

Advocacy of NGOs in the formulation of policies and implementation of digital transformation projects in the field of information society development

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Abstract

The paper tries to present the role of NGOs in Slovenia in advocating for or against different policies and implementation of digital transformation projects in the field of information society development. For that aim a survey “Digital Transformation of Society and the NGO Sector” was carried out addressing the issues and challenges of cooperation between key stakeholders (policymakers and NGOs) and their impact on the development of the information society. The focus was mainly on three areas: the extent of the cooperation, the acknowledgment of the NGOs’ proposals by the policymakers, and possible practices aimed at improving the cooperation between decision-makers and NGOs working in the field of information society development. Results showed that some cooperation (although lacking) between policymakers and NGOs exists, while the intensity differs depending on the concrete area of the information society field. Similarly goes for the acknowledgment of NGO proposals by the policymakers, where the NGOs see their average level of suggestions impact as relatively low. On the other hand, NGOs show a high level of agreement and support towards different practices that would, or could, help improve cooperation between decision-makers and NGOs working in the field of information society development. All this shows there is room for improvement in the advocacy practices of NGOs regarding the formulation of policies and implementation of projects in the field of information society development.

Keywords: non-governmental organizations (NGOs), information society, digitalization, policy preparation, cooperation

1. Introduction

The paper aims to present the role NGOs in Slovenia play in advocating for or against different policies and implementation of digital transformation projects in the field of information society development – with an emphasis on digital inclusion. NGOs play a very important role in advocating for solutions aimed at the wider public or working in the public interest. Advanced digital technologies (such as artificial intelligence (AI), blockchain, internet of Things (IoT)) make it possible to change existing and create new business models, develop new products and services, increase the efficiency and competitiveness of the economy, and contribute to broader social and economic development.

Information and communication technologies (ICT) are used widely in civil society reflecting, albeit lagging, commercial organizations. There is a long-established body of literature on the topic, often referred to as ICT4D (Walsham, 2017).

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Most of the working groups or programs regarding the development of the before-mentioned areas include at least in some part – NGOs. The paper uses the term “NGO”, although civil society organization (CSO) is a term that is being used more and more often in Slovenia. As for this article, NGOs are a synonym for CSOs, similar to United Nations terminology, defining a civil society organization or non-governmental organization (NGO) that is any non-profit, voluntary citizens’ group organized on a local, national, or international level.² Digitization has an increasingly obvious impact on the life of every citizen. By participating in today's technology-supported and information-rich environment, citizens co-create the digital environment, which is essential for democratic processes and practices and is the context in which the rights to social, economic, and political participation can be exercised. The key here is that the possibility of participation or inclusion in the information society is guaranteed to all citizens. An important stakeholder in realizing the needs and interests of all citizens is the non-governmental sector. Advocacy, for this presentation, is understood as any action of advocating, pleading for, or supporting a cause or proposal regarding digital transformation projects or policies by different NGOs.

2. NGO sectors stay of play in Slovenia

To better understand the NGO sector in Slovenia, we should first present some facts and numbers about Slovenia and its NGO sector. In Slovenia - a country of 2 million inhabitants, and 212 municipalities - in April 2023 there were 27,600 registered NGOs, of which 23.464 were societies³, 3.879 (private) institutes,⁴ and 259 foundations⁵. This is approximately the same as two years ago (2021) when there were 27.617 registered NGOs, of which 23.577 were societies, 3.776 (private) institutes, and 264 institutions. In recent years, the number of NGOs has increased by around 500 per year. The number now seems to have stopped increasing. In September 2012, for example, 22.490 societies, 2.324 institutes, and 251 institutions were registered. Not all registered NGOs are necessarily active. Under the established practice, we consider active those who submit their annual reports to AJPES (Agency of the Republic of Slovenia for Public Legal Records and Related Services)⁶ which totals to approx. 3 percent less than registered. Data on active NGOs are available only for previous years and are expected to be available every September when AJPES processes aggregate data on submitted annual reports. In 2020, there were just under 27.000 active societies, institutes, and foundations. Looking at the number increase of registered NGOs we can conclude their numbers have stopped increasing in the last few (circa 5) years. Data on societies also include data on branches of societies and youth councils, while data on institutions also include data on religious communities that have the status of a humanitarian organization. The data excludes societies, institutes, and foundations established by the Republic of Slovenia, municipalities, or other persons governed by public law. The number of NGOs increased slightly in 2020 compared to the previous year, with the number of societies decreasing by 0.25%, the number of institutions increasing by 2.52%, and the number of foundations increasing by 3.00%. The total index of annual growth in the number of all NGOs in 2020 was 0.12%.⁷

² <https://www.un.org/en/civil-society/page/about-us>.

