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KEY SUCCESS FACTORS FOR E-PARTICIPATION MATURITY LEVELS: A PROPOSAL FOR CASE STUDY OF NORTHERN CYPRUS MUNICIPALITIES

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ABSTRACT

In this research proposal, the current e-Participation features of the 28 municipalities in North Cyprus are aimed to be examined by using the United Nations e-Government Survey with the intention of contributing to local-level electronic government and public administration studies. The survey scores will represent the e-Participation Maturity Level for the electronic services that are provided by the local governments. Based on these scores, the e-Participation Maturity Levels will be then cross-checked with specific key success factors. As the main contribution of this exploratory work these key success factors for the municipalities' websites development are identified based upon the literature, and will then be used for hypothesis-testing based upon the survey results.

Keywords: E-government, e-participation maturity level, citizen engagement, local government, mayors, key success factors

Introduction

After the World Wide Web (WWW) was launched to the public in 1991, the penetration of the internet has been increasing steadily to the point where 40% of the world's population are now online, which is equal to almost 3 billion people. In response to a decrease in the cost of smartphones, it is expected that mobile users will amount to 5.2 billion by 2019 and they will use more than 11 billion mobile devices. 66% of total internet traffic will be connected via Wi-Fi and mobile devices, which makes the mobile capability of e-Government web sites a necessity (CERN 2008, Turban *et al.* 2011, BBC 2012, International Telecommunication Union 2015, Cisco 2015). 'E-government refers to one aspect of digital government: the provision of governmental services by electronic means, usually over the Internet' (Garson 2006, p.18). The E-Government concept has a variety of features such as 'Transparency', 'Openness', and 'Accessibility' (Bonsón *et al.* 2014, Susha and Grönlund 2014, Youngblood 2014). Authorities are searching for ways of increasing the transparency and participation methods (Gasco' 2014), where one of the tools is Open Government Data. 'A government that prioritizes the use of two key tools: open data i.e. data that is available in standardized and structured formats, that is machine readable, and that is guaranteed to be freely available over time) and 'open action' (Gasco' 2015, p. 1). In other words, Open Government Data can be defined as 'government information proactively disclosed and made available online for everyone's access, reuse and redistribution without restriction' (United Nations 2014, p.163).

While there are a variety of advantages of e-Government, it also has some challenges that can be stated as the lack of information technologies (IT), red borders (legislation) and financial budget (United Nations 2014). Nevertheless, in spite of the pro and con arguments, it is accepted that e-Government has already been applied worldwide. For example, it has been used for electronic residency in Estonia, as an electronic digital signature in Denmark and Finland, and used for e-voting in Iceland (Igari, 2014, Global e-Government Forum 2014). The Republic of Korea, Australia and Singapore are the top three ranked countries in the E-Government Development Index (United Nations 2014). The Republic of Korea uses e-Government features in a variety of concepts ranging from 'Immigration Control Systems' to 'SOS Public Relief Service' (Ministry of Security and Public Administration 2014). It could be said that the e-Government idea started to saturate when the top 25 countries scored 0.8368 and the world average reached 0.4712 on the E-Government Development Index (United Nations 2014).

In line with the concepts of e-Government explained above, this paper firstly aims to analyse the current situation of the municipalities that are located in the northern part of Cyprus. Future recommendations will be made after analysing the current state in order to increase e-Participation by means of increasing transparency and providing a medium for effective dialogue among the citizens.

Development of the e-Participation Concept and Current Features

Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) play a crucial role and are highly used within social and political concepts due to the advancement of the internet (Vicente and Novo 2014). According to the study, it is further mentioned that e-Participation can include taking part in petitions and giving/reading opinions about debates or public issues. The E-Participation Index provides information about the extent that governments enable mediums for their citizens to participate, and the Netherlands, the Republic of Korea and Uruguay shared the top three places on the most recent e-Participation Index (United Nations 2014).

E-participation includes concepts like e-Information, e-Consultation and e-Decision Making. Furthermore, archived information, availability of an official United Nations (UN) language (Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish), integration with social networking sites and tools in order to gather feedback from users/public are important features that an e-Government website needs to have. Finance, Health and Education are the top three archived

areas of e-Information. Social tools are the most used e-Consultation method, which is followed by online forums and online polls. It is highlighted that the e-Decision making concept is mostly used for financial decisions, which is followed by social welfare and the environment (United Nations 2014).

