THE ROLE OF E-PARTICIPATION
– CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT
IN PUBLIC SERVICE DELIVERY

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Abstract The partnership between citizen and public service sector will play an important role in good governance concept. People are able to participate in public management process and public service delivery to make societies more inclusive. Today, information and communication technologies (ICT) expanded opportunities for civic engagements. Thanks to the use of e-information provision, e-consultation and e-decision people are ably to active participation in public life. Participation praxis in public sector are expanded all over the world. The article presents an issue of using information technology for contacts between public administration and citizen in conjunction with social participation. The objective of the article is to present the concept of e-participation, methods and some practice that enable active involvement of the citizen into the public live. Next part of the article describes the global trends in e-participation development. The conclusions were formulated at the final part of the article. The paper uses the methods of literature review, case study analysis and synthesis.

Introduction

Participation apply mainly to introducing politics and making decisions In political purposes, within the limits of formal and informal systems as well. Participation exists when action taken by society can have real influence on every stage of politics lifecycle. Participation would have direct influence on public aims and values such as democracy (Millard, 2009).

Concept and levels of participation – literature overview

Concepts of participation apply to various spheres, in which most common terms are social participation, public participation and individual participation.

Social participation can be determined as a community (vertical) participation. In the broad sense it is connected with the participation of units in actions taken by society to whom belong the unit. That type of co-participation is connected with the idea of civil society whose members voluntarily take part in public activity. In wider sense, social participation means public law partnership between communal government and citizens in order to taking actions in aim of local development (Hausner, 1999). Five classical tools of social participation are: election, consultations, referendum, administrative proceeding and direct operations (Hausner, 1999).

Public participation refers to the involvement of individuals in the activities of the structures and institutions of the democratic state and so the public authorities and controlled by them or subordinate them public organizations. The concept of political society (Kaźmierczak, 2011) is the reference frame for this concept. According to Langton, public participation includes the following categories of citizen participation (Langton, 1978):

- public action,
- public involvement,
- electoral participation,
- obligatory participation.

The characteristics of individual categories of citizens' participation in the life of political communities are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. The characteristics of individual categories of citizens' participation

Category of participation	Charasteristic	Forms of participation
Public action	Measures initiated and controlled by citizens in order to influence decisions taken by public authorities or voters	– lobbying, – protest, – public education, – disobedience of citizens, – advocacy
Public involvement	Actions initiated and controlled by public authorities in the frame of their administration or management tasks. It deals with improvement activities. The decision-making process and the quality of public service delivery at every stage of public policy	– public consultation, – public consultation, – consultative and advisory boards, – public hearings, – survey research
Electoral participation	actions necessary for the nomination of candidates and the selection of representatives to hold public functions in the structures of the various levels of authority	– central elections, – local elections, – referendum
Obligatory participation	Obligatory activities taken by citizens, which are the support of the public authorities necessary to fulfill their statutory research	– obligatory payment of taxes, – institution of court judges

Source: own elaboration based on Langton (1978).

Individual participation is linked to the daily choices and actions of the individual who express his or her expectations about the society in which he or she wishes to live. It deals with issues such as socially responsible consumption, participation in charity and participation in social organizations (Kaźmierczak, 2011).

An important contribution to the theory of participation was made by Arnstein, who in 1969 defined three levels of civic participation: lack of participation, quasi participation and participation. In the first case, the opinions and interests of the decision makers are centered, but the needs of the target group are not taken into account, or the target group is deemed to have insufficient knowledge to make decisions. The stage of apparent participation means more and more influence on the decision-making process, but without the possibility of direct influence. Decision makers share problems with the target group and are interested in her views. However, opinions expressed need not be taken into account when making decisions. At the last stage of participation, the society has a formal and binding role in the decision-making process, and the partnership is characterized by this partnership (Urban, 2005).

Participation of citizens in public life should be considered both internationally and nationally as well as locally. The European Commission says that electronic participation helps people get involved in politics and understand process of making public decisions. It is part of the European Commission's „open government approach" which aims to provide opportunities for public administration (Lironi, 2016). The importance of this problem is demonstrated by the European Union's launch of the E-UROP program, whose main objective is to increase Information and knowledge on e-participation tools, especially in the field of Community policymaking. The European Union defines four basic direct tools for participation (Kinyik, 2015):

– European Citizens' Initiative,
– petition to the European Parliament,
– public consultation of the European Commission,
– puzzle by policy.