³ Societies Act, Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia, No. 64/11 – uradno prečiščeno besedilo in 21/18 – ZNOrg.

⁴ Institutes Act, Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia, No. 12/91, 8/96, 36/00 – ZPDZC in 127/06 – ZJZP.

⁵ Foundations Act, Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia, No. 70/05 – uradno prečiščeno besedilo in 91/05 – popr.

⁶ <https://www.ajpes.si/> [11.4.2023]

⁷ <https://www.cnvos.si/nvo-sektor-dejstva-stevilke/stevilo-nvo/> [22.5.2023].

On different government pages, we can find statements supporting such advocacy of the NGO sector regarding digital transformation policies (laws, regulations, strategies, etc.) and projects. Slovenian government recognizes, that in the field of the information society, cooperation with the network of NGOs for an inclusive information society (NGO-VID Network) is extremely important. The network of NGOs for an inclusive information society strives for quality life in the information society and for the empowerment of people with the help of digital technologies. The NGO-VID network connects 32 societies, private institutes, foundations, social enterprises, and cooperatives, 7 of which have the status of NGO in the public interest in the field of information society development.

3. Research Methodology

The paper presents an in-depth content analysis of the impact of NGO advocacy activities in the field of information society development regarding the formulation of policies and implementation of digital transformation projects. The paper combines uses mixed research methods since it combines both theoretical and empirical findings related to the selected field of research in Slovenia.

Qualitative research methods are based on the observation of roles, experiences, and stories regarding the interaction between the Government and NGOs in the field of information society development with an emphasis on analyzing the process of strategic and project documentation preparation and adoption. This is based on case study research and analysis of different situations of Government and NGO interaction in the field of information society development.

The theoretical part uses the descriptive method of writing, where its focus is mainly on presenting the existing legislation and different literature on the subject to describe and explain the concepts and already-known facts related to the impact of NGO advocacy activities in the field of information society development regarding the formulation of policies and implementation of digital transformation projects, with emphasis on those NGOs working in the public interest. In the empirical part Government practices, interviews, and reports regarding the funding of NGOs are analyzed. The empirical part consists also of a detailed overview of concrete Government measures. The research descriptive methodology choice was based on the specifics of the research field and the fact that NGO's role in the field of information society development is in a way still in the early development stages. The latter methodological approach provided insight into the current theoretical and legislative starting points on one side and later an empirical review of practice on the other.

The quantitative method that was used was based on a survey system with which obtained primary data that enabled us to understand the general characteristics of the NGO sector regarding the advocacy of NGOs in the formulation of policies and implementation of digital transformation projects in the field of information society development. Surveys was sent to all NGOs advocating in the field of information society development, with a special focus on the NGOs with the status of an "NGO working in the public interest". NGOs working in the field of an inclusive information society were sent questions relating to topics on "how they influence policy making", "what is their assessment of the impact on the adopted policies to date", and "how do they work", etc. After analyzing the results, we will get a clearer picture of how and to what extent NGOs through advocacy influence the formulation of policies and implementation of digital transformation projects in the field of information society development and digital inclusion.

4. NGO status in Slovenia and its latest developments

Some initial research in the area shows that before 2018 there was little to no regulation on NGOs in Slovenia. In 2001 CNVOS was founded by NGOs, and in the next years, certain strategic documents were adopted such as the Strategy of systemic development of NGOs in Slovenia for the period 2003–2008⁸, the Strategy of the Government of RS for cooperation with the NGOs, etc. This all led to the Parliament adopting the Non-Governmental Organizations Act (NGOs Act)⁹ in 2018 and the adoption of the Development Strategy of non-governmental organizations and volunteering until 2023¹⁰ in the same year by Slovene Government.

