

# THE PRESENCE OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION IN THE DIGITAL ENVIRONMENT AND DIGITAL PARTICIPATION OF CITIZENS IN LATVIA

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## 1. ABSTRACT

The digital environment and social media are providing new solutions for public administration to be closer to citizens and empower their ability to participate in the decision-making process. At the same time, digital transformation is also bringing new challenges that public administration has to face but not always is capable to do so. Still, it is undoubtedly that the rapid development of the digital environment will continue with or without the direct presence of public administration. Therefore, for public administration, it is better to be directly represented in the digital environment and develop it in a way that helps to strengthen democracy instead of weakening it. Hence, public administration should take a more important role in the digital transformation processes. Moving towards this position is already noticeable in the activities of the European Union institutions, but also member countries should be more proactive. In the case of Latvia, several good preconditions could help the public administration to be able to cooperate with citizens in the digital environment more successfully, still, there is a lack of common vision and direction. The goal of the paper is to analyse the current situation in Latvia and identify the biggest limitations that should be overcome to develop digital environment as a place where public administration can communicate and cooperate with citizens and successfully engage them in the decision-making process. Sequentially, the main question of the research is: what are the main limitations that public administration should overcome to foster digital participation of citizens in Latvia? Research methods that are implemented are analysis of Latvian and the EU strategies and legal documents connected with citizen participation and presence of public administration in the digital environment; review of smartphone applications that are already used in Latvia for citizen participation and cooperation with public administration; and content analysis of *Facebook* pages maintained by Latvian Ministries. In the content analysis is analysed entries that are published in the main *Facebook* pages of all 13 Latvian ministries in the six months period (July 2019 until December 2019, in total 3181 entries).

Results of the analysis of Latvian and the EU strategies and legal documents are suggesting that on paper there is noticeable support to citizen participation and use of digital solutions, still, in practice, this position in Latvia is not always resulting in the implementation of real digital solutions or current activities are fragmented and project-based without common objectives and direction. Results of the content analysis are demonstrating that for now, institutions are insufficiently using two-way communication and engagement opportunities, as well as institutions are not very active in the promotion of the existing participation opportunities. Hence, there is not only a need for a more active presence in the digital environment, but it is also necessary to promote wider already existing participation opportunities, including smartphone applications that are not sufficiently used by citizens. Therefore, one of the largest limitations that should be overcome in Latvia to foster citizen digital participation is public administrations comprehension of the value of citizen participation and the institution's ability to use digital environment for cooperation with citizens and promotion of participation opportunities.

## 2. POINTS FOR PRACTITIONERS

Results of the content analysis of the *Facebook* pages maintained by Latvian Ministries and review of smartphone applications are providing comprehension about the presence of Latvian institutions in the digital environment and current activities that are implemented to foster digital participation of citizens. That could be used as an example to other countries for the development of public administrations presence in the digital environment. Results of the research could also be used in the development of digital strategies and legislation that is regulating citizen digital participation and representation of institutions in the digital environment.

**Keywords:** decision-making process, digital participation, public administration, social media

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### 3. INTRODUCTION

In a democracy, public administration should maintain good relations with citizens thus motivating them to follow the rules and order. By having a dialogue with citizens and fostering their participation in the decision-making process public administration is also supporting its legitimacy, thus continuing the democratic development of the country. Voting in the elections is seen as a traditional participation activity that could delegate the decision-making power to politicians, thus it is the easiest activity that citizens can take to participate in the decision-making process. Additionally, there are many other activities – digital, face-to-face, institutional and non-institutional – that can also demonstrate the level of citizen participation in the country. In Latvia level of citizen participation is comparatively low (*See Table 1*). However, the current situation is heterogeneous, for some activities, such as voting, participation rates are gradually declining, but for other activities, for example, signing proposals for draft laws or participating in pickets and rallies participation rates are increasing. Nevertheless, it must be noted that the situation in Latvia cannot be fully captured, as registration of the citizen participation activities is not performed very well, data of the most recent period often is missing, not all information is publicly available, and statistical data of some activities are not comprehensively compiled at all, for example, about the number of pickets and rallies that are organised.

