Local government websites: making citizens be customers

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Abstract – In this article we will discuss the way electronic communication between local authorities and citizens influences on level of trust and quality of public services.

Keywords – local authorities, governmet, electronic communication, citizens, public services, electronic participation, website.

I. Introduction

Prerequisite for the successful functioning of the political system of any society is the political trust of citizens as one of the essential factors for the existence of democracy. Trust connects ordinary citizens with political institutions, raising both legitimacy, and the effectiveness of these institutions.

Governments are realising that achievement of this goal requires applying the same principles and technologies that are fuelling the e-business revolution [1, 2]. They have recognised the need to change the way they do provide services and information centred on the citizen. The result: the emergence of big city's functional websites with better quality and more accessible public services.

II. The measures to create and develop services to support broader electronic participation

The Ukrainian government is working on a system of informational communication with citizens. Yes, the National Program for Informatization was adopted, the Presidential Decree "On measures for the development of the national component of the global Internet information network and security wide access to this network in Ukraine", the project "Electronic Government of Ukraine" was developed, issued Decree of the Cabinet of Ministers "On the order of announcement in the Internet of information about activity of executive bodies".

On the Internet there are more and more sites of state bodies, party structures, numerical ones international and non-governmental organizations that contain a wealth of information that dramatically increases political awareness of citizens [3].

Today, almost all ministries and departments have their own websites, and there is a web presence became a mandatory requirement of the government to its structures. However, much of the official sites created primarily, formally, as a one-off event. It is needed to improve the quality of web sites.

Let's name some problems which, according to the definition of the International Renaissance Foundation, interfere development of e-governance and e-democracy in Ukraine:

1. Introduction of e-government technologies requires modernization, first of all, of the system public administration, effective administrative reform;

2. Incomplete procedures for the provision and receipt of administrative services through use information and communication technologies (ICT);

3. Lack of typical approaches and standard requirements for implementation of e-governance technologies;

4. The slowness of the establishment of e-democracy (the ability of everyone through ICT to take part in formation and implementation of state and local politics);

5. Lack of effective interaction between the executive authorities, local self-government bodies and non-governmental non-governmental organizations necessary for the development and implementation of specific plans with introduction of e-governance technologies;

6. Low level of awareness, motivation and training of civil servants and representatives non-governmental organizations, businesses and the public e-government technologies.

One of the main challenges underlying different Electronic Government forms is the provision of a quality public service. In the Local Government context, local authorities allow for an adjustment between the characteristics of public services and the specificities of local communities, letting populations define their own priorities, which vary from community to community based on objective elements but also subjective by nature. The quality of these services in their electronic format should be analyzed and taken into account to potentiate and elaborate a strategy capable of improving offered services, increasing the satisfaction of the recipient.

At the same time as people from big cities of Ukraine have already felt the benefits of providing services by government websites and have a role in making government decisions (fig. 1), the situation with the towns where population is less than 10,000 is different.
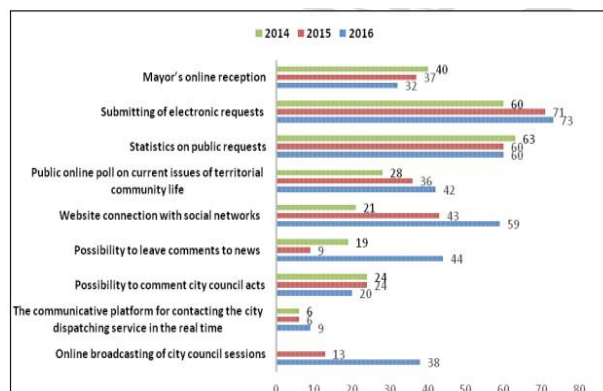

Fig. 1. The dynamics of using the feedback tools on the local government websites in 2014 – 2016

Little town's sites themselves, for the most part, perform representative and informational functions. Their

design resembles advertising. Their typical blocks are: history; management structure, news from the organization's life; an official press release, announcements of the organization of events; archive of documents.

Site and application will allow sending feedback about the situation in the town, selecting a problem area and send it for consideration and see the situation with the issues. The advantage of such a project is a simple way of communicating residents with the authorities, a sense of attraction to changes in the city, as well as the impact on the work of carriers. For the city council, this project will provide convenient visualized service, expanded statistics and rapid communication with the inhabitants.

Sure, for any local e-government project to be successful there needs to be some degree of e-participation and community development.

E-participation and citizen's feedback on the service delivery issues is beneficiary for local authorities' perception of their own activities and the use of the internet for citizen input to policy consultation and debate [4].

Summarized, local authorities should consider the following in their efforts to establish and develop services to support wider e-participation:

1) Produce a policy document for internal dissemination and use, setting out a clear best practice process for the conduct of all e-participation activities.

2) Draft a set of privacy guidelines to be read by all citizens before taking part in eparticipation activity.

3) Produce a marketing strategy that explicitly addresses the issue of how e-participation opportunities are to be brought to the citizen's attention [6, 8].

Local e-government is a way of vision at the local level, at the point where the vast majority of services are delivered. It gives citizens the opportunity to electronically make their views known. And at the same time, the internet allows the public sector to extend its role as a client-oriented service provider.

Conclusion

Functional web-sites are not a panacea to solve all local governance problems, but they have the potential for cost savings, streamlined processes and improved management information. Futhermore, it really helps government to understand the various public needs and opinions, giving them a great role making local governance decisions.

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