The adoption of the 2018 NGO Act had an important and welcome effect since it defined (1) the conditions for being an NGO in Slovenia and at the same time defined (2) the needed conditions for granting the status of an NGO in the public interest. One of the important novelties was that the NGO Act established the before-mentioned special budget fund for the (general) development of NGOs. The fund will finance projects and programs of horizontal networks and regional junctions as entities of the NGO support environment aimed at promoting the development of NGOs, as well as other projects and programs of NGOs and other persons aimed at implementing development measures in individual areas and promoting the development of NGOs and the development of a supportive environment for NGOs. Sources of funding for the NGO Development Fund, as provided by law, are personal income tax funds that taxpayers did not use to finance activities of general public interest, political parties, or representative unions, although they could, in accordance with the law governing personal income tax, and other funds, if so provided by law, international treaty or if so decided by the donor. Public funds for the financing of mainly NGOs acting in the public interest are (although some say should be) provided at the state level within the financial plans of budget users, which are responsible for the activities of the NGOs concerned.

An NGO is granted the status of an NGO in the public interest in a certain area if its activity in this area exceeds the interests of its founders or its members and if it is generally beneficial. An NGO may be granted the status of an NGO in the public interest in different fields of work, for example in the development of the information society field.¹¹

An NGO that has a status in the public interest in the field of information society development is entitled to a donation from one percent (1 %) of personal income tax and can receive other benefits that NGOs in the public interest have. This way taxpayers could voluntarily donate twice as much of their personal income tax to finance activities of general public interest, political parties, representative unions, etc. And the undistributed remainder of the funds up to one percent (1 %) of the personal income tax now goes into the NGO development fund.

Yet, this was not always the case. During the Covid-19 pandemic, in December of 2020, the Act Determining Intervention Measures to Assist in Mitigating the Consequences of the Second Wave of Covid -19 Epidemic¹² was adopted. In it, the Government first proposed raising the percentage from 0.5 to 1 percent – this way taxpayers could voluntarily donate twice as much of their personal income tax to finance activities of general public interest,

⁸ More on the topic in Mevlja, B., Kavčič, K. 2012, *Strateški razvoj nevladnih organizacij v Sloveniji*. Fakulteta za management, <http://www.dlib.si/?URN=URN:NBN:SI:DOC-K62JF1A1>.

⁹ Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia, No. 21/18.

¹⁰ Ordinance on the development strategy of non-governmental organisations and volunteering until 2023, Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia, No. 37/18.

¹¹ Article 6 of the Non-Governmental Organizations Act (NGOs Act), Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia, No. 21/18.

¹² Act Determining the Intervention Measures to Mitigate the Consequences of the Second Wave of COVID-19 Epidemic, Uradni list RS, št. 175/20, 203/20 – ZIUPOPDVE, 15/21 – ZDUOP, 51/21 – ZZVZZ-O, 57/21 – odl. US in 112/21 – ZIUPTG.

political parties, representative unions, etc. But at the same time, this meant abolishing the NGO fund, since there would be no more undistributed 1 percent of personal income tax. In practice, this meant that the undistributed “leftovers” of 1 percent of a person’s income tax would become a part of the state budget instead of a special NGO development fund. This proposal was met with widespread opposition raging from NGOs to the media, political parties, etc. The arguments used in the debate mostly promoted the positive contribution to society of different projects and programs, the funds are being used to support, such as employment growth, welfare issues, and sports. The result was a legislative change that now enables individuals paying personal income tax to donate up to 1 percent of personal income tax to grant beneficiaries such as NGOs, political parties, representative trade unions, registered churches, and other religious communities.

The Covid-19 epidemic also affected the NGO sector. For several years it is clear that the internet can save time and money in various management areas, providing benefits to non-profit (NGO) managers, especially in administration, procurement, human resource management, logistics, training, volunteer recruitment, and fundraising (Lee et al., 2001). The Covid-19 epidemic speeded up the process. In some countries, Covid-19 brought together NGOs and app-based companies. These NGOs and app-based companies would have never thought of coming together and forming a partnership if it was not for the lockdown (Huda et al, 2022). The Covid-19 pandemic also showed that non-profits can provide online support to reach populations that sometimes do not receive assistance due to distance and such digital transformation lessons can be applied in the future to ensure that nobody is left behind (Santos and Laureano, 2021).