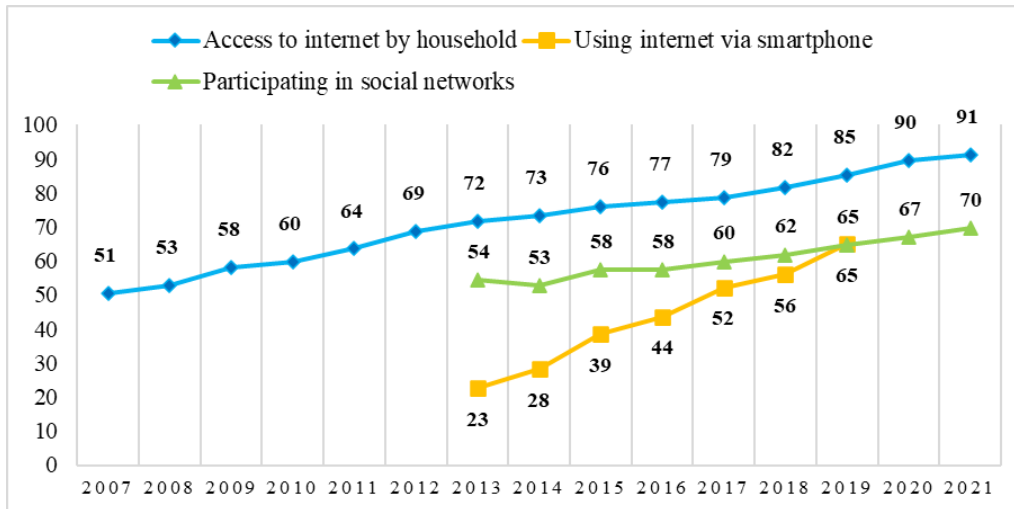
**Table 1. Citizen participation in Latvia**

Participation activity / indicator	Data	Source of the data and year
Voting in the latest municipal elections (2021)	34.01%	Central Election Commission of Latvia, 2021
Voting in the latest municipal elections when all municipalities were included (2017)	50.39%	Central Election Commission of Latvia, 2017
Voting in the latest Parliament elections (2018)	54.56%	Central Election Commission of Latvia, 2018
Voting in the latest European Parliament elections (2019)	33.53%	European Parliament, 2019
Number of political parties and Associations of political parties (22.09.2021)	62	The Register of Enterprises of the Republic of Latvia, 2021
The proportion of citizens who are members of political parties	1%	Van Biezen et. al., 2012
The proportion of citizens who are members of political parties (in 2017)	1.1%	Latvijas Sabiedriskie mediji, 2018
Consultative bodies in Latvian ministries (in 2018)	170	State Chancellery of Latvia, 2018
Consultative bodies in Latvian ministries (in 2019)	147	Ministru kabinets, 2021A
Number of non-governmental organisations participating in the consultative bodies of Latvian ministries (in 2019)	839	Ministru kabinets, 2021A
Number of non-governmental organisations that have signed a cooperation document with Latvian ministries	288	Ministru kabinets, 2021A
The proportion of non-governmental organisations that are active in the participation mechanisms at the national level	4%	Latvian Civic Alliance, 2021
The proportion of Latvian citizens participating in non-governmental organisations (in 2017)	5%	Pārresoru koordinācijas centrs, 2017
The proportion of civic-active citizens (in last two years have participated in a public consultation, picket, donated their time to a problem of public importance, signed a letter of public importance or contacted the elected deputies)	14%	Providus, 2021
Civic participation index (in 2015)	10%	Pārresoru koordinācijas centrs, 2020
Civil Society Participation Index (in 2018)	7	The World Bank Group, 2021
Public submissions to Parliament (2019 / 2020)	5467 / 4542	Mandātu, ētikas un iesniegumu komisija, 2021
Number of citizens that have used participation portal Manabalss.lv in time from 2011 until 2021 (have voted at least once)	344074	Sabiedrības Līdzdalības Fonds, 2021
Number of votes casted in the participation portal Manabalss.lv in time from 2011 until 2021	1759019	Sabiedrības Līdzdalības Fonds, 2021

