це, у свою чергу, підтримує прозоре, ефективне та демократичне управління для досягнення спільної мети та забезпечує участь громадян в управлінні. Електронна участь, зокрема, дозволяє громадянам легше висловлювати свою думку з питань місцевого та регіонального рівня, а також об'єктивно приймати рішення після застосування процесу широкого обговорення. Для підвищення ефективності електронної участі було підкреслено важливість таких ключових показників, як безпека, інформація та активність користувачів, інтегрованість, інформаційна прозорість та інтерактивність. Водночас, як важливий напрямок розвитку державного управління, так і актуальність вивчення електронної участі, яка є однією з основних категорій електронної демократії, також важливо мати на увазі як пріоритетний напрям для його застосування та реалізація в електронному урядуванні. У статті аналізується процедура впровадження електронної участі в Азербайджанській Республіці, політика, що проводиться в цій сфері, та застосування відповідної форми шляхом вивчення міжнародного досвіду. В результаті, остаточні висновки, сформовані на основі аналізу електронної участі, а також поточної ситуації в напрямку розвитку електронної участі в Азербайджанській Республіці, були надані відповідні пропозиції та рекомендації.

Ключові слова: участь громадян, електронна участь, е-сервіс, портал, відкрите урядування.

Introduction. Topic relevance and development rate: One of the main problems in modern times is ensuring the process of citizens' participation in electronic democracy. Has democracy really been able to ensure the participation of citizens in public administration? It is known that from the first day when the concept of state and society was created, people actually had certain roles in state administration. However, the degree of importance of such roles, as well as whether they cover the whole

society or not, was determined by both the regime and the era. In the digital world, participation is a bit different. In general, since the concept of electronic participation has become relevant in recent years, there are not enough studies and information in this field. Therefore, it is important to research and study the topic.

Research goals and objectives: Today, as one of the emerging concepts, we can show increasing the role of citizens in public administration by using

existing information technologies as the main task of e-participation.

By exploring the topic of e-participation, we will try to achieve the following goals:

- 1. Increasing the principle of transparency in public administration;
 - 2. Expanding the role of citizens in governance;
- 3. To facilitate the establishment of citizenstate relations in the Republic of Azerbaijan using electronic means;
- 4. Development of the local e-participation process in the Republic of Azerbaijan based on international experiences;
- 5. Increasing citizen influence in rapidly changing and updating processes;
 - 6. Implementation of electronic voting.

Research methods: Important methods such as parsing, analysis, extrapolation and decision-making were used in the development of the research.

Scientific novelty of the research: E-participation is especially important because it is a new concept in the modern age of information society. The study of e-participation, which is one of the main indicators of e-democracy and e-government, and the development of the development mechanism are not only of an urgent nature, but it is expected to have an important role in the decision-making process in the short term.

Theoretical and practical significance of the research: The study of the subject has theoretical and practical importance, as e-participation is being applied by a number of countries with high ICT development, and the experience gained in a short time shows that, in addition to the application of practical processes in this field, the development of theoretical approaches and laws is equally important. is important.

1. The essence of the concept of e-participation

The evolution of information and communication equipment has led to the emergence of joint participation as a process that enables and supports democratic initiatives [5, p. 57-58]. Public participation is understood as the way in which stakeholders of public institutions participate in the process of public decision-making, planning, organization and financing in order to achieve common public goals. Electronic participation has already become part of the development of electronic government by governments in all developed countries [17, p. 4-6]. E-participation means ensuring the participation of citizens in public administration using information and communication tools. In recent years, e-participation is considered an important field, especially in e-government and management. The rapid spread of the Internet and mobile technologies around the world has accelerated the need for electronic participation of every citizen. In states with established democratic governance, society is already calling for transparency and better governance without corruption. These citizens want to convey their words and opinions in a new form in the decisions made by leaders all over the world [17, p.10].

E-participation includes democratic principles, tries to prevent corruption and increases transparency. E-participation makes the use of technological tools an absolute necessity in the modern era. It is important to take security measures when uploading information to electronic equipment [21]. Because violation of the privacy of citizens' personal information, monitoring of citizens by the government is considered as a direct damage to the image of the concept of e-participation, and the corresponding situation can create distrust of e-participation among citizens. For this reason, the expectation of privacy of personal information and opinions belonging to citizens should be expected as one of the main priority factors.