One more positive example of why NGOs strive to receive the status of an NGO working in the public interest is that such an NGO can have better chances when competing in the case of public tenders for obtaining funds from the state budget intended for NGOs development etc. The criteria for the selection of recipients of such funds (can) also take into account the status of an NGO in the public interest in the field for which the public tender is intended, whereby the consideration of such status must not be less than five percent (5 %) and not exceed twenty percent (20 %) of the total value of the criteria; in this way, this criterion can also be regulated in municipal public tenders. In such a way public authorities recognize the work certain NGOs provide in the public interest.¹³ This enables (or at least) NGOs to cover some material costs or even salaries etc.

Which criteria a certain NGO must fulfill to gain the status of an NGO working in the public interest in the field of information society development are set in the Rules on determining the criteria for demonstrating significant achievements of non-governmental organization activities for granting the status of non-governmental organization in the public interest. The rules set out the criteria for demonstrating the most important achievements of the non-governmental organization for the award of the status of non-governmental organization in the public interest in different fields, among them the development of the information society. The criteria for demonstrating significant achievements – all in the field of development of the information society - are (1) dissemination of professional knowledge and promotion of the field, primarily by issuing or publishing professional articles, publications or by organizing trainings, consultations, congresses, seminars or other forms of professional meetings at the national or international level, (2) receiving recognition or award at the local, national or international level for work in the field, (3) active cooperation with other professional organizations that carry out related activities with the aim of exchanging experience and good practices and developing professional work in the field, (4) proactive cooperation with competent authorities in order to solve issues related to the development

¹³ Ibid., Article 16.

of the information society field, (5) cooperation in the systemic development of volunteering, training of volunteer mentors and coordinators and promotion of volunteer work in the field and (6) performing other activities that significantly contribute to the development of the information society field. An NGO must be able to demonstrate it meets at least three criteria listed in the significant achievements if it wishes to be granted the status of an NGO working in the public interest in the field of development of the information society.¹⁴

5. Development of the information society and NGOs

The rules mentioned in the previous section were adopted by the Minister of Public Administration. This is the result of the fact that the area of development of the information society now falls under the newly founded Ministry of digital transformation. The Ministry of Digital Transformation carries out tasks in the areas of the information society, electronic communications, computerization of state administration, management of information and communication systems and provision of electronic public administration services, ensuring the operation of the state eGovernment portal, safe deposit boxes and central services for online registration and electronic signature.¹⁵ The ministry's stand is that digitalization has an increasingly obvious impact on the life of every resident. It is precisely by participating in today's technology-supported and information-rich environment that residents co-create the digital environment, which is essential for democratic processes and practices and represents a context in which the rights to social, economic, and political participation can be exercised. The key here is that the possibility of participation or inclusion in the information society is guaranteed to all residents. An important stakeholder in realizing the needs and interests of all residents is the NGO sector. Regarding the Network of NGOs for an Inclusive Information Society (NGO-VID Network (Slovene) / the NGO-IIS Network (English)), the ministries stand is that in the field of the information society, cooperation with the Network of NGOs for an Inclusive Information Society is extremely important. The network of NGOs for an inclusive information society strives for quality life in the information society and the empowerment of people with the help of digital technologies. The NGO-VID network connects 32 societies, federations of societies, private institutes, foundations, social enterprises, and cooperatives, 7 of which have the status of NGOs in the public interest in the field of information society development.¹⁶

6. Digital technologies and the NGO sector

Much literature can be found on digital technologies and civil society organizations (CSOs). CSOs and NGOs are closely connected, which is why some findings from the use of digital technologies or information society development and CSOs can also apply to NGOs.

If civil society refers to all forms of social action carried out by individuals or groups who are neither connected to nor managed by state authorities, then a CSO is an organizational structure whose members serve the general interest through a democratic process, and which plays the role of mediator between public authorities and

¹⁴ Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia, No. 25/19.

¹⁵ Article 28.1 of the Act on State Administration (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia, No. 113/05 – official consolidated text, 89/07 – odl. US, 126/07 – ZUP-E, 48/09, 8/10 – ZUP-G, 8/12 – ZVRS-F, 21/12, 47/13, 12/14, 90/14, 51/16, 36/21, 82/21, 189/21, 153/22 and 18/23).

