

A SITUATION ANALYSIS FOR NORTHERN CYPRUS MUNICIPALITIES: KEY SUCCESS FACTORS FOR EFFECTIVE PARTICIPATION

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-Abstract-

In this research, the current e-participation features of the 28 municipalities in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) have been 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 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 were then cross-checked with specific key success factors that were identified in literature. The key success factors for the municipalities' websites development were identified based upon the literature, which were then compared within the findings. When the current situation was reviewed, it was found that half of the municipalities in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus

(TRNC) do have a website, however the features that are provided by these websites need to be improved as the e-government concept is in the enhanced stage. In addition, this research highlights key success factors such as revenue, population, its capability and availability of an official United Nations (UN) language of the top-ranked municipality websites, which can be used for improving the e-participation maturity levels of the municipalities in TRNC and other parts of the world.

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

JEL Classification: O38, H38, H70

1. INTRODUCTION

By the advancement of the technology and fast diffusion of new and innovative approaches, governments are able to provide many of the physical services on electronic environment as well (Porumbescu, 2016). Usage of e-government services provides efficiency both in financial and operational terms. This paper aims to develop an earlier proposal by Kaya, Medeni and Sağsan (2016) about the municipalities which are located in northern part of Cyprus. Figuring out key success factors will enable to propose recommendations for improvements of e-government services provided by the municipalities which both will increase citizen engagement and quality of the services provided.

1.1. Development of the e-Participation Concept and Current Features

As part of e-government and Information and communication technologies (ICT), 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) also mentioned e-contact, e-petition and e-donation as three methods of e-participation.

As underlined by Kaya et al (2016) socio-economic factors like 1. age, education and income level, 2. political issues and interests such as left-right wing choices, democracy and stability, 3. population and budget, and institutional capacity of a municipality are directly related to the development of technical and administrative infrastructure that result in the sophistication of e-government and e-governance initiatives, and thus use of citizens. In the mean time, e-government discourse should be presented as non-ideological in order to get acceptance from more parts of the society. If it is presented as ideological rather than technical, the opposite sides may not accept/use the service which will prevent the penetration (West, 2005). Furthermore, “political commitment of top political leaders is necessary for overcoming the reluctance to invest money in a policy whose benefits only accrue in the long term, and which cannot be fully implemented by any single ministry” (Lee, 2015, xvii). Media also plays a crucial role for discourse of e-government services where e-government related news showed significant increase during the discourse of e-government services in Turkey (Yildiz and Saylam, 2013). Further information on the related literature can be found in the previous study proposal, on which this work has been based. (Kaya, Medeni, Sağsan, 2016)

2. DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

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 in the

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 was applied for all (28) municipalities in TRNC. The form included 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 TRNC are using or have saturation of the e-participation maturity level (See Kaya, Medeni, Sağsan, 2016 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’ (Sağsan and Yıldız, 2010) in TRNC. 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.

The first part of this research includes a content analysis of the municipality websites and the literature review is also conducted in order to determine the key success factors and current maturity level of the municipality websites. The second part of this research includes the ranking, quantitative assessment and comparison of the key success factors with respect to the findings and the independent variables.

2.1. 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 TRNC? 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 (Table 1):

Table-1. Hypothesis (adapted from Kaya, Medeni and Sağsan, 2016)

- **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

In order to test the hypotheses empirically, it was necessary to design the research by identifying both dependent and independent variables. In this case, the E-participation maturity level is the dependent variable, and Key Success Factors are the Independent variables. The Cronbach's Alpha test was applied to verify the reliability, which was 0.891.

2.2.The Current Situation in North Cyprus and Analysis of Municipality Websites

Local elections are conducted every 5 years and were last held on 29th June 2014 for all 28 municipalities, when 16 mayors changed. In total, the 28 municipalities operate and provide services to 285,699 people. There are 190,494 Turkish Cypriots, 80,550 Turkish and 3,693 British citizens (Devlet Planlama Örgütü 2015). However, it has been announced that the number of municipalities will be decreased, aiming to increase collaboration within the municipalities and to expand their authorization area (Kıbrıs Postası (KP) Daily News 2014b, State Planning Organization, 2015).

