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Problems of E-Governance Implementation in Ukraine

The article analyses the essence and perspectives of e-governance development in Ukraine. The factors that limit the introduction of e-governance in Ukraine have been determined. Attention is paid to the model of improvement of e-governance at various levels of communication between the authorities and the citizens.
Key words: e-governance, e-democracy, e-participation, information-communicative technologies

Стаття аналізує зміст та перспективи розвитку електронного урядування в Україні. Автор визначає фактори, які обмежують впровадження електронного урядування в Україні. Приділено увагу моделі покращення електронного урядування та різних рівнів спілкування між владою та громадянами.
Ключові слова: електронне урядування, електронна демократія, електронна участь, інформаційно-комунікаційні технології

E-governance is an important mechanism for communication democratization between the authorities and the society as well as for the development of the modern information society. The ability of citizens to use information-communicative technologies (IT) makes them true subjects of state-buildking, which is one of the postulates of e-democracy. However, introduction of e-governance in Ukraine has a number of peculiarities and problems that may turn this phenomenon into democracy imitation and a tool for certain manipulations.

Studies of e-democracy, e-governance can be found both in the humanitarian and technical spheres. The information society theory (J.-A. Condorcet, J. Fourastié, A. de Saint-Simon) may be considered the theoretical foundation for the "electronic democracy" concept. The aspects of the information society theory (V. Danil'an, D. Diuzhev, O. Kartunov, A. Kolodiuk, o Hryhorta etc.) are among the most developed ones in Ukraine. Thesis papers of O. Yemelyanenko, S. Boychun, L. Malyshenko and Y. Mazurok are dedicated directly to the study of certain aspects of e-democracy in Ukraine.

Despite the constant increase of the amount of scientific literature on the topic, there are still many unsolved problematic issues concerning the implementation and effectiveness of e-democracy in Ukraine.

Scientists predominantly describe the possibilities of the IT sphere, suggest software products for e-elections, e-participation, e-voting etc. Nevertheless, deeper and more serious problems arise, problems that are connected with the necessity to create conditions for citizen deliberation of important sociopolitical issues before forming the final list of questions and before making the final decision concerning the implementation of certain projects. Namely, we speak of the possibility and the wish of the participants of political communication to actually deal with political issues at different levels (local, regional, national) [1; 2].

Thus, taking into consideration everything said above, the aim of our scientific investigation is the theoretical finding of the correlation between the necessity of e-governance introduction and the possibilities of its implementation in Ukraine.

E-governance is a form of state governing that facilitates the increase of effectiveness, openness and transparency of state and local authorities, provision of a number of on-line state services for citizens, society, the state and business through the use of IT technologies.

The aim of e-governance introduction in Ukraine is the development of e-democracy in order to achieve the European standards of electronic state services as well as openness and transparency of the work of the authorities. The complex evaluation of e-democracy development should be done using four criteria: transparency, accountability, civic education and e-participation. It is obvious that transparency and accountability are closely connected with e-governance technologies in general, including the authorities' provision of full and timely access to public information. A Regulation of the Cabinet of Ministers #835 was passed in autumn 2015 according to which all bodies of power are obliged to publish a certain

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set of data in the open data format [3]. A separate impulse to the development of these two components was given by the introduction of the "ProZorro" electronic public procurement system and the "E-Data" project on publishing the reports on the expenditure of public finances. Generally speaking, transparency and accountability concern the e-governance system, thus ensuring public access to information and being a precondition for further e-participation.

In the last two years e-democracy has become much stronger in Ukraine. Some of its instruments have been introduces in many cities, namely, e-reception room of the City Mayor, a possibility of submitting an e-appeal, holding online opinion polls. At the state level, a single portal for e-appeals, an "e-parliament" have been created, a system of e-petitions to State bodies of power as well as the unified system of local petitions have been introduced. The Secretariat of the President were the first to successfully create the e-petition system (August 2015), the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine were second and only in summer 2016 such option appeared for the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine. Also, in 2015-2016 there was a wave of creation of an instrument called "the participation budget". The municipality dwellers have a chance to submit a project on community development and to receive financing from the local budget for its implementation. Another much discussed instrument is the system of e-declarations of the officials.

