The Role of DPPs in Promoting Local Government–Citizen Collaboration and Participation:
The Case of "Baladiaty"

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INTRODUCTION

Tunisia is considered as an emerging economy, a very young and nascent democracy not only in Africa but also in all the Arabic Word. In fact, since the 2011 revolution, Tunisia has undergone a rapid political transformation to democracy. After six decades of autocracy, it has witnessed four consecutive free and fair elections, including the 2011 constituent assembly elections, the 2014 parliamentary and presidential elections, and the 2018 municipal elections. It approved a new constitution in 2014 that is progressive even by Western standards, enshrining not only freedom of religion but also conscience (permitting atheism) and mandating not just gender equality but an active commitment by the state to ensuring it. Tunisia has also passed progressive laws countering violence against women and racial discrimination (Grewal, 2019).

But eight years into democracy, Tunisians have become frustrated with its failure to deliver economically. The unemployment rate, which had remained at a steady 12 to 13 percent through the late 2000s, jumped to 18 percent after the 2011 revolution and remains at 15 percent today. The rate of inflation, 3 to 4 percent prior to the revolution, has doubled to 7.4 percent. Receipts from international tourism, the third-largest sector of the Tunisian economy, totaled $3.9 billion in 2009 and have dropped to just $1.7 billion today. By nearly all metrics, the economic situation is even worse than that which prompted the 2011 revolution (Grewal, 2019).

Accordingly, Tunisians have become increasingly disillusioned with democracy as a solution to their day-to-day problems. Nationally representative survey data from the Afrobarometer help to capture this disillusionment over the course of Tunisia's transition. While 70 percent of Tunisians in 2013 agreed that "democracy was preferable to other forms of government," only 46 percent agreed last year (Grewal,

2019). Moreover, Tunisians no longer trust their parliaments, municipal governments, and political parties. They have lost the commitment and engagement of their citizens.

In this context, what could be done to deal with this dramatic situation?

The literature review in the public management field suggests the use of digital tools as one of the multiple answers to this question. In other words, how digital tools can be used by parliaments, municipal governments, and political parties to engage citizens in the reconquest of democracy?

Desouza & Bhagwatwar (2012); Ertiö (2015); Williamson & Parolin (2013); and Zavattaro & Sementelli (2014) have claimed that we need more digital tools for actual collaboration and citizen engagement in local government activities (Falco & Kleinhans, 2018).

For Simon et al. (2017), "*the practice of democracy using digital tools and technologies" is called "digital democracy*". Therefore, among these digital tools, the authors distinguish the Digital Participatory Platform (DPP) as a specific kind of collaborative social media. For Falco and Kleinhans (2018) DPPs include all the features proper to 'conventional' social media (such as Facebook and Twitter): they are based on Web 2.0, allowing for user-generated content, and sharing of such content. However, compared to conventional social media, DPPs also include different and more elaborate technological features.

The implementation of a Digital Participatory Platform (DPP) takes into account the mandatory use of issues and challenges that local governments face in fostering online and offline citizen engagement (Falco and Kleinhans, 2018). In fact, what any local government, especially municipality aspire or look for is not only implementing DPP, but also how this later should be designed to foster citizen engagement and democracy.

Thus, the aim of this paper is to present the implementation of a pilot digital participatory platform (DPP) called "Baladiaty" in order to foster local government-citizens collaboration and participation in Tunisia. "Baladiaty" means in the Arabic language "My municipality". "Baladiaty" is a DPP designed, developed and commercialized by ARSELA in 2019, a Tunisian start-up located in the governorate of Sousse.

This paper will contain two main parts. The first is considered a theoretical part. The authors will focus on the two main terms and concepts of this research, namely: digital democracy, and DPP. This first part will focus on the definition of the digital participatory platform (DPP), and its role in promoting participatory democracy, citizen engagement and their ubiquitous engagement throughout the open government concept. The second part would be considered as a case study presenting a recently designed pilot DPP "Baladiaty" in Tunisia. This paper could be considered theoretical by focusing on the presentation of a pilot DPP in Tunisia, a nascent democracy.

BACKGROUND: TERMS AND CONCEPTS

In the following, the authors will focus their literature review on the main concepts of this chapter: democracy, e-democracy, and digital participatory platform (DPP). This literature review, based on recent publications, will cover the specificities of all these fundamental concepts: definitions, objectives, dimensions, forms, and models, etc.

I. Democracy

Before going further on the presentation of e-democracy and DPPs, the authors chose to focus on certain definitions of democracy, its forms, and models in order to clarify their foundation.

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