2. National e-participation policy and open government in the Republic of Azerbaijan

In the Republic of Azerbaijan, a number of steps are regularly taken for the purpose of developing electronic government. The United Nations presents the E-Government Development Index every two years in order to determine the state of e-government development of member states. Here, three important key indicators of e-government are taken into account: online services, telecommunication connectivity and the overall dimension of human potential. According to the reports of 2022, the Republic of Azerbaijan scored 61 out of a possible 100 points for online services, 67 points for telecommunication connection and 79 points for human capital. Based on these indicators, countries are classified into four groups: highest, high, medium and low. In this ranking, Azerbaijan was in the 23rd place among 73 countries included in the top group [23].

For the progress of the Republic of Azerbaijan according to the above indicators, special attention should be paid to the field of e-participation. A number of works are already being carried out in the direction of the development of e-participation. Azerbaijan 2030: based on the adopted National Priorities on socio-economic development, a competitive human capital, a space for modern innovations and a society based on social justice should be realized. In addition, the national e-participation policy is based on the Strategic Roadmap for the development of telecommunications and information technologies in the Republic of Azerbaijan and the strategic plan of the State Agency for Citizen Service and Social Innovation under the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan for 2022-2024. A number of public mobile applications and portals have been developed in this area. Examples include myGov personal cabinet-based e-government portal, digital executive power portal and ASAN application mobile application [4].

Based on the national strategy based on creative and innovative society in the field of modern innovations adopted in Azerbaijan, a number of portals have started to operate in order to provide online services for citizens. The main goals of the electronic register of public services created by the State Agency for Citizen Service and Social Innovations under the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan were as follows:

- specifying and systematizing the total number of services;
 - improving service quality and transparency;
- integration of information resources and a single database;
- eliminate duplication of services with the same content and create new types of services;
- form a centralized information-search base [3]. According to the adopted law on public participation in the Republic of Azerbaijan, public participation should be legal, legitimate, transparent, pluralistic, voluntary and non-discriminatory while anticipating the demands of the democratic society. Implementation of participation is possible through the creation of a council, hearing, discussion, written consultation and the study of public opinion [1].

Along with the provision of online services through the national electronic government portal of the Republic of Azerbaijan, the process of evaluating the efficiency of the activities of state institutions is carried out. This includes open data, budgeting, e-participation, draft laws open for discussion and, in particular, an opinion section on public services. So, citizens should select the name of the service and the service center to which the application belongs by switching to this section. Later, it is possible to send feedback about the application and service.

3. Importance of "Digital Executive Power" portal

Digital Executive Power Portal (https://rih. gov.az/) started operating in accordance with the "National Action Plan for the Promotion of Open Government for 2020-2022" approved by the Decree of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan dated 27.02.2020 in order to ensure the participation of citizens in public administration. Through this portal, services that can be provided online by local executive authorities are provided to citizens. It should be noted that at the initial stage, this project was implemented for 3 socio-economically active regions of the Republic of Azerbaijan, namely Ganja city, Masalli and Guba districts, and the portal started operating in November 2021. As of March 2022, the process of integrating all local executive authorities of the country into the "Digital Executive Authority" portal has been completed [22].

The main goal of the portal was to optimize the activities of local executive authorities, to coordinate with other institutions, and at the same time, to

provide electronic information, provide electronic state services, and ensure citizen participation in management. It is possible to enter the corresponding electronic portal with a personal identification number or electronic signature. The portal has four main sections listed below:

- 1. Citizen admission;
- 2. Services;
- 3. E-participation;
- 4. Notification.

It is possible to conduct the citizen admission process online and in the form of an on-site meeting, which the citizen chooses based on his wish. In order to send the application in this section, it is enough for the citizen to select his personal information, the contact method and the topic of the meeting. In the services section, citizens can submit their requests for services provided to them by local executive authorities and take advantage of relevant services. To send the application, the citizen should select the service he wants to apply for, and then they can send their application by entering the required information about the service.

One of the main sections of the Digital Executive Portal is e-Participation. Citizens can enter this section and quickly prepare a request regarding the issues related to the executive power. For this, it is enough to choose the relevant local executive authority, set the category and enter your proposal. At the same time, in this section it is possible to get acquainted with the surveys posted by other citizens and by executive bodies and participate in voting. Surveys are conducted anonymously, and the results are shared publicly on the portal. For example: improvement of infrastructure conditions, special attention to residential areas, etc. Implementation of proposals on such issues is accepted on the basis of majority vote. From here it can be concluded that the essence of the e-participation module is the participation of citizens in making decisions about their lives. Citizens can monitor the status of their respective applications through their personal cabinets and get acquainted with incoming notifications. Through the information section, it is possible to regularly get information about the innovations and other issues in the region

As you can see, the main goal of creating the portal is to optimize the activities of local executive bodies in state administration and ensure citizen satisfaction. Citizens can independently send inquiries about the changes they want to see in their districts or make various proposals, such as building a road, building a school, and building a park. For this reason, citizens can actively use the portal and make important contributions to the development of their region.

