Implementation of E-Participation Elements in Educational Institutions Based on Experience of E-Democracy State Instruments Implementing in Ukraine

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Abstract

Electronic or digital democracy is based on the use of modern digital and information technologies to enhance citizen participation in public policy-making, increase government transparency and accountability, and strengthen citizen skills and awareness of the benefits of using IT for public life. In recent years, Ukraine has advanced significantly in the field of eDemocracy. Recent amendments to the Law of Ukraine «About Citizens' Appeals» introduced a mechanism for submitting petitions and appeals in electronic form, developing bills on eVoting and eVote counting at local government elections. However, despite the relatively high development of eParticipation instruments at national or regional state level, citizen participation at the local level still remains an unattainable dream. For example, eParticipation tools are lacking at the level of student self-government, which should be a driving force in creating democratic processes and procedures. Based on national experience in implementing eDemocracy tools in Ukraine, it can be noted that the use of such tools at a lower local level, namely in public universities, could significantly increase the involvement of students and staff in dialogue, public policy, decision-making, monitoring and control.

Keywords [[1]](#footnote-1)

eDemocracy, digitalization, eurointegration, information technologies.

# Introduction

Various IT technologies have become an integral part not only in the environment around us, but also actively developing as a component of our socio-political life. Global experience shows that effective use of modern digital technologies can have a positive impact on democratic processes, such as increasing transparency and promoting accountability. eDemocracy tools help fight corruption, provide citizens with all the information they need, and actively engage them into decision-making process at the state level. Despite its rapid development, eDemocracy in Ukraine remains a relatively new concept.

The Decree of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine No. 797-r of November 8, 2017 approved the Concept of e-democracy development in Ukraine (hereinafter - the National concept of eDemocracy) and approved the plan of measures for its implementation. The main purpose of this Concept is to create political, organizational, technological and ideological conditions for the development of eDemocracy in Ukraine, characterized by an increase in citizens' involvement in communication, cooperation, control, participation in policy making, development of self-organization and self-government, as well as the level of trust in the authorities.

The concept of development of eDemocracy in Ukraine defines the term eDemocracy such as: «eDemocracy is a form of social relations in which citizens and organizations are involved in government and public administration, and local self-government through the widespread use of information and communication technologies in democratic processes, enabling: to increase participation, initiative and citizen engagement at the national, regional and local level to public life; improve the transparency of decision-making and accountability of democratic institutions; improve the response of public authorities to citizens' appeals; to facilitate public discussions and to draw citizens' attention to the decision-making process»[1]. eDemocracy (also known as «digital democracy») is based on the use of modern accessible digital technologies and aims at developing civil rights and freedoms, engaging new ways of citizen participation in decision-making processes, developing social policy and government processes, and engaging citizens in the social, political, and economic development of their community. It aims to reinforce basic concepts of good governance, such as:

* transparency;
* accountability;
* participation;
* civic education.

eDemocracy is not intended to replace ordinary democracy. Its` tools should be created and implemented as a way to strengthen democracy in the country by digitizing existing democratic mechanisms (eg electronic appeals, as a digital analogue of citizen appeals in paper form). With the effective use of information technology, they can help the government to introduce new tools for civil society participation in government, and for citizens to engage in political life in alternative and more convenient ways. By enhancing citizens' involvement in political and social processes, eDemocracy can directly influence the level of social integration, reciprocity, and empowerment that underpins a modern democratic state. It should be noted that the new approach to quality governance identifies citizens as the main actors through the use of electronic services. That is why state processes must now be formed to provide bottom-up participation opportunities.

# Instruments of eDemocracy at national and local levels

Recommendations of the European Union on the development of eDemocracy can be considered as one of the most successful regulatory bases for consolidating the plan and principle of development of eDemocracy instruments [2]. These recommendations were adopted in 2009 and included six guidance documents. Indicative Guide No.1 «Generic tools and policies for an electronic democracy» [3] provides an extensive list of possible eDemocracy tools, namely:

* eCampaigning;
* eCitizen Relationship Management (eCiRM);
* eComplaints;
* eConsultation;
* eConsulate / eEmbassy;
* eDemocracy Games;
* eDemocracy Webcasts;
* eDiscussion;
* eInitiative;
* eJournalism;
* eJustice;
* eLegislation;
* eOmbudsman and Audit Institutions;
* eParliament;
* eParty (external);
* ePetition;
* ePolitician;
* eSpatial Planning (eNeighbourhood);
* eVoting.

**Figure 1**: The process of public policy making and the use of appropriate online tools

## Electronic petitions

In 2019, ePetitions, eAppeals, public budgets (also known as «participation budgets») and eConsultations have become most prevalent at the national level in Ukraine. It should also be noted that over last 3 years, resources have been developing rapidly to publish public data sets in the form of open data and aggregation tools, which may also combine several eParticipation tools.

Electronic petitions. The Law of Ukraine «About Citizens' Appeals» defines an electronic petition as a special form of collective petition of citizens to the President of Ukraine, the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine or a local government body [4]. Electronic petitions draw attention to the problems of the citizens, whose solution is impossible without the intervention of the authorities. Any citizen can initiate and register a petition and vote for it. Information about the problem raised by the petition, the number of votes and the results of real-time voting should be made available to the public.

The public budget. The main purpose of the public budget is to empower citizens and NGOs to propose their own local development projects and influence the allocation of a certain share of the budget funds by voting for certain projects.

It is also important that community surveys can also be initiated. Further details on the types of public consultation [5] that underlie the e-consultation tool are provided in Table 1

Table 1

Types of public consultations

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Individual** | **Collective** |
| Poll | Consultative / advisory groups or committees |
| Questionnaire | Public councils |
| Interview | Public hearings |

An Example of equation

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| $$E=mc^{2},$$ | (1) |

where ...

# Conclusions

On June 12, 2019, the Decree of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine No. 405-p approved the Action Plan for the Implementation of the Concept of eDemocracy Development in Ukraine for 2019-2020. Paragraph 2 of this Plan defines measures for the introduction of e-democracy in higher education institutions, in particular the introduction of electronic voting tools in the activities of student self-government bodies. This task should be carried out by representatives of the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, the Ministry of Justice of Ukraine and the Ministry of Digital Transformation of Ukraine with the involvement of NGOs, such as the «eGovernment Accountability and Community Involvement Program» (EGAP). As a result of these measures, at least five higher education institutions are expected to be able to use e-democracy tools. All this tells us that in 2020 Ukraine should take the first step towards meeting the introduction of eParticipation tools in higher education.

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