In 2001, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) published a handbook that highlights the important role of local, national and international (OECD, 2001) policy-making. The OECD draws attention to the possible ways in which the rulers and citizens interact, such as:

– information (one – way relationship) – allowing access to public information;
– consultation (two-way relationship) – getting feedback from citizens as a response to the debate initiated by the rulers
– active participation (advanced two-way relationship) – citizens actively engage in decision-making and policy-making.

The role of ICTs in the process of participation

The use of ICT for the democratization of public life makes it closer to citizens. Modern ICT technologies, despite some safety constraints, are important in the development of democracy (Millard, 2006):

– they can mobilize citizens to change their attitudes from passive to active,
– can involve the public in shaping public services,
– it can help transform societal and political approach from government to people into government by people.

Electronic participation in the context of e-government plays an increasingly important role. E-participation can be defined as the process of engaging citizens in policy, decision-making, the design and delivery of services, where the ICT technology are being used (United Nations, 2016).

Electronic participation means better decision-making and increased citizen participation at all stages of the democratic decision-making process (Märker, 2009).

E-participation can be defined as the participation of natural and legal persons and their groups in public decision-making through the involvement of information and communication technologies (ICTs).

The importance of using ICT in the process of participation was emphasized by the United Nations, which, based on the OECD defined interactions, identified three levels of interoperability using electronic tools (United Nations, 2014). The characteristics of the three levels of participation are shown in Figure 1.
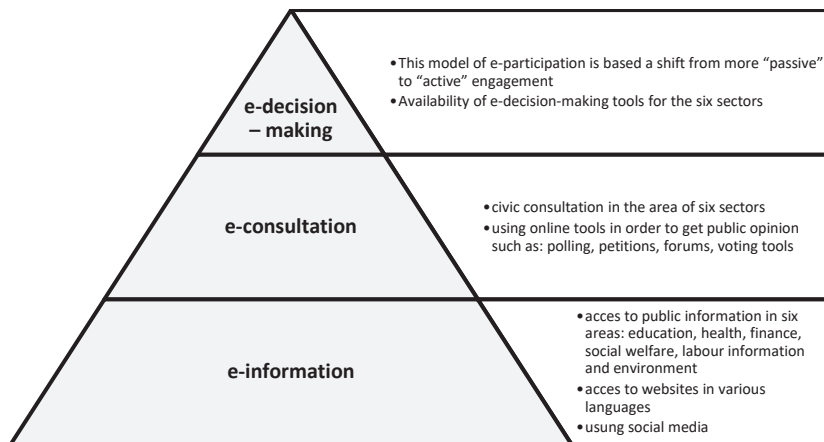

Figure 1. The characteristics of the three levels of participation

Source: own elaboration based on United Nations (2014).

Tools used in e-participation are:
– information on the websites of public institutions and non-governmental organizations,
– e-mail,
– sms,
– information in electronic media (radio, television);
– Internet chats,
– social media,
– conferences and training conducted by electronic means,
– an electronic survey on the website,
– a survey sent by e-mail,
– phone survey,
– petitions submitted electronically,
– forums,
– voting tools.

Among the tools mentioned above, electronic access to public information is the most important, which presented in a systematic way, ensuring transparency of public activities.

Examples of the best practices of e-participation in Poland- case study

One of the best practices applied at the central level of public administration in Poland is the Odysseus program introduced by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. It allows you to contact Poles traveling abroad and give them the necessary information in case of emergencies and assistance by the competent diplomatic post. This system also allows you to receive notifications of dangers in the country of travel and other consular information (odyseusz. msz.gov.pl, 2017).

One example of participatory action at the local level using electronic tools is the NaprawmyTo.pl website. It is an IT tool for mapping problems in public spaces, which can be located in subsequent communities. The main sources of inspiration for the site were: FixMyStreet.com and SeeClickFix.com, which are very popular in the world. Thanks to this solution the inhabitants of the communes participating in this project have the opportunity to report minor defects that they observe in their own municipality. These problems include, for example, the broken windshield at the bus stop, no timetable at this stop or illegal dump. This application goes directly to the appropriate cell in the office. The citizen receives information on the progress of the case and who is involved. The program according to the 2017 data has joined 15 municipalities, which have resolved over 21,000 cases (NaprawamyTo. pl, 2017).