*Source: Author's construction based on statistical and public information*

The digital environment of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is ensuring that public administration can be closer to citizens than it was possible previously. At the same time, citizens can also more thoroughly and easily follow the decisions and activities of the representatives of institutions. The openness of the government activities and digital solutions can be used also for citizens participation in the decision-making process. The use of the digital environment for communication and cooperation between the state and society is a widely studied subject providing encouraging evidence as well as comprehension about challenges that institutions are facing when trying to adapt to the digital environment. There are several good preconditions that are allowing to foster digital participation in Latvia, for example, comparatively good access to the internet, digital habits of citizens and already existing

representation of public administration online (Seimuskane, Lielpeters, 2020). The use of the internet has significantly grown over the last 15 years in Latvia (See Figure 1), from 51 per cent of the population in 2007 to 91 per cent in 2021. Participation in social media is becoming more popular as well, in 2021 from the total population of Latvia 70 per cent were using social media. Thus, the digital environment in Latvia has the potential to become a modern space where public administration can communicate and cooperate with citizens.



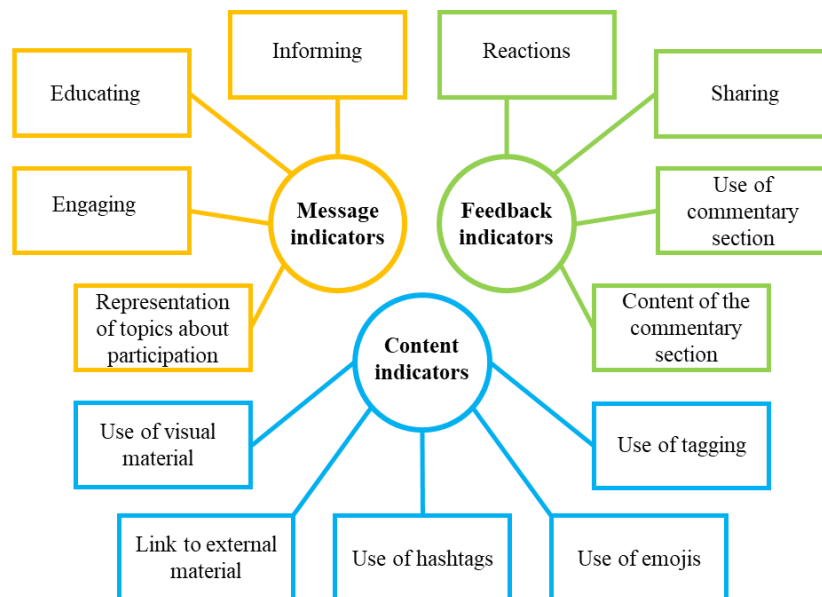
**Figure 1. Use of internet and social media in Latvia (2007 until 2021), the share of the population (in %)**  
*Source: Author's construction based on the data from the Official statistics portal (2020, 2021)*

Citizen participation rates in Latvia are comparatively low and an essential role in the decision-making process is given to non-governmental organisations as representatives of society (United States Agency for International Development, 2019). Nevertheless, in non-governmental organisations are participating only a small part of the Latvian population. Therefore, digital participation opportunities should be used as a modern solution to foster individual participation, increasing the number of citizens that are participating in the decision-making process of public administration. The opportunity to participate in the decision-making process could also foster citizen trust in public administration and democracy in general. For now, citizen trust in public administration is comparatively low in Latvia. According to Standard Eurobarometer 95 (Publications Office of the European Union, 2021), from the Latvian population 33 per cent in Summer 2021 tend to trust in public administration, which is below the EU average (55 per cent) and below the trust rates in other Baltic countries – Estonia (63 per cent) and Lithuania (42 per cent). Thus, considering the existing reality in the relations between public administration and citizens, institutions must be the ones that are making the first step towards citizens. Offer of modern and easy-to-use participation opportunities that is followed by promotion of those participation activities, feedback from citizens who participated, improvement of participation opportunities and later engagement of more citizens. That is the way institutions should choose because gaining trust must be seen as a long-term process. Therefore, it also needs careful planning and comprehension of current opportunities that the digital environment can offer for communication and cooperation between institutions and citizens.

#### 4. METHODOLOGY

The goal of the paper is to analyse the current situation in Latvia and identify the biggest limitations that should be overcome to develop digital environment as a place where public administration can cooperate with citizens and successfully engage them in the decision-making process. Sequentially, the question of the research is: what are the main limitations that public administration should overcome to foster digital participation of citizens in Latvia? Research methods that are implemented are analysis of Latvian and the EU strategies and legal documents connected with citizen participation and presence of public administration in the digital environment and review of smartphone applications that are already used in Latvia for citizen participation and cooperation with the public administration. Content analysis of *Facebook* pages maintained by Latvian Ministries is implemented, analysing entries that are published in the main *Facebook* pages of all 13 Latvian ministries in the

six months period (July 2019 until December 2019). In total content of 3181 entries are analysed according to three groups of indicators: content indicators, message indicators and feedback indicators. Each of the three groups was composed of several sub-groups of indicators (See Figure 2) in total - more than 60 sub-indicators were analysed.