When the content analysis was made, Guzelyurt Municipality achieved the highest score (15) amongst the 28 municipalities, which was followed by Iskele (13) and Girne (13), then Mehmetçik (11) and Mağusa (10). 57.1% of the municipalities have a website (f=16) whereas 42.9% do not have any website for their institution (f=12). None of the municipalities have e-Payment options and only a minority (f=7, 25%) have online call integration within the website structure. Only 21% (f=6) provided policies and 25% (f=7) provided legal documents on the websites, whereas none of the municipalities provided budget

information on their websites. None of the municipalities provided datasets, and only 25% (f=7) have the Availability of an official United Nations language (English). Facebook is the most used social network within the municipalities (f=27, 97%), which is followed by Twitter (f=12, 43%) and YouTube (f=10, 36%). Media Tools was the highest valid e-consultation Tool (f=7), whereas there were only a small number of Polls (f=3), Online Forums (f=2) and Online Tools (f=2). There were not any Petition Tools on the municipalities' websites. E-decision making tools have been rarely used within the municipality websites, according to our findings.

When a correlation analysis was applied to the data, it was found that the weighted e-participation maturity level has a correlation with revenue (-.638), population (-.731), IT capability (.654), political stability (-.385) and availability of an official UN language (.609) at 0.01 significant level.

2.3.Regression Models

According to the Regression Model 1, 2, 3 and 4, the e-participation maturity level is affected by the revenue, population, IT capability and availability of an official UN language. All models are significant by the ANOVA model level of .000b.

Model 1

The effect of the e-participation maturity level was analysed to determine if there is a relationship with the dependent variable (e-participation maturity level) and the independent variables (availability of an official UN language, political stability, IT capability, revenue, population). The independent variables represent the dependent variables by the degree of 76.2%. This also means that when the e-participation maturity level is upgraded by 1 unit, revenue will increase by 0.703, which supports Hypothesis 4.

Model 2

The effect of the e-participation maturity level was analysed to see if there is relationship with the dependent variable (e-participation maturity level) and independent variables (availability of an Official UN language, political stability, IT capability, revenue, population). Independent variables represent the dependent variables by the degree of 76.2%. This means that when the e-participation

maturity level is upgraded by 1 unit, population will be affected by -1.064, and therefore Hypothesis 5 has not been supported.

Model 3

The effect of the e-participation maturity level was analysed to see if there is a relationship with dependent variable (e-participation maturity level) and the independent variables (availability of an Official UN language, political stability, IT capability, revenue, population). Independent variables represent the dependent variables by the degree of 76.2%. This means, when the e-participation maturity level is upgraded by 1 unit, IT capability will be affected by .362, which therefore supports Hypothesis 6.

Model 4

The effect of e-participation maturity level was analysed to see if there is a relationship with the dependent variable (e-participation maturity level) and independent variables (availability of an official UN language, political stability, IT capability, revenue, population). Independent variables represent the dependent variables by the degree of 76.2%. This means, when the e-participation maturity level is upgraded by 1 unit, availability of an official UN language will be affected by .315, which supports Hypothesis 3.

3. KEY SUCCESS FACTORS ACCORDING TO THE E-PARTICIPATION MATURITY LEVEL

3.1.The Revenue

In the literature review, it was argued that revenue plays an important role in the development of e-government (Cárcaba and Garcia 2008, Tolbert *et al.* 2008). In spite of this assertion, the qualitative content analysis showed that the municipalities with the least revenue also had high scores such as Iskele (10th according to revenue and 2nd according to e-participation maturity score), Mehmetcik (19th according to revenue and 4th according to e-participation maturity score). Quantitative analysis highlighted that the revenue has a positive relationship with the e-participation maturity level parameter, which supports Hypothesis 4 and is also supported by the Regression Model-1.