¹⁶ <https://www.gov.si/en/topics/digitalisation-of-society/> [18. 4. 2023].

citizens. And examples of such organizations include NGOs.¹⁷ Like commercial and indeed government institutions, digital technologies have the potential to transform organizational capacity and stakeholder engagement in and with civil society institutions yet CSOs are rarely included in indices seeking to measure digital progress in society (Lynn et al, 2022). What changed is that we so often talk about CSOs or NGOs on one side and information society, digital technologies, etc. on the other side of the same sentence. For example, literature published prior to COVID-19 suggested that digital adoption by CSOs is limited (Dufft and Kreutter, 2018). We previously already mentioned the Covid-19 epidemic's impact on the use of digital tools by NGOs in Slovenia. Nowadays digital technologies are changing how CSOs organize themselves locally, regionally, nationally, and globally. Lynn argues that there exists well-established literature on the use of digital technologies by non-profit organizations (NGOs) for information sharing and promotion, community building, fundraising, recruitment, and advocacy. Lynn argues that this literature cites a wide range of potential advantages including increasing organization capacity (Sun and Asencio, 2019), improved transparency (Dumont, 2013), access to market and targeting (Shier and Handy, 2012, Saxton and Wang, 2014), message amplification and reach (Saxton and Wang, 2014, Briones et al., 2011), faster service delivery (Briones et al., 2011), and payment (donation) efficiency (Shier & Handy, 2012). On the other hand, some challenges may occur with the usage of digital tools and technologies such as the social (digital) exclusion for the most vulnerable in society. Different disadvantaged groups do not have the skills or access to avail of these technologies. To promote and advocate for social (digital) inclusion and address certain challenges in societies' digital transformation and information society development it is important to have different networks of NGOs such as the Non-Governmental Organisations for an Inclusive Information Society (the NGO-IIS Network) in Slovenia, tackling these challenges.

7. Survey and result analysis

In the second half of March of 2023, an online survey was sent to all the members of the Non-Governmental Organisations for an Inclusive Information Society (the NGO-IIS Network) in Slovenia.¹⁸ The survey's title was "Digital Transformation of society and the NGO sector". The purpose of the survey was to obtain data for the preparation of an analysis of cooperation with key stakeholders (Government and NGOs) and their impact on the development of the information society. The survey was completely anonymous, and the results are only be used for the needs of dissemination and raising awareness among the general and professional public about the role of NGOs in the development of the information society in the form of published articles and contributions at conferences, round tables, etc. By highlighting both shortcomings and good practices, the aim is to try and (also) alert decision-makers to specific areas that need to be addressed if we want to improve the situation in the sector. The survey consisted of nine (9) closed and open-ended questions. Answers to closed questions were given by marking the appropriate value, while answers to open (optional) questions were prepared in the form of short sentences.

¹⁷ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/EN/legal-content/glossary/civil-society-organisation.html> [20. 4. 2023].

¹⁸ The author would at this point like to thank the Non-Governmental Organisations for an Inclusive Information Society (the NGO-IIS Network) for their cooperation in consulting the author on the topic and for assistance in obtaining answers to survey questions. The survey was done via the <https://www.lka.si/d/en> survey application.

For meeting the objective of presenting the role NGOs in Slovenia play in advocating for or against different policies and implementation of digital transformation projects in the field of information society development – with an emphasis on digital inclusion – three (3) survey research questions were chosen:

RQ1: As an NGO, to what extent do you cooperate with ministries or other decision-makers in the preparation of policies in the listed areas?

RQ2: How much do the policy makers (government, ministries) acknowledge your proposals in a certain area/field?

RQ3: In your opinion, what practices would help improve cooperation between decision-makers and NGOs working in the field of information society development?

23 out of 32 NGOs working in the field of information society development answered the survey questionnaire.

Of the 23 that answered 7 NGOs have the status of NGOs in the public interest in the field of information society development.