**Figure 2. The framework of the content analysis**

*Source: Author's construction based on the objectives of the research (content analysis of Facebook pages maintained by Latvian Ministries)*

Results of the research are demonstrating the current state of the digital presence of public administration in Latvia and the motivation and ability of institutions to use and promote digital participation solutions. Although the digital presence of institutions in Latvia is comparatively good, there is a necessity for bold further activities to improve digital communication with citizens and fully seize the opportunity to foster citizen digital participation in Latvia.

## 5. SUPPORT FOR CITIZEN PARTICIPATION

At the European Union level, there is strong support for the initiative to foster democracy, looking towards a strong civic society with youth participation and thoughtful use of online technologies as a way how democracy could be strengthened. In the Council Conclusions on Democracy (Council of the European Union, 2019) is pointed out that for fostering democracy in the European Union it is necessary to support and promote civic education and online media literacy and promote the use of online technologies in strengthening democratic participation. Support to the necessity to strengthen democracy and the use of digital participation opportunities has grown especially recently, since the middle of 2020, partly as a reaction to problems and challenges recognised in the context of the COVID-19 crisis. That is noticeable in the Berlin Declaration on Digital Society and Value-Based Digital Government (Federal Ministry of the Interior, Building and Community, 2020) and further in the implementation of the COVID-19 crisis recovery plan *Next Generation EU* (European Commission, 2021). This ideological and financial support could foster improvements in citizen participation opportunities and digital development in the European Union. Nevertheless, only active steps by EU member countries will ensure that goals are reached, thus EU member countries should be more active in the implementation of digital solutions and cooperation and communication with citizens in the digital environment.

In Latvia, citizens are still learning about the value of democracy and their opportunities to influence the decision-making process of public administration. From the public administration's side necessity to foster citizen participation is being reminded occasionally from time to time (Valsts Kalnceleja, 2020A) and in public communication it is emphasized that public administration values citizen participation and is interested to

improve (Latvijas Vēstnesis, 2018) the current unsatisfactory situation. As well, in the national planning documents citizen participation is recognised as a field where improvement is needed (*See Table 2*).

**Table 2. Support for citizen participation in Latvia (in planning documents)**

Planning document	Arguments supporting the need to foster citizen participation	Highlighted stakeholders	Suggested methods that could be implemented
Sustainable Development Strategy of Latvia until 2030 (Latvija 2030)	The need to reform the decision-making process in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity. In policy development involve society as much as possible	Latvian citizens (society), considering the diversity of society and social diversity. Also, the activity of social partners and NGOs as important actors of the process	Citizen panels, participation in the development process, citizen juries, civic participation programs, discussions on topical issues in society, mass creativity portal, mass creativity award, interdisciplinary mass creativity coordination institution, the introduction of e-government
National Development Plan of Latvia 2021–2027	There is a need to improve participation, as good governance is characterized by the involvement of citizens; participation in open public administration processes and opportunities to influence them; trust in the representatives of institutions - policy developers; and active involvement of civic society	Individuals, NGOs, Social partners, society (knowledge society as a precondition for an active society)	Self-organisation of society. Expanding cooperation and participation skills and opportunities, in particular: by developing civic education for youth; citizen participation in non-governmental organizations, trade unions and volunteering. Implementation of smart, efficient, and open governance in all public administration processes, using new methods and digital opportunities
Guidelines for a Cohesive and Active Society 2021-2027	The development of a culture of democracy, as purposeful and meaningful participatory processes can have a positive impact on the development of democracy	NGOs, active civic society and organized civic society	Knowledge as a resource (for citizens and public administration); access to information about democracy and participation; creating a common space for quality information and democratic debate; forms of participation planned and based on both the local needs of the citizens and digital participation solutions for remote participation
Guidelines for digital transformation 2021-2027	Digital technology environment as a new space for public administration, considering the involvement of society in public administration processes as a modern necessity. External openness and cooperation, as well as co-creation with the citizens must become the value of public administration	Latvian citizens and businesses; civic society; representatives of the society, entrepreneurs, non-governmental organizations and other stakeholders	Digital governance tailored to the needs and expectations of stakeholders; opportunities for politicians, public administration and local government employees to acquire the skills necessary to ensure meaningful public participation; to create digital tools and applications that allow to quickly and easily find out the public position on specific issues; to develop platforms for e-participation