4. International experience of e-participation

Since 2003, the United Nations E-Government Study has been tracking and analyzing developments

and changes in e-government in all countries. E-participation acts as an important indicator of elected democracy as a means of interaction between the interests of citizens and state institutions. In this regard, e-participation is considered a process that increases political participation and enables citizens to interact with each other and with civil servants using ICT [17, p. 3].

It is possible to show the implementation of e-participation in three main stages: problem setting, request formulation and decision making. At the initial stage, the content and essence of the problem is determined and prepared. At the second stage, important information is obtained and political issues are discussed, that is, official requests are submitted to government agencies to mobilize support for political projects. In the end, the priorities of the budget expenses are determined, e-voting is carried out and the appropriate decision is taken, for or against [5, p. 58-60].

Of course, the above stages are tentative and may vary by country and position. As stakeholders in e-participation, we can divide the subjects into four groups: citizens, politicians, government agency and voluntary organizations. In order to increase the importance of e-participation, citizens should be taken into focus. A key factor influencing citizens' political participation is the protection of privacy and trust in the use of digital tools. In order to ensure participation, we will try to analyze the three main categories that are implemented consistently based on the experience of different European Union countries.

Conducting monitoring is essential. Access to electronic information for the person conducting monitoring should be relevant. Monitoring in this form actually means accountability of the state. That is, the attitude of citizens to the adopted decisions, the influence and role of citizens in controlling the activities of a group of elected officials or the implementation process should be evaluated. In this regard, access to information should be improved. In Portugal, special attention is paid to this process, where citizens are given electronic information prior to electronic cooperation. After the process of informing the citizens, certain discussions are already being held. Citizen activism has a special role in the discussion stage for the development of electronic participation. Organizing discussions can be done through various methods, which can be various forms such as conducting surveys, organizing voting [7, p. 95-99].

Electronic promotion is key when formulating a survey, as the variety of company types can vary depending on the importance of the issue on the agenda. In recent years, the importance of social media in running an electronic campaign is undeniable. The course of events in social networks has a direct impact on the decision-making process. In recent

times, narrowing and political marketing methods have been used as a special type of campaign strategy to create influence on social media during elections in the United States. These two methods keep the relationship between the voters and the elected in a constant state of flux based on public opinion. For this reason, strategic behavior among politicians is important. At this stage, special attention should be paid to electronic applications and appeals. Since this system has the character of an official appeal, it is extremely important in the direction of solving problems and taking into account the wishes of citizens [7].

At the last stage, the main goal is to maintain legitimacy in making political decisions. The purpose of organizing electronic consultations at this stage is to make effective decisions and increase confidence in electronic participation. Implementation of electronic voting is considered to be the process that has the most impact on decision-making. For this reason, the organization of voting in a democratic manner is of special importance [7, p. 103].

Public participation and citizen consultation have already become a goal that provides a democratic framework for decision-making in Europe. At the level of the European Union, the right of every citizen to participate in the democratic life of the Union is guaranteed by the Treaty of Lisbon. The agreement states that state institutions should participate in transparent, open and regular discussions with citizens, representative associations and NGOs [17].

It is known that e-consultation is important as a way to support participatory democracy. General principles and minimum standards for stakeholder consultation were developed and adopted by the European Commission in 2002. These principles include participation, accountability, efficiency, openness and consistency. In the rules on citizen participation in the process of making political decisions adopted by the Council, four forms of participation are indicated:

- 1. Information;
- 2. Consultation;
- 3. Diologist;
- 4. Active participation.

Information should be clear and understandable at all stages of decision-making. At the same time, institutions should carry out consultations with citizens and inform the public about the results. Another factor that shows the importance of e-participation is that citizens are interested in conducting dialogues. Because regular public hearings and organizing forums gradually lead to a structured result-oriented process. The concept of active participation is slightly different from the other three forms, as it already involves the creation of certain working groups and committees for the purpose of transparency of processes in the preparation of documents. In general, the following criteria and important principles should be expected

in order to implement citizen participation in public administration:

- Transparency and accountability;
- Non-discrimination and consideration of the voices of people from all walks of life;
- Collection of citizen opinions and consideration in decision-making;
- Availability of information in the participation process;
 - Honest mutual relationship, trust and etc.