However, introduction of e-governance instruments does not guarantee that they will be widely used by the public or, what is more important, that they will be used to ensure quality changes in governing. Increasing the level of civic education in the e-governance sphere is a very important task. This can be proved by looking at the results of e-petition introduction in Ukraine. Many of the submitted petitions contradict the norms of Ukrainian legislation or were sent to the bodies that do not have the competence to deal with the issue in question. This is especially true concerning the petitions to the Secretariat of the President of Ukraine [4].

Moreover, according to the results of the research conducted by the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology for the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation as well as the State Agency for e-Governance Issues in February 2015, 79% of the respondents have never heard of the term "e-democracy"; only 41% of the respondents partially understand the meaning of this concept [5].

Attention should also be paid to the general access of the Ukrainians to the Internet. Thus, according to various evaluations, 14 to 26 million people have regular Internet access and only from 21% to 29% of them regularly visit the sites of state and local authorities. The percent of "wired" working places in regional state administrations is 92%, and at the district level it is 65%. Despite the fact that various electronic services are being introduced, there is still a necessity to increase the popularity and level of trust in the society to electronic systems. According to the data of Google, a little over 60% of Ukrainians are Internet users. This is a relatively low index. Poland has 80%, Mexico – 77%, Malaysia – 76% [6].

It is evident that citizens of Ukraine cannot effectively use the existing or the potential possibilities in the sphere of e-governance unless they reach the necessary competence level and receive Internet access. For according to the Green Book of state policy on e-governance in Ukraine, the instruments of electronic democracy must strengthen the capacity of people to ensure consideration of their priorities and to submit proposals on development of concrete programs of state policy [7]. In other words, a digital discrimination appears.

So we may assume that without social engineering IT would only imitate democracy instead of creating it. For at this stage, according to the aforementioned studies, it is clearly evident that there are certain procedures and mechanism for public participation in the decision-making process. However, the most important component is absent, namely the actual participation of citizens, their desire and understanding of their role in this process etc.

This leads to the paradox of creation of a "fraud democracy", in which specialists make an effort to form e-governance instruments, and the target audience does not know about it or is simply not interested in using these instruments. So it becomes obvious that attention should be focused on using the best practices of e-governance, on encouraging citizens to actively participate in state-building through IT.

But it should be noted that significant projects on "optimizing" democracy cannot be brought to life without Internet access and the wish to improve the interaction process between the authorities and the society. Serious developments in programming, mathematics and modeling are needed. Most projects nowadays are reduced to simple tasks and the existing mechanisms.

Ideally, each citizen must have the chance to participate in deliberating socially significant issues. And we see today that it is practically impossible to implement without the Internet. But simple presence of a computer connected to the Internet does not solve the problem of a deliberating platform where citizens may discuss certain issues, suggest their solutions, compare and comment, change and unify them and finally select one of the competing variants.

Of course, there is a large number of Internet-forums, and more or less specialized web-sites. They provide a wide variety of votings, petitions, elections, vote delegations, but all these variants are mechanisms of democratic choice from the alternatives that have been suggested and selected beforehand. Any participant may suggest a new topic or problem, but without a clear deliberating procedure all the activity on such a forum cannot be more than a discourse of a few people.

At the first sight it seems that we simply need to transfer those common procedures that function in democratic countries to the Internet. But the "living" parliament does not organize mass discussions. Any issue, any law is first discussed and developed by a specialized committee and in party factions. Plenary discussions are therefore reduced to submission of the already prepared variant and the confrontation of faction opinions (one opinion from each faction). The majority of deputies in this procedure are simple functionaries waiting for the moment when they need to vote "as the faction orders". It cannot be otherwise: 450 people cannot discuss anything together at the "real" sitting.

So the question arises: if 450 people cannot do so then what if this number is 10 or 100 times more? For if we make the deliberation process open for all citizens as it is supposed to be in a true advisory direct democracy, we may have up to 100 thousand participants on a well-organized Internet-platform in a week. For instance, the most burning issues that may interest citizens are the creation of the well-structures law-enforcement system; ensuring children safety, development of higher educational system etc. Not the already written law should be discussed but rather the topic itself in order to find the unique non-standard solution and involvement of a considerable number of participants is inevitable.