Anduiza *et al.* (2010) mentioned e-contact, e-petition and e-donation as three methods of e-Participation. E-contact includes sending e-mails to a politician or government representative, e-petition explains the tendency to opt for an online petition and e-donation is the online method of making donations. In addition, social networks have extensive usage in the current era, where the worlds' largest social network Facebook has more than 1.04 billion daily and 1.49 monthly active users (Facebook 2016). Vicente and Novo (2014) also mentioned that social networks can be effective in order to increase e-Participation in their research that this field. Furthermore, it could be stated that usage of social networks improves public sector transparency as information becomes more visible and easier to access. Moreover, social media can also increase e-Participation in decision making, since users would be more involved by commenting and sharing their ideas (Bonsón *et al.* 2012). Social networks are extensively used for political and social participation due to low cost and ease of accessibility (Tufekci and Wilson 2012). In addition, Turban *et al.* (2011) highlighted that e-Payment options are crucial for an effective website design. In the same manner, it could be said that e-Government websites should provide payment options to enable users to pay for their bills and invoices.

It is argued that socio-economic factors like age, education and income level are an important factor as to whether or not individuals will be able to reach information and acquire the skills to engage with information (Armingeon, 2007, Norris 2013). Anduiza *et al.* (2010) mentioned that people with political interests have the tendency to be engaged online as well. This might be a problem for the areas with low voting ratios. On the other hand, recent research has highlighted that a worldwide increase in democracy, the spread of education and worldwide internet usage has removed money related barriers towards e-Participation (Krishna 2008). It is stated that budget is another important factor for the institutional capacity of a municipality, which is directly related to the development of its technical and administrative infrastructure (Anduiza *et al.* 2010). In addition, some studies have highlighted that the municipalities that are governed by left-wing parties tend to give more importance and positivity towards the e-Government concept (Cárcaba and Garcia 2008, Tolbert *et al.* 2008). Furthermore, it is stated that the political stability of the mayor does not have an effect on the e-Government features of the municipality (Tolbert *et al.* 2008, Anduiza *et al.* 2010).

Methodology of the study

Municipalities play an active role by closing the distance between the citizens and government. In addition, they decrease the bureaucratic and hierarchical process, which challenges the traditional governmental work. Likewise, municipalities play a leading role whereby they work closely with their citizens, which is one of the key features for increased participation. In addition, the e-Government concept was first introduced at the municipality level (Delibaş and Akgül 2010). Due to the explained reasons, the authors chose to conduct the research specifically on municipalities.

A local municipality assessment form was created by using the standards provided by the United Nations E-Government Survey 2014 and other findings within literature. Political stability was added from the research of Tolbert *et al.* (2008) and Anduiza *et al.* (2010), political ideology was added from the studies of Cárcaba and Garcia (2008) and Tolbert *et al.* (2008), the budget information was added from the research of Anduiza *et al.* (2010) and e-Payment was added from the study of Turban *et al.* (2011).

This form will be applied for all (28) municipalities in North Cyprus. The form includes 21 questions, which aimed to gather responses related to e-Participation Maturity Level. It

included e-Information, e-Consultation and e-Decision Making parameters in order to assess to what extent the municipalities in North Cyprus are using or have saturation of the e-Participation Maturity Level (See Appendix 1 for the Local Municipality Assessment form). The E-Government concept is new and in the Enhanced Stage i.e., ‘Governments provide more information on public policy and governance. They have created links to archived information that is easily accessible to citizens, for instance, documents, forms, reports, laws and regulations, and newsletters’ [names removed for review integrity] in North Cyprus. Due to the relative newness of the area, a weighted maturity level was applied that included 11 questions from the e-Information Parameter (50%), 5 questions from e-Consultation (25%) and 5 questions from the e-Decision Making (25%) parameters.

Research Design

In this study, the authors are trying to answer the following question: What is the e-Participation Maturity Level of the current municipality websites in Northern Cyprus? The main motivation that underlines this research question is to determine whether it is possible to improve the e-Participation Maturity Level of the citizen websites by pointing out the key success factors of effective websites.

Based on the theoretical evidence, it is argued that the six following propositions are valid:

Hypothesis 1: There is a positive correlation between e-Participation Maturity Level and political stability.

Hypothesis 2: There is a positive correlation between e-Participation Maturity Level and political ideology.

Hypothesis 3: There is a positive correlation between e-Participation Maturity Level and the availability of an official UN language for the municipality website.

Hypothesis 4: There is a positive correlation between e-Participation Maturity Level and the revenue of the municipality.

Hypothesis 5: There is a positive correlation between e-Participation Maturity Level and the population of the municipality.

Hypothesis 6: There is a positive correlation between e-Participation Maturity Level and IT capability.

See Appendix 2 for the initial data collected about the municipalities with respect to these independent factors.

