


Chapter 3


Digitalization in Citizen Participation and Effects on Local Governments

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ABSTRACT

Citizen participation refers to the ability of citizens to influence political decisions that impact their lives, forming a core aspect of democracy. While some argue that citizens lack the time, information, and motivation to engage in every public sector decision, others suggest that increased participation fosters knowledge, expertise, and community engagement. The role of public administrators in this process remains debated. However, with technological and social changes, new participation mechanisms have emerged. In particular, the rise of Information and Communication Technologies in the 2000s has transformed interactions between individuals, organizations, and governments, introducing concepts such as electronic participation. This study examines electronic citizen participation in local governments by presenting a theoretical framework, explaining participation in local governance, and analyzing practical examples. Finally, the benefits and challenges of citizen participation in local governance are evaluated.

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INTRODUCTION

Citizen participation in public administration denotes the ability of individuals to influence policy decision-making processes that directly or indirectly impact their lives. As a fundamental component of democracy, it serves as a critical bridge between citizens and governmental institutions. This pivotal role has made citizen participation a subject of extensive scholarly debate. While some argue that expecting citizens to be actively involved in every public sector decision is unrealistic—given constraints related to time, knowledge, and personal motivation—others contend that greater participation fosters the acquisition of expertise, civic awareness, and a stronger sense of community, thereby enhancing public engagement in decision-making.

The question of how and when public administrators should involve citizens in decision-making remains an ongoing topic of discussion. However, technological and societal transformations have diversified the means of political participation, leading to the development of various participatory mechanisms. In particular, the proliferation of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) since the early 2000s has significantly altered the ways in which individuals, organizations, and governments interact. This digital shift has introduced new dimensions to participatory governance, most notably in the form of electronic participation (e-participation). Furthermore, according to the OECD Deliberative Database, public authorities have increasingly incorporated citizens into decision-making processes over the years. Figure 1 illustrates the number of deliberative processes undertaken by OECD member states between 1979 and 2023.

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