A solution with a wider range of possibilities for civic participation is the Platform of Social Consultations in Olsztyn (konsultacje.olsztyn.eu, 2017), which was created to keep the dialogue with residents of Olsztyn up to date and to familiarize with the planned investments. Residents now have access to information on what is being consulted, what will be consulted, what the results of the public consultation will be and how they may affect the investment decisions and urban projects. This platform includes, among others, thematic web forums or detailed city budget data. An interesting tool used in that project is the simulation game called budget slider, which allows you to easily find out the budget of Olsztyn and to get to know the influence of appropriate disposal of budget to particular municipality's tasks.

Widely used by local authorities is the electronic poll related to the civic budget. About the topic of electrical survey. The successful application of an electronic survey of mainly for the purposes of consultation in Poznan are written by Matczak, Mączka i Milewicz (2015). The universality of participatory practices with the use of electronic tools can be demonstrated by their presence not only in large cities but also in small communities. An example is the Municipality of Dobra, which has introduced and continues to develop e-participation practices such as (dobraszczecinska.pl, 2017):

- posting on the website of the municipality information related to its functioning (eg concerning investment, traffic hindrances, community budget),
- an electronic poll related to the citizens' budget,
- an electronic survey related to the program of revitalization of Dobra commune,
- SISMS messenger – a free phone application that allows you to receive important and interesting information from the Municipality of Dobra (eg, information about dangers such as storms, cultural and sporting information and more).

Global trends on the e-participation

The United Kingdom is ranked as global leader on the e-participation, while Japan and Australia share second place. In top 25 performers in e-participation in 2016 is Poland. In the survey Poland reached 14th place, while two years earlier it was 65th ahead of countries like Germany and Denmark. Studies show that public consultations, in the form of online deliberations, are a popular way of coordinating the formation of opinion among citizens for further decision-making processes by government. The United Kingdom's engagement strategy has focused on maximizing openness and transparency in information provision in general, especially in relation to policy formulation. All policy documents by the government are published on Gov.uk. Almost three thousand policy documents were already deliberated with the public's participation or are in the process of consultation. The second example is the Austrian government, which has created a directory of online consultations to inform the public of the topics that are open (United Nations, 2016).

Participatory modeling practice also applies to Estonia, which already introduced Internet voting in 2005. In 2007, the osl.ee portal was implemented in Estonia, which has the following functions (Słociński, Żelaznowski, 2015):

- the possibility of initiating new legislation, reporting criticism and ideas in the form of petitions,
- the opportunity to participate in public debate,
- possibility of obtaining public information, information on draft legislation, political decisions, planned debates.

The most common e-participation tools and activities are (Panopoulou, Tambouris and Tarabanis, 2009):

- information provision online,
- electronic campaigning (protest, lobbying, petitioning and other forms of collective action),
- e-electioneering to support politicians, political parties and lobbyists in the context of election campaigns,
- e-polling and e-voting,
- co-production and collaborative e-environments, including innovation spaces, hackathons (an event, typically lasting several days, in which a large number of people meet to engage in collaborative computer programming), crowdfunding (the practice of funding a project or venture by raising many small amounts of money from a large number of people, typically via the Internet),
- public policy discourses, including crowdsourcing, online consultation and deliberation.

The concept and tools of e-participation are still developing.

Conclusions

Participatory action is aimed at stabilizing, changing or improving some public management (Millard, 2009). The necessary conditions for effective participation are (United Nations, 2016):

- focus on areas of public activity relevant to the needs of society,
- providing appropriate tools and communication channels,
- focus on the interaction between citizens and the government itself.

In addition to the many positive aspects of involving citizens and objects interested in public decision-making, attention should also be paid to the negative side of this phenomenon. The biggest disadvantage of participation

is the longer decision-making time and costs. However, the use of ICT reduces the cost of communication and information. On the other hand, other costs are worth the cost due to the long-term benefits of cooperation between residents and authorities.

The further development of electronic participation depends on many factors including:

– willingness to use the possibility of participation by citizens, including by electronic means,
– willingness of public institutions to use participatory practices with the use of electronic tools,
– citizens' digital skills,
– access to computer, telecommunications equipment, software, telecommunications services and the Internet.

Considering the aforementioned factors, the e-participation process will develop faster in developed countries, leading in global rankings. However, the willingness to participate in the poorer countries in public life also leads to the development of e-participation processes, although they may be less technologically advanced what is proved in the United Nations reports (United Nations, 2016).

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