Table 1: Own Source

RQ1 As an NGO, to what extent do you cooperate with ministries or other decision-makers in the preparation of policies in the listed areas?											
	Subquestions	Answers						Valid	No. of Units	Av.	Std. deflection
		Very little/1	Little/2	Medium/3	A lot/4	Very much/5	Total				
Q1a	Information society.	3 (13%)	6 (26%)	6 (26%)	5 (22%)	3 (13%)	23 (100%)	23	23	3,0	1,3
Q1b	Electronic communications.	8 (35%)	10 (43%)	4 (17%)	1 (4%)	0 (0%)	23 (100%)	23	23	1,9	0,8
Q1c	Digital inclusion.	5 (22%)	7 (30%)	2 (9%)	7 (30%)	2 (9%)	23 (100%)	23	23	2,7	1,4
Q1d	Digital competencies.	5 (22%)	7 (30%)	5 (22%)	4 (17%)	2 (9%)	23 (100%)	23	23	2,6	1,3
Q1e	Data economy.	10 (43%)	8 (35%)	4 (17%)	1 (4%)	0 (0%)	23 (100%)	23	23	1,8	0,9
Q1f	Information and communication systems management.	9 (39%)	9 (39%)	5 (22%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	23 (100%)	23	23	1,8	0,8
Q1g	Providing electronic public administration services.	10 (43%)	3 (13%)	7 (30%)	3 (13%)	0 (0%)	23 (100%)	23	23	2,1	1,1
Q1h	Would you like to highlight any other area in which you cooperate with ministries or other decision-makers in the preparation of policies?	2 (29%)	2 (29%)	1 (14%)	2 (29%)	0 (0%)	7 (100%)	7	23	2,4	1,3

Table 2: Own Source

Q1h_text Q7 (Would you like to highlight any other area in which you cooperate with ministries or other decision-makers in the preparation of policies?)					
	Answers	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Valid (in %)	Cumulative
	open source, open data	1	4%	20%	20%
	Ministry of Health	1	4%	20%	40%
	e-democracy, e-participation	1	4%	20%	60%
	sustainable or green digital transformation	1	4%	20%	80%
	yes, but they are not areas related to digitization	1	4%	20%	100%
Valid	Together	5	22%	100%	

RQ 1 offered multiple answers which are presented in Tables 1 and 2. The question of the extent of cooperation between ministries or other decision-makers in the preparation of policies was focused on seven (7) areas. The

goal was to find out the existing areas of cooperation and the extent of the latter. Results show that policymakers (government, ministries, etc.) cooperate with NGOs working in the field of information society development mostly in the areas of 1. Information society, followed by 2. Digital inclusion, 3. Digital competencies, 4. Providing electronic public administration services, 5. Electronic communications, 6. Data economy and 7. Information and communication systems management. Some NGOs listed (with the same frequency) also some other areas in which they cooperate with ministries or other decision-makers in the preparation of policies, such as open source, open data, policies related to the Ministry of Health, areas of e-democracy, e-participation, sustainable or green digital transformation, and mentioned other areas exist where they cooperate with ministries, but they are not areas related to digitization. We can safely say there exists a relationship of cooperation between NGOs engaged in the field of information society development and ministries or other decision-makers in the preparation of policies in different areas related to digitalization. What is worrying is that the average level of cooperation for all areas is 2,3, which puts the level of cooperation somewhere between little (2) and medium (3). All and all the extent of cooperation is seen as below average or medium (3). The intensity of cooperation varies between different areas of policy preparation which can be understood since different NGOs, although all working in the field of information society development have different priorities and specialize in different areas of information society development. Some are also more active than others. The results offer a possibility of further research into the reasoning behind such a low evaluation of the extent of cooperation with the policymakers from the side of NGOs.

Table 3: Own Source

RQ2 How much do the policy makers (government, ministries) listen to your suggestions in a certain area/field?											
Subquestions		Answers						Valid	No. of Units	Av.	Std. deflection
		Very little	Little	Medium	A lot	Very much	Total				
Q2a	Digital inclusion of general population.	2 (9%)	11 (50%)	6 (27%)	3 (14%)	0 (0%)	22 (100%)	22	23	2,5	0,9
Q2b	Digitization of the NGO sector.	4 (18%)	8 (36%)	10 (45%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	22 (100%)	22	23	2,3	0,8
Q2c	Advocacy in the planning, and preparation of policies and regulations.	2 (10%)	13 (62%)	6 (29%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	21 (100%)	21	23	2,2	0,6
Q2d	Advocacy in the implementation of regulations and policies.	1 (5%)	13 (62%)	7 (33%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	21 (100%)	21	23	2,3	0,6
Q2e	Professionalization (recruitment) of NGOs in the field of information society.	3 (14%)	12 (55%)	7 (32%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	22 (100%)	22	23	2,2	0,7
Q2f	Support for specific project proposals.	5 (23%)	9 (41%)	7 (32%)	1 (5%)	0 (0%)	22 (100%)	22	23	2,2	0,9
Q2g	Establishing dialogue and cooperation with non-governmental organizations.	1 (5%)	8 (36%)	9 (41%)	3 (14%)	1 (5%)	22 (100%)	22	23	2,8	0,9
Q2h	Would you like to point out another area where policy makers (government, ministries) listen to your suggestions?	2 (40%)	0 (0%)	3 (60%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	5 (100%)	5	23	2,2	1,1

