Question of digital co-governance: Rethinking collaboration in data-Driven Local Governance in Lithuania

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Abstract: Our paper suggests a theoretical exploration and conceptual elaboration of how digital and data-driven transformations are reshaping engagement, collaboration and democratic practices within local governance. The paper focuses on the emergence of digital engagement as a new form of civic and institutional interaction in the context of smart city development. Drawing primarily on Lithuania's experience of advancing local self-governance, the paper situates its arguments within a broader European discussion on intelligent governance and collaborative policymaking. The paper's main aim is to clarify the meaning of digital engagement and theorize its role in co-producing public value at a local level. Integrating insights from theories of collaborative governance (Ansell & Gash, 2008), intelligent governance (Vigoda-Gadot, 2024) and digital-era governance (Dunleavy et al., 2005), the paper builds on interdisciplinary perspectives from public administration, political science and sociology. The paper argues that digital engagement goes beyond traditional ideas of civic participation and good citizenship by incorporating human, social, and technological intelligence into governance processes.

In our paper, we propose that digital engagement is a multidimensional concept that links data-driven policymaking, stakeholder collaboration and democratic values. It explores the relationships between digital engagement and existing theoretical constructs, such as civic engagement, political participation and administrative performance, and presents a conceptual model that explains how digital engagement can influence collaboration and trust in local governance. The Lithuanian context is used to illustrate these theoretical discussions and offers a case study of ongoing digital transformation in municipalities and regional governance systems. The paper's primary contribution is theoretical. It seeks to advance the conceptual foundations of digital co-governance, connecting emerging ideas of data-driven decision-making with classical understandings of civic participation and institutional learning. Through this lens, local governance is reinterpreted as a dynamic, multi-actor system in which technological capabilities and human capacities jointly determine the quality of democratic outcomes. Paper is a part of research project "Digital Engagement and Collaboration in Local Governance: New Directions of Co-Production in Data-Driven Lithuanian Municipalities".