*Source: Author's construction based on Saeima 2010; Pārresoru koordinācijas centrs, 2020; Ministru kabinets, 2021B; Ministru kabinets, 2021C.*

Analysis of the planning documents is demonstrating that public administration declaratively is supporting the necessity to foster citizen participation and also is aware of various methods that could be used to improve the current situation. Nevertheless, the goodwill demonstrated in the planning documents previously not always has resulted in the implementation of real activities. It is also noticeable, that public administration is not planning to reach all citizens directly but is relying on other actors as intermediaries, such as non-governmental organisations, lobby organisations or organized civic society. Thus, it can be concluded that on paper there is noticeable support for citizen participation and use of digital solutions, but it is necessary to follow up if those good deeds do not remain on the paper only.

## 6. DIGITAL PARTICIPATION AND DIGITAL COMMUNICATION

Since 1991 Latvia has reached significant progress in the digitalisation of public administration processes, granting citizens digital access to government services and fostering a digital environment and ICT structure (Ozols, Nielsen, 2018). For several years already, in the official State service portal Latvija.lv citizens have access to digital services provided by public administration and municipal institutions, in 2021 citizens could use 140 digital services provided by 27 different institutions. In September 2021 this opportunity was used by 813781 individuals, hence more than 40 per cent of the Latvian population (State service portal, 2021A). The official State service portal could also be used for the collection of signatures on voters' initiatives organized in accordance with the Law "On National Referendum, Legislative Initiative and European Citizens' Initiative" (State service portal, 2021B). In recent years public administration is also fostering citizen access to public data,

that can be used for improving citizen comprehension of public processes. In 2019 was launched Open data portal (Valsts Reģionālās attīstības aģentūra, 2019) and in 2020 was launched Official Statistics Portal (Centrālā statistikas pārvalde, 2020). In 2019 citizens for the first time could apply for the state-issued official e-mail address (VARAM, 2019) that is promising to make easier, faster, and more secure communication between institutions and citizens. It can be evaluated that public administration in Latvia is gradually increasing its digital presence, ensuring an environment that is used for digital communication and cooperation with citizens. Thus, also developing digital space that could be used for citizen digital participation, however, for now, this potential is not sufficiently covered.

**Table 3. Comparison of smartphone applications for citizen participation in Latvia**

Application	Owner	Number of users	Purpose	Participation level	Available functions	Two-way communication (Yes/No)
Vides SOS (Environment SOS)	The State Environmental Service	More than 10000	Reporting environmental issues	National	Submit a report; read the reports submitted by others and their status	No (information about the execution of the report is sent to e-mail)
Ogres novadnieks (Ogre townsman)	Ogre municipality	More than 5000	Information and participation opportunities for citizens of Ogre county	Local	Read news; access tourist and public transport information; receive special offers; submit a report; read the reports submitted by others and vote for them; answer surveys	Yes (response of institution is publicly available for everyone)
Futbols (Football)	The State Chancellery	More than 1000	Reporting on the work of public administration representatives	National	Access contact information of institutions; submit a report	No
Valodas draugs (Language friend)	The State Language Centre	More than 1000	Reporting good examples or violations of the use of Latvian language	National	Submit a report; follow the execution of the report	Yes
Cēsis8911 (Cesis8911)	Cesis municipality	More than 1000	Information and participation opportunities for citizens of Cesis county	Local	Submit a report; follow the execution of the report; read the reports submitted by others; read public announcements by municipality; answer surveys	Yes
Līdzdalība. Padoms. Aktīvisms. (Participation. Advice. Activism.)	NGO "Civic-Alliance Latvia"	More than 100	Information and participation opportunities for civic society	National	Read news about participation opportunities; access tips and support tools; answer short surveys	No