Table 4: Own Source

Q2h_text	Q2 (Would you like to point out another area where policymakers (government, ministries) acknowledge your suggestions?)				
	Answers	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Valid (in %)	Cumulative
	concrete experience gained through our work	1	4%	50%	50%
	participation in the organization of events	1	4%	50%	100%
Valid	Together	2	9%	100%	

RQ 2 offered multiple answers which are presented in Tables 3 and 4. The aim was to identify the level of policymakers (government, ministries) acknowledgment of proposals or suggestions given by NGOs in certain areas. Even if NGOs cooperate with decision-makers that does not mean their ideas and suggestions find their way into different policies or result in concrete projects being carried out. We wanted to research the impact NGOs have on policymakers in different areas of information society. The chosen seven (7) areas were digital inclusion of the general population, digitization of the NGO sector, advocacy in the planning, and preparation phase of policies and regulations, advocacy in the implementation phase of regulations and policies, professionalization (recruitment) of NGOs in the field of the information society, support for specific project proposals, establishing dialogue and cooperation with NGOs. Again – same as with RQ1 -, what is worrying is that the average level of impact of NGOs and their suggestions regarding different areas of digital society is seen as relatively low with an average grade of 2,4, which puts the average level of NGOs’ suggestions impact cooperation somewhere between little (2) and medium (3). Results show that policymakers (government, ministries, etc.) acknowledge proposals from NGOs working in the field of information society development mostly in the areas of 1. establishing dialogue and cooperation with non-governmental organizations, 2. digital inclusion of the general population, 3. digitization of the NGO sector, 4. advocacy in the implementation of regulations and policies, 5. advocacy in the planning, and preparation of policies and regulations, 6. professionalization (recruitment) of NGOs in the field of the information society, 7. support for specific project proposals. Two NGOs listed that decision makers also acknowledge their proposals regarding concrete experience gained through their work and participation in the organization of events.

Table 5: Own Source

RQ 3 In your opinion, what practices would help improve cooperation between decision-makers and NGOs working in the field of information society development?											
Subquestions		Answers						Valid	No. of Units	Av.	Std. deflection
		I do not agree at all	I do not agree	I neither agree nor disagree	I agree	I totally agree	Total				
RQ3a	Development and preparation of joint projects.	0 (0%)	1 (4%)	4 (17%)	12 (52%)	6 (26%)	23 (100%)	23	23	4,0	0,8
RQ3b	Implementation of joint projects.	0 (0%)	1 (5%)	4 (18%)	12 (55%)	5 (23%)	22 (100%)	22	23	4,0	0,8
RQ3c	Organization of joint events.	1 (5%)	0 (0%)	2 (9%)	16 (73%)	3 (14%)	22 (100%)	22	23	3,9	0,8
RQ3d	Mandatory inclusion of NGOs in the procedures for the preparation of public tenders for the development of the information society	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	3 (13%)	9 (39%)	11 (48%)	23 (100%)	23	23	4,3	0,7

	and digitization of NGOs.										
RQ3e	Mandatory involvement of NGOs in the preparation of legislation.	0 (0%)	1 (4%)	2 (9%)	10 (43%)	10 (43%)	23 (100%)	23	23	4,3	0,8
RQ3f	Early involvement of NGOs in the preparation of legislation.	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (4%)	11 (48%)	11 (48%)	23 (100%)	23	23	4,4	0,6
RQ3g	Establishment of expert advisory groups for individual areas of digital transformation.	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	4 (17%)	8 (35%)	11 (48%)	23 (100%)	23	23	4,3	0,8
RQ3h	Establishment of regular (at least monthly) meetings between NGOs and decision-makers.	1 (5%)	0 (0%)	5 (23%)	11 (50%)	5 (23%)	22 (100%)	22	23	3,9	0,9
RQ3i	Would you suggest another practice that, in your opinion, would help to improve cooperation between decision-makers and NGOs working in the field of information society development?	2 (50%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	2 (50%)	0 (0%)	4 (100%)	4	23	2,5	1,7