3.2.Population

In spite of the fact that the revenue of a municipality increases with population (Kuzey Kıbrıs Türk Cumhuriyeti Cumhuriyet Meclisi 1995), different relationships between population and e-participation maturity level were observed such as Iskele (10th according to population and 2nd according to e-participation maturity score) and Mehmetcik (17th according to population and 4th according to e-participation maturity score). In addition, when the population and e-participation maturity level ($r=-.731$, $p= 0.000010$) were analysed, it was found that there is also a negative relationship, which is supported by the Regression Model-2. According to the Population and e-participation maturity level relationships, Hypothesis 5 has not been supported.

3.3.IT Capability

When the qualitative analysis was applied, it was found that while there is generally a certain level of IT capacity in the municipalities that have websites; some of them prefer to outsource their IT operations, whereas others use in-house IT teams for their website creation and maintenance. In addition, quantitative analysis shows that there is a positive relationship between e-participation maturity level and IT capability ($p=0.654$, $r= 0.000162$), which supports Hypothesis 6 and is also supported by Regression Model-3.

3.4.Availability of an Official UN Language

It was discovered that the top-ranked websites do have the availability of an official UN language and it was also highlighted that the websites with the English language are mostly perceived to be the best ones throughout the qualitative analysis. Likewise, the quantitative analysis outlined that there is a positive relationship between the availability of an official UN language and e-participation maturity level ($r = 0.609$, $p = 0.001$), which supports Hypothesis 3 and is also supported by Regression Model-4.

3.5.Political Stability

It was observed that the municipalities with high political stability received higher (top) positions in the content analysis (Also see the Appendix of Tuğberk, Medeni, Sağsan 2016). On the other hand, quantitative analysis showed that there is a negative relationship between the political stability and the e-participation maturity level ($r=-3.85$, $p= 0.043$), therefore Hypothesis 1 has not been supported.

This contradicting evidence of quantitative and qualitative findings results in no significant relation, confirming the findings of Tolbert *et al.* (2008) and Anduiza *et al.* (2010).

3.6. Political Ideology

In spite of previous research that highlighted that left-wing parties were perceived to pay more attention to e-government features (Cárcaba and Garcia 2008, Tolbert *et al.* 2008), the qualitative research highlighted that there is no direct relationship between the political ideology and e-participation maturity level in northern Cyprus. The top five municipalities were distributed between the left and right-wing political parties. In addition, there was not any relationship within the Political Ideology and e-participation maturity level throughout the quantitative analysis, therefore Hypothesis 2 has not been supported.

4. DISCUSSION

In this research, the current situation of TRNC municipality websites was examined. The ranking within the current municipality websites was made based upon the United Nations e-government survey 2014 (United Nations 2014). Out of the 28 municipalities, 16 have a website, yet it could be said that the e-government concept is relatively new for TRNC municipalities and an action plan is required with the aim of increasing e-Participation of the citizens. The e-municipality plan needs to be applied as a macro policy on the national level by the Kıbrıs Türk Belediyeler Birliği (KTBB, the Cyprus Turkish Union of Municipalities) and the Ministry of Interior. There is a lack of an effective policy making process at the macro level, therefore KTBB and the Interior Ministry can pioneer all of these areas in order to increase active participation of citizens. In addition to these top-down governmental initiatives, it is also important to have complementary bottom-up civic actions. For instance, the civil society movement ‘Toparlanıyoruz’ recently increased the debate about the transparency of government institutions, which can be an important civic trigger for improving the e-participation maturity level within affluent municipalities (KP Daily News 2014c). Ultimately, by 2019, it is anticipated that 80% of individuals will connect to the internet by using mobile devices. For this reason, e-government websites must move into the mobile environment. In addition, creating smartphone

applications is necessary to generate greater engagement and participation with e-municipalities (Damani and Damani 2007, Cisco 2015).