Conclusion and Future Studies

As a part of this research, the current e-Participation features of the 28 municipalities in North Cyprus will be examined by using the United Nations e-Government Survey, scores of which will represent the e-Participation Maturity Level for the electronic services that are provided by the local governments. Based on these scores, the e-Participation Maturity Levels will be then cross-checked with specific key success factors that are identified in literature. The key success factors for the municipalities’ websites development were identified based upon the literature and used for the construction of six hypothesis to be tested.

Limitations of the Research

In spite of the fact that all of the municipalities in Northern Cyprus will be analysed in this research, the sample size is quite small (N=28). Furthermore, in order to contextualize the research results, it should also be mentioned that, while there is awareness and consciousness related to the e-Government concept, this awareness and capacity cannot be turned into action

and the e-Government features cannot be improved, since there is little or almost no budget for e-Government activities. In addition, the European Union does not recognize the state of North Cyprus due to Resolution 541 by the United Nations Security Council and for this reason, there is not any budget allocated to improve e-Government features in Northern Cyprus by the European Union. Consequently, most of the e-Government development initiatives are directed from Turkey due to its historical, cultural and political ties with North Cyprus. The current stalemate of the political and legal conditions that also influence e-Government and e-Participation initiatives of North Cyprus can, however, be prone to new developments in line with the latest political and administrative changes in EU, Turkey, Greece, as well as the Northern and Southern communities of the island.

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Appendix 1. Local Municipality Assessment Form

	Municipality 1	Municipality 2	Municipality 3	Municipality ..
e-Information				
Website (1)				
e-Payment (1)				
On Call Line (1)				
Archived information				
Policies (1)				
Budget (1)				
Legal Documents (1)				
Datasets (1)				
Official UN Language (1)				
Social Networks				
Facebook (1)				
Twitter (1)				
YouTube (1)				
Tools to obtain public opinion (E-Consultation)				
Online Forums (1)				
Media Tools (1)				
Pools (1)				
Voting Tools (1)				
Petition Tools (1)				
e-Decision Making Tools				
Online availability of policies (1)				
Online availability of procurement announcements (1)				
Online availability of government information (1)				
Online availability of Calendar (1)				
Outcome provision for new policy or service (1)				

Appendix 2. E-Participation Maturity Level and Key Success Factors

Municipality	Population ¹	Revenue	Winning times of the Mayor	Availability of an UN Language	Political Ideology	Website Design
Güzelyurt	18,946	12,936,535	4	Yes	Right	Outsourced
Kyrenia	33,207	26,094,571	3	Yes	Left	Outsourced
İskele	7,906	6,474,831	5	Yes	Right	In-house
Mehmetçik	3,729	2,228,286	4	Yes	Right	In-house
Famagusta	40,920	33,333,744	5	Yes	Left	Outsourced
Nicosia	61,378	67,181,709	1	Yes	Left	In-house
Gonyeli	17,277	13,638,305	2	No	Left	Outsourced
Degirmenlik	11,895	10,906,105	2	No	Left	In-house
Lapta	12,118	9,796,344	5	No	Right	Outsourced
Yeni Bogazici	6,618	5,094,938	2	No	Left	Outsourced
Dikmen	9,120	8,377,597	2	No	Left	In-house
Büyükkonuk	2,860	1,780,770	2	No	Right	Outsourced
Alaykoy	3,884	2,738,629	2	No	Left	Outsourced
Çatalkoy	5,652	4,396,138	1	Yes	Independent	Outsourced
Tatlısu	1,459	1,379,692	3	Yes	Right	Outsourced
Akıncılar	390	500,938	2	No	Left	In-house
Alsancak	6,594	5,231,028	3	N/A	Right	N/A
Akdoğan	2,471	1,866,412	3	N/A	Right	N/A
Beyarmudu	4,125	2,743,739	2	N/A	Right	N/A
Gecitkale	2,380	1,781,067	2	N/A	Right	N/A
Inonu	2,927	2,439,289	1	N/A	Independent	N/A
Serdarlı	2,411	1,569,466	2	N/A	Right	N/A
Vadili	2,390	1,476,446	1	N/A	Right	N/A
Esentepe	2,414	2,696,687	3	N/A	Right	N/A
Lefke	11,091	7,784,332	6	N/A	Right	N/A
Yeni Erenkoy	5,627	3,481,588	2	N/A	Right	N/A
Karpaz	2,349	2,095,527	2	N/A	Right	N/A
Pasakoy	3,561	1,743,448	3	N/A	Right	N/A

1: Census of 2011 had been considered.

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