When the already written draft law is discussed even if it can be criticized and certain points may still be amended ("public hearings"), the attention of the participants is disseminated between many points, and only a few hundreds may focus their attention on the key and most controversial issues. Does this mean that true mass public deliberation (in which tens or even hundreds of thousands participate) is even theoretically impossible? It is true that the Internet simplifies communication, terminating the limitations created by time and distance, but it still does not broaden our perception.

When forecasting the result of such e-democracy, e-participation we may assume that the reduction of the number of participants deliberating a certain problem through either delegating their votes to others or involvement of a limited number of citizens may lead to ignoring of the deliberation altogether.

If we continue the imaginary modeling of this situation, we should take into consideration that for true practical study of e-democracy in Ukraine a burning topic should be selected, a topic that would gather, let's say, more than ten thousand participants. Its deliberation should begin after the participants are familiarized with "expert reviews" of this topic. New suggestions of the participants (as well as their commentaries) are sent out to randomly selected participant for anonymous reviewing. Reviewing presupposes the evaluation of the quality of the new proposal (its clarity, substantiation) and determining the level of agreement (or disagreement) of the reviewer with the expressed idea. At this stage a great number of commentaries that contradict deliberation rules (contain personal comments, commercial advertising, do not concern the topic discussed etc.) is cut off. It should be noted that this is done by the participants themselves without the intervention of appointed moderators, and the initial send out to the randomly selected reviewers gives a certain level of guarantee of the objective quality evaluation.

The system constantly groups and regroups (divides into several clusters) all the submitted proposals using the existing evaluations and sometimes requiring additional ones. This clustering is done according to a certain algorithm and usually takes into consideration the "level of agreement" between various group members. Proposals within each cluster are then "ranged" by the program according to the average point of their quality, so at the top of the cluster is the proposal which, in the program's opinion, best presents the idea of all the proposals of the cluster. In this structured form any participant may quickly and easily learn about the key ideas expressed before submitting his or her own proposal or they can just improve/comment on the already expressed ideas.

The described approach to the direct consultative (electronic) democracy has many controversial issues which may only be solved through certain theoretical development as well as practical experiments. Many questions arise: how to organize interaction between the "experts" (those who have professional knowledge on the given topic) and the deliberation participants (carriers of different value systems)? How to evaluate the objectiveness of these experts and to guarantee that their opinion will be significant for the participants? How to coordinate the deliberation of various interconnected issues, including those which arise during the deliberation of the initial "key" issue? How to ensure the stability of the system, its "self-defense" from informational attacks? Which kinds of trust ratings or other indices may be effective for encouraging constructive behavior of the participants?

So why is the large-scale deliberation of an issue so important? The thing is that direct democracy prin-

ciple means that the legitimacy of the decisions made is achieved not only through openness, but also through mass deliberation.

Another important issue is who may or must select issues for deliberation. This issue is much simpler to deal with than the question of effective organization of the deliberation process itself. For the list of deliberation issues must be simply structured according to the priority level while the list of solutions must be then reduced to a single choice. We may assume that at first the deliberating issue will be chosen for the participants, but not by the authorities, but rather by the organizers of a certain project. Then the list of issues may be prioritized by the citizens themselves as, for instance, it is already done in Iceland. Actually it should be mentioned that northern countries with a low population density (Iceland, Estonia, Finland) are among the leaders in state supported experiments in the field of e-democracy.

To sum up, we may state that e-democracy is a real project that is effective for the development of the Ukrainian society, but is still not fully implemented. The problems connected with its implementation include considerable limitation in Internet access (electronic inequality); low level of interest in e-communication with the authorities among Internet users; lack of competence in the sphere of e-governance and e-democracy; low level of public interest towards e-communication in general; absence of Internet-platforms for mass deliberation and selection of burning sociopolitical issues, etc.

E-democracy may be really effective only if state workers follow all the described procedures, if cooperation between the bodies of power and the civil society is established and if the quality of civic education in the field of e-governance and e-democracy is increased. We should use the existing instruments and methods of e-democracy, but it is also necessary to model and improve platforms for mass deliberation of burning sociopolitical issues. True direct democracy must give all citizens the possibility to submit and then discuss their proposals. The system that would allow this must be ready to "serve" a considerable number of participants. Such a system may not exist without the introduction of new, specific algorithms, with the help of which the participants will be able to arrive to a common decision.

A wide range of theoretical and practical aspects of development of the e-democracy concept may be outlined as perspectives for further scientific research.

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