Northern Cyprus and Turkey has historical, cultural, geographical and economical connections. For that reason, institutional isomorphism is present between Turkey to TRNC, where most of the implemented projects, e-government or otherwise, started with the initiatives of Turkish Governments (Sağsan et al, 2011). Kromidha (2012) indicated that benchmarking process via international donors has limited but positive effective for the countries which has less e-government development. The author proposed research stages for strategic e-government assistance and benchmarking. "From a neo institutionalist perspective, international e-government assistance on strategic initiatives and benchmarking are strongly related to long-term joint interests between donor organizations and developing countries" (Kromidha, 2012, p. 579). The statement shows that in addition to isomorphism, benchmarking via international donors also might be helpful where EU standards need to be implied to improve e-government level of the country. Cyprus negotiations continue and in case of unification, TRNC infrastructure needs to be ready and improved to meet the EU standards which need well-planned macro-level strategies. As mentioned above, the e-government plan needs to be applied as a macro policy on the national level by the Kıbrıs Türk Belediyeler Birliği (KTBB, the union of municipalities) and the Ministry of Interior. There is a lack of an effective policy making process at the macro level, therefore KTBB and the Interior Ministry can pioneer all of these areas in order to increase active participation of citizens. In addition to these top-down governmental initiatives, it is also important to have complementary bottom-up civic actions to increase spread of use of e-government practices in TRNC.

As only $f=16$ (57.1%) of the municipalities have a website, there is a great opportunity to develop well-designed municipality websites. It was surprising that only $f=7$ (25%) of the websites have online call integration whereas almost all of the municipalities $f=27$ (97%) have a Facebook presence. However, some of the municipalities have a Facebook profile rather than an official Facebook page, which must be modified as government institutions are required to have an official government page on Facebook (Akar 2010, Fill 2011, Sabate *et al.*, 2014). As highlighted in the findings, Facebook has extensive usage within municipalities, which means there is an opportunity to create e-government applications on

Facebook, to increase e-participation and familiarise citizens with e-government concepts. In addition, it is a necessity to provide e-Payment opportunities and budget information to ensure transparency, which was not provided with any of the municipality websites (Turban *et al.* 2011). Polls and tools need to be embedded onto municipality websites in order to involve citizens in the decision-making process. Likewise, the availability of policies, procurement announcements and calendar information also need to be increased.

Nevertheless, this research highlighted the key success factors after making qualitative and quantitative analysis of the municipalities that had high e-participation maturity levels. The Regression Model-1 highlights that there is a positive relationship between the revenue and e-participation maturity level of a municipality, as proposed in Hypothesis 4. This is an expected result as revenues can provide the resources needed to develop and improve the electronic services provided on the municipality websites. In addition, it can be argued that as the revenue of municipality increases, implementing media tools, the tendency to provide live broadcasts and other media features all become easier, enabling a richer experience of participation and involvement.

Regression Model-2 indicated that there is a negative relationship between the population and e-participation maturity level of a municipality. It could be stated that, as the population of a municipalities increases, it focuses more on daily routine work like cleaning, disposal of waste and other forms of non e-government al work. Therefore, their tendency to improve e-government functions decreases. Regression Model-3 indicated that there is a positive relationship between IT capability and the e-participation maturity level, as proposed in Hypothesis 6. As IT capability is one of the key success factors for the municipality websites, it is recommended for the municipalities to increase their IT capability (either through IT outsourcing or employing in-house IT team), which will increase the effectiveness of their e-participation features.

Regression Model-4 indicated that availability of an official UN language (English) has a positive effect on the e-participation maturity level parameter, as proposed in Hypothesis 3. This may be due to the English-speaking citizens living within the municipalities, who would like to be more involved in the decision-making process of these municipalities. As there is a reasonable amount of

English speaking citizens in TRNC, it can be argued that the municipalities with a high number of English-speaking citizens tend to have a higher e-participation maturity level. This could be due to the high participation level of the United Kingdom (8th place in World e-government ranking) (United Nations 2014). As these citizens are used to a high e-participation maturity level, they might follow the same pattern and trigger actions for service development and improvement. Generally, the majority also receives the benefits of these services, while “traditionally most disadvantaged groups in society are also those being digitally excluded” (Vicente and Novo 2014, p.385). Regression Model-4 contradicts this tendency as it is highlighted that a disadvantaged group (minority of English speaking citizens) actually has a positive effect for the e-participation maturity level and benefit from the e-government services, which is one of the remarkable findings of this study.