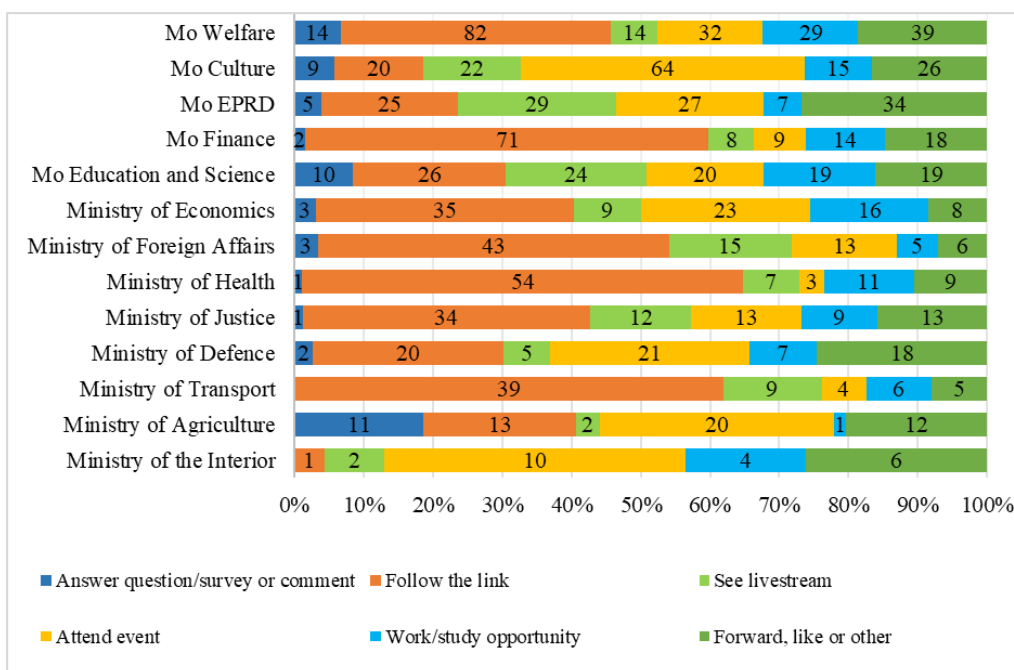
*Source: Author's construction based on analysis of the smartphone applications*

Several state-owned smartphone applications are in Latvia that can be counted as an example of digital participation tools (See Table 3). *Vides SOS (Environment SOS)* for reporting environmental issues, *Futbols (Football)* for reporting on the work of public administration representatives and *Valodas draugs (Language friend)* for reporting good examples or violations of the use of Latvian language. Several participation applications are developed also by municipalities, for example, *Cēsis8911 (Cesis8911)* for citizens of Cesis county or *Ogres novadnieks (Ogre townsman)* for citizens of Ogre county. There are also participation applications developed by the non-governmental sector, for example, *Līdzdalība. Padoms. Aktīvisms. (Participation. Advice. Activism.)* developed by *Civic-Alliance Latvia*. Nevertheless, analysis of applications is demonstrating that their functionality often is limited for the purpose of engaging citizens in the decision-making process and not always two-way communication is ensured. Also, the number of users is comparatively small, one of the reasons could be that not enough citizens are informed that such applications exist.

A good example of citizen digital participation in Latvia is the participation platform *Manabalss (MyVoice)* where citizens can propose and vote for legislative initiatives that are later given for evaluation to Parliament or municipalities. It was established by non-governmental organisation *Sabiedrības Līdzdalības Fonds* in 2011 and

since then has gradually grown its influence and number of users (Sabiedrības Līdzdalības Fonds, 2021). The first state-owned participation platform in Latvia was introduced in September 2021 - Single Portal for Development and Harmonisation of Draft Legal Acts (*TAP portāls*). This portal is a major step towards e-government in Latvia as it is digitalizing the circulation of documents and improves the opportunity to follow the decision-making process of public administration. Portal can also be used for citizen participation by non-governmental organisations, lobby organisations and other stakeholders, as well as individual citizens. In the portal citizens can authorize with a unified login service that is available in Latvia, thus approving their digital identity and submit their objections or proposals about draft legal acts. Portal can support the use of other digital participation methods as well, for example, surveys and discussions (Valsts Kanceleja, 2021). Initially evaluating the functionality of the portal – it can be concluded that portal could improve citizen participation in Latvia, however, in the organisation of participation process significant role still is given to non-governmental organisations as representatives of citizens, as some of the participation opportunities are available only to members of non-governmental organisations and not individual citizens. Nevertheless, it is too early to jump to conclusions as the usability and impact of the portal could be estimated only later when the portal has been used for at least a year.