Table 6: Own Source

RQ3i_text	Q9 Would you suggest another practice that, in your opinion, would help to improve cooperation between decision-makers and NGOs working in the field of information society development?				
	Answers	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Valid (in %)	Cumulative
	establishing a structured dialogue between the NGO-VID content network and the Ministry of Digital Transformation	1	4%	100%	100%
Valid	Together	1	4%	100%	

RQ3 offered multiple answers which are presented in Tables 5 and 6. The goal was to identify NGOs' stand and agreement on which practices would or could help improve cooperation between decision-makers and NGOs working in the field of information society development. Chosen eight (8) practices were the development and preparation of joint projects, implementation of joint projects, organization of joint events, mandatory inclusion of NGOs in the procedures for the preparation of public tenders for the development of the information society and digitization of NGOs, mandatory involvement of NGOs in the preparation of legislation, early involvement of NGOs in the preparation of legislation, the establishment of expert advisory groups for individual areas of digital transformation, the establishment of regular (at least monthly) meetings between NGOs and decision-makers. Results show that all the "proposed" practices were seen by NGOs as positive since the average grade of proposals is 4,1, which puts the average level of agreement with the propositions of practices which could help to improve cooperation between decision-makers and NGOs working in the field of information society development somewhere between "I agree" and "I totally agree". Looking at them from the most positively accepted proposed practice downwards the order is 1. early involvement of NGOs in the preparation of legislation, 2. mandatory inclusion of NGOs in the procedures for the preparation of public tenders for the development of the information society and digitization of NGOs, 3. establishment of expert advisory groups for individual areas of digital transformation, 4. mandatory involvement of NGOs in the preparation of legislation, 5. development and preparation of joint projects, 6. implementation of joint projects, 7. establishment of regular (at least monthly)

meetings between NGOs and decision-makers, 8. organization of joint events. When asked about other possible positive practices, which would or could help to improve cooperation between decision-makers and NGOs working in the field of information society development only one responding NGO mentioned that establishing a structured dialogue between the NGO-VID content network and the Ministry of Digital Transformation would be a welcome practice. The answers to RQ3 clearly show there is much room for improvement in cooperation between decision-makers and NGOs working in the field of information society development. Some possible practices which could address the issue of lacking cooperation are listed above. It is up to both parties, the policy and decision-makers and the NGOs to agree on which practices would suit them best and result in increased cooperation between decision-makers and NGOs working in the field of information society development, that would improve further development of the information society.

8. Conclusion

NGOs play a significant role in different communities (from local to international) and perform several valuable functions that address unmet public needs, especially regarding the prevention of social (digital) exclusion. For NGOs to be effective and efficient in advocating in the field of information society development and digital transformation, they must be able to use digital technologies to their advantage in a way that supports voluntary (non-profit) work in the public interest. A clear need also exists to measure the progress of the digital transformation of the NGO sector since it is an important part of society whose progress will no doubt affect other parts of society – in a positive or negative way. When advocating in different areas of information society development and digital transformation they often come across different obstacles. Using the survey and research results we can conclude that:

1. Policymakers (government, ministries, etc.) do cooperate with NGOs working in the field of information society development regarding the preparation of different policies, while the intensity of the cooperation differs depending on the concrete area of information society development in question. The overall average level of cooperation as seen by NGOs is somewhere between low and medium, proving there is room for improvement.
2. The intensity of policymakers' (government, ministries) acknowledgment of proposals or suggestions given by NGOs is on average – as seen by the NGOs - also between low and medium, also making room for improvement.
3. NGOs show a high level of agreement (on average they agree or totally agree) and support towards different (listed) practices that would, or could, help improve cooperation between decision-makers and NGOs working in the field of information society development. The support level All this shows there is room for improvement in the advocacy practices of NGOs regarding the formulation of policies and implementation of projects in the field of information society development.

All the areas of information society development have room for improvement, while – at least as seen through NGOs' eyes – improved cooperation between then NGOs and policymakers holds the key.

9. Literature

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