There was not any positive relation confirmed for Hypothesis 1 (e-participation maturity level and political stability) and Hypothesis 2 (e-participation maturity level and political ideology) through the regression models. Cypriots are a high-context people, who have a closer relationship with their families, friends and colleagues (Hall and Hall 1990). For that reason, it can be argued that this situation affects the political processes whereby people tend to solve their problems by personal contribution rather than legislation and political ideology. Due to this situation, problems tend to be solved on a one-to-one basis and most of the time mayors or political parties fail to apply legislation based on their ideology. Therefore, it could also be stated that nepotism is a problem for the management of public institutions in TRNC.

Table 2. Displaying the relation within independent variables and analysis

Independent Variable	Relation according to Qualitative Analysis	Relation according to Quantitative Analysis	Hypothesis
Revenue	-	+	4 had been supported
Population	-	-	5 had not been supported
IT Capability	+	+	6 had been supported
Availability of an Official UN Language	+	+	3 had been supported
Political stability	-	+	1 had not been supported
Political Ideology	-	-	2 had not been supported

5. CONCLUSION AND FUTURE STUDIES

To conclude, this study highlights a variety of findings. Firstly, revenue has a positive impact on the e-participation maturity level (Regression Model-1), yet population has a negative effect (Regression Model-2). This could be due to the fact that as population increases, the municipalities focus more on routine traditional non e-government activities like cleaning and disposing waste, whereas they do not give importance to improving their e-participation features. IT capability is also crucial for the e-participation maturity level, demonstrated by the cases where the infrastructure of the website had been either outsourced or supplied by an in-house team, which is also supported by Regression Model-3. In addition, the websites with the Availability of an Official UN Language are perceived to have higher e-participation maturity level rankings, as can be seen from the Regression Model-4. Therefore, it could be concluded that Hypothesis 3 (availability of an official UN language and e-participation maturity level), Hypothesis 4 (revenue and e-participation maturity level) and Hypothesis 6 (IT capability and e-participation maturity level) were all verified to be positively related, while Hypothesis 5 (population and e-participation maturity level) was found to be negatively related. Hypothesis 1 (political stability and e-participation maturity level) and Hypothesis 2 (political ideology and e-participation maturity level) were not supported throughout the regression models.

It should be highlighted that the e-government concept is now in the Enhanced Stage (compared to being in the Emerging Stage in the study of (Sağsan and Yıldız, 2010)). The improvement of e-government functions to the next stages (Interactive, Transactional and Connected) will require time, consistent planning, macro level e-government strategy and civic support. An IT Workshop was recently organised, which shows that government is trying to improve the state of e-government functions (Kıbrıs Postası 2015). Furthermore, an electronic identity project commenced in May 2015 (KP Daily News 2015a). This progress is a good sign that the level of e-government is improving in TRNC. On the other hand, it was announced that the deficit of the municipalities increased by 12.83% (Yenidüzen 2015), which may negatively affect e-government development. For that reason, repetition of this work in upcoming years will provide further evidence on this topic in order to see if there is any consistency or sharp differences within the current research, key success factors and e-participation maturity level. In addition, further analysis on different maturity levels based upon the United Nations e-participation framework can provide fresh insights and in-depth analysis for the subject. Likewise, it would be beneficial to repeat this study for the TRNC ministerial websites in the following years. The authors also speculate that if ten different populations are researched, could there be a correlation with respect to the population density. Therefore, it could be said that there is an opportunity to carry out further research in this field. In addition, comparative studies for e-government services of small islands could be conducted which will be a general mind-set for the lead author to carry out his PhD research.

5.1.Limitations to the study

Despite the fact that all of the municipalities (N=28) had been analysed, the first limitation of the study is the population size. In addition, there are political issues due to the Cyprus conflict where TRNC faces with isolation and is not recognized due to the Resolution 541 by the United Nations Security Council. For that reason, technological developments are mainly adapted from Turkey, which is already mentioned in the paper as isomorphism (Kaya, Medeni and Sağsan, 2016). This paper aims to provide a situation analysis and expected to be used for further improvements of e-government services in TRNC. The authors are aware of the

fact that this paper does not have full unity among the related concepts of e-governance, e-participation and e-government, they may be used interchangeably.

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