Digital solutions for citizen participation in Latvia are used also on a municipal level, for example, in the participatory budgeting process in Riga - the capital city of Latvia. Since 2019 each year online voting is used to determine those citizen-initiated projects that will receive funding from the municipal budget. In 2021 there were allocated 500000 EUR that was divided for 12 projects that gained the most votes from citizens (Rigas dome, 2021), however, the total number of voters was 19000, hence only 3 per cent of the total population of Riga. Thus, in the future more activity from the municipality would be needed to popularize that city is organizing participatory budgeting and citizens can vote for the projects that will receive funding. Overall, it can be concluded that there are still broad opportunities for growth in the use of digital tools for citizen participation in Latvia. An essential role in the implementation and promotion of such participation opportunities should be given to digital communication of public administration. Nevertheless, the ability of institutions to reach citizens online and maintain meaningful digital communication is one of the main challenges that public administration is facing in the 21<sup>st</sup> century not only in Latvia but also in other European Union countries.

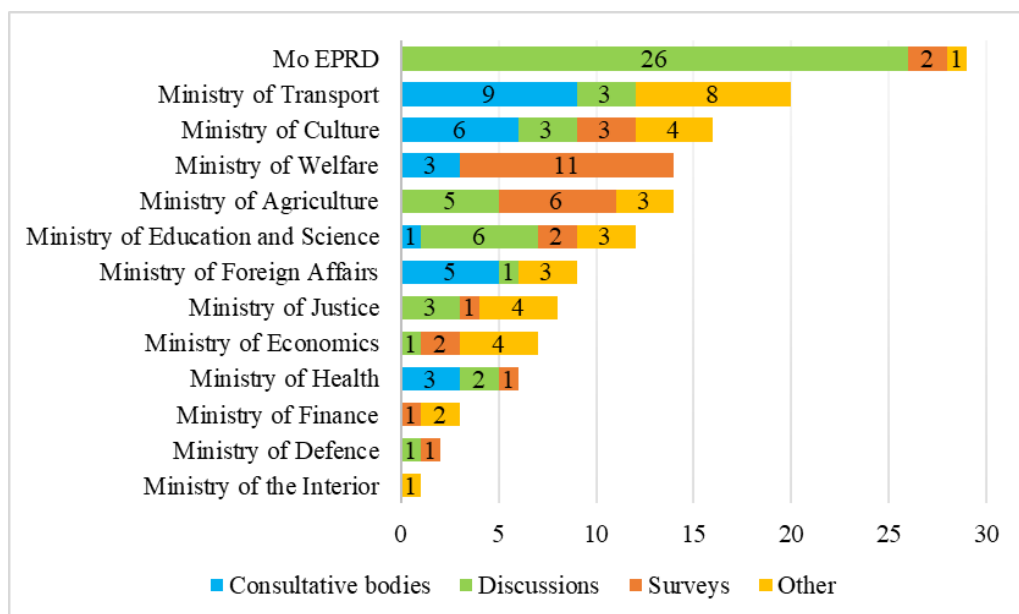


**Figure 3. Engagement methods used in the Facebook entries of Latvian ministries, July-December 2019 (amount of use for each method and their proportion from the total amount of engagement methods used by each ministry, ministries arranged by activity with the most active at the top)**

Source: Author's construction based on the content analysis conducted by Eduards Lielpeters in 2020, n=3181