In connection with the diversification of the forms of electronic participation, serious steps are being taken to ensure dialogue between institutions and citizens, to form interaction and to increase efficiency in the European Union states. Various programs and platforms have been created in Europe related to the development of e-participation. One of them is the government program "Open Municipal Information" which operates in the Netherlands and provides citizens with possible information and increases participation. Through the program, citizens can submit their desired alternative proposals for solving specific problems related to social issues. According to the current law, relevant requests must be answered by civil servants [6].

In Denmark, participation is emphasized as one of the main principles of e-democracy, and citizens are consulted through a program called "eDem" in order to support citizens' initiatives. The following elements are implemented in the program:

- availability of educational measures and instructions for citizens and government agencies;
- creation of a general mechanism for the implementation of participation at different levels;
- implementation of a system enabling the participation of vulnerable (disabled, elderly) citizens in decision-making processes like other citizens.

A national e-participation project has been developed in order to implement democratic and efficient governance in Finland. This country takes a proactive approach to democracy, so six different electronic services have been developed that can be used by anyone to simplify the interaction between government authorities and citizens. Through digital platforms such as Kansalaisaloite.fi and Kuntalaisaloite.fi, which are applied in the field of e-participation in Finland, citizens can take initiative and present their projects. In addition, with the otakantaa.fi online dialogue platform, it is possible to carry out consultations in the direction of service and policy evaluation, strategy and planning project preparation [6].

Poland has a slightly different approach to e-participation policy than other European countries. Thus, in individual cities, individuals alone or together with others propose certain projects to the local authorities, which can be implemented based on the approval of the local authorities after passing the

expertise. Financial resources for the implementation of projects are allocated from the city budget. That is why sometimes the term budget participation is used.

If we try to study e-participation in the Republic of Turkey, it is important to note that local selfgovernment bodies have a special weight in governance in Turkey, and we can logically conclude that citizen participation has a large share in local governance. Although Turkey has enough experience in the field of e-participation, it lags behind European countries. The reason for this is the problem of building citizen trust in e-participation, but gradually Turkey is trying to develop e-participation through new digital systems. Currently, the state policy in this direction is to ensure the participation of citizens through various platforms created by municipalities. It is possible to point to such platforms as "Istanbul Senin" and "BizIzmir" online platforms that are particularly distinguished and analyze and study the opinions of citizens.

It is known that in developed countries, e-participation is more studied and accepted by citizens than in developing countries. The reasons for this depended on both the spread of information and communication equipment and the level of development of democracy. In general, since e-participation has been formed in recent times, it is important to examine the experiences in this field. At the same time, there are various global factors to consider regarding an e-participation strategy:

- Population growth and increasing levels of discontent (especially among young people);
- Limited food and consumption resources in proportion to the growing population;
 - Global warming, climate change and its effects,
- With the development of technology, the destruction of existing jobs for unskilled workers due to automation;
- Demanding democratic governance by citizens against corruption;
- The proliferation and impact of social media coverage;
 - ICT development and rapid changes.

The result. From the analyzes conducted, it is clear once again how important it is to ensure citizen participation in the provision of public services. It is true that the concept of participation has existed in the past, but the concept of online participation has emerged in recent times and has become relevant. The importance of electronic participation has increased so much that when talking about the democracy and social development of world states, electronic participation is one of the first criteria.

In addition to the importance of e-participation in the article, the state policies of many countries regarding e-participation are also studied here. In general, it can be concluded that e-participation is more widespread in developed countries. However, it is also important to note that some countries have national programs that are specifically applied in this area, and this is not a bad practice. Simply put, the main problems of many countries related to e-participation are related to gaining citizens' trust and arousing interest in the population. At the same time, the process of managing the budget and allocating the appropriate amount should be carried out after studying citizens' opinions and suggestions. Therefore, during the implementation of projects, local government institutions should be interested in allocating funds to projects that are important and related to the welfare and comfort of citizens.

Despite the little of experience of the Republic of Azerbaijan in the field of electronic participation, many steps have been taken in this field in a short period of time. The law of the Republic of Azerbaijan on citizen participation and e-participation adopted in Azerbaijan, as well as the decree of the head of

the country on the creation of a single electronic information system for citizens' appeals in local executive bodies, are of great importance. In general, taking into account the importance of electronic participation in the Republic of Azerbaijan and a number of developing countries, the following suggestions are made:

- Ensuring privacy of citizen information;
- Wide application of electronic voting;
- Realization of projects that can be implemented based on citizen's opinion by implementing budget participation;
- Creating an additional fund to support the implementation of decisions made on the basis of consultation and ensuring its operation under the control of citizens;
- Arousing interest in participation in the population, creating confidence in the confidentiality of their information;
 - Adapting to ICT changes and ensuring security.

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