The good news is, that Latvian public administration is comparatively well-represented online. Since the middle of 2020 more than 85 public administration institutions have joined the unified platform for state and local government websites (Valsts Kanceleja, 2020B) making the home pages of institutions more understandable to citizens. For more than 10 years already, Latvian institutions are represented on social media, the most often used social networks being *Twitter*, *Facebook* and recently also *Instagram*. For Latvian ministries as the main social media can be considered *Facebook* as it is used regularly by all ministries and there is published the widest scope of information. To understand the main topics represented in the *Facebook* entries of ministries, as well as the use of digital solutions for fostering two-way communication with citizens the content analysis of *Facebook* pages of Latvian ministries was implemented. Results of the content analysis demonstrated that, for now, institutions have various and noticeably different habits in the use of digital opportunities that social media are offering for content creation, network building and two-way communication. Significant differences were noticed in the use of visual material, emojis, hashtags and links, as well as in the use of tagging, both in the tagging intensity and in the choice of tagged accounts. Also use of engagement methods varies between ministries (See Figure 3) both by intensity and choice of methods that are implemented. In the analysed period the most active was the Ministry of Welfare and the least active was the Ministry of Interior. The most often used engagement method for most institutions was in direct text written suggestion to follow a link for further information. Often used was also an invitation to attend face-to-face or online events. The opportunity for two-way communication by encouraging citizens to ask questions, provide answers to institutions questions or fill in a survey was used comparatively rarely.

Furthermore, analysis of the commentary section of the entries published by ministries is demonstrating that institutions are not making good use of the opportunity for dialogue. Often comments made by followers are left without reaction and even questions are not answered. However, also in this position situation varies between ministries, the response rate being in the range from 4 per cent as lowest for the Ministry of Justice to 36 per cent as highest for the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Regional Development.



**Figure 4. Entries about citizen participation in the Facebook pages of Latvian ministries, July-December 2019 (ministries arranged by activity with the most active at the top)**

Source: Author's construction based on the content analysis conducted by Eduards Lielpeters in 2020, n=3181

Considering the frequency and topics of the social media posts, it is noticeable that in most institutions there is not happening careful long-term planning of the entries and most probably there are not happening considerations of effects that particular entries could have on improving or damaging relations between public administration and citizens. Social media entries often are reflecting current events and agenda, as well as emphasizing institutions, other public entities and, for several ministries, also proportionately often highlighting activities and opinions of the minister himself/herself. In the analysed time period (six months) there were only



141 entries (4 per cent from the total amount of entries), about citizen participation or decisions that are made with the participation of citizens (*See Figure 4*). The most active was the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Regional Development with 29 entries, hence, even the best result is comparatively small, and it can be concluded that the decision-making process is mostly kept away from the eyes of social media followers. Although at the same time information published on the home pages of ministries are demonstrating that the decision-making process is active and ongoing. A question for a discussion remains if that is a conscious choice of the representatives of the institution to limit the number of entries that are about citizen participation and decision-making process or they are just genuinely not aware that social media could be used for promoting citizen participation opportunities and fostering citizen participation in the decision-making process. Therefore, one of the largest limitations that should be overcome in Latvia to foster citizens digital participation is public administrations comprehension of the value of citizen participation, as well as institutions' ability to use the digital environment for cooperation with citizens and promotion of participation opportunities.

## **7. CONCLUSION**

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, public administration can be closer to citizens than it has been possible ever before. Institutions can reach citizens directly online, explain decisions made by public administration and also engage citizens in the decision-making process. Nevertheless, it should be a carefully planned process, considering the best opportunities that the digital environment is offering for two-way communication, citizen participation in the decision-making process and co-creation. Considering that Latvian institutions have various habits in the use of digital solutions that are offered by social media, there is a need for a more active exchange of experience between representatives of institutions or the development of a common digital communication style for all public administration institutions in Latvia.

Judging by the strategic planning documents, Latvian public administration is interested to foster citizen participation in Latvia and is aware of the methods that can be used to reach this goal. Nevertheless, public administration should be able not only to write in the planning documents that it cares about citizen participation but also prove that by doing. The current state of the digital environment in Latvia is providing an opportunity for fostering digital participation of citizens. To seize this opportunity, the first step for public administration is to improve digital relations with citizens by introducing meaningful two-way communication and approving in public communication that institutions care about citizens' opinions and are eager to engage citizens in the decision-making process. Until now, this has not been done sufficiently in Latvia.

Results of the content analysis are demonstrating that, for now, institutions are insufficiently using two-way communication and engagement opportunities, as well as they are not very active in the promotion of the existing participation opportunities. Hence, there is not only a need for a more active presence in the digital environment but also there is needed more active promotion of already existing participation opportunities, including smartphone applications that are not sufficiently known and used by citizens. Thus, for now, as the main limitations that public administration should overcome to foster digital participation of citizens in Latvia are the digital skills of representatives of institutions, as well as their comprehension of the value of citizen participation in the decision-making process.

## **8. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

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