

Improving quality of eGov strategies in Belarus, Ukraine and Lithuania

Executive summary

During the past few years most government agencies in Belarus, Ukraine and Lithuania have established a public face online, and developed e-government related programs: e-Belarus (2002), e-Ukraine (2003), and in Lithuania, the Strategic Plan for Information Society Development (2001) and the Concept of eGovernmentnet (2002). Governments in these three countries are reconfiguring their activities and services in order to make use of the opportunities provided by the Internet and new information and communication technologies (ICTs).

But many decision-makers and researchers still concentrate onesidedly on the provision of electronic services and regard society's participation as an unnecessary complicating factor [Suh, 2005]. They treat people as customers rather than as citizens who are responsible for taking initiative to solve problems; officials fail to grasp the beneficial potential of CSOs for their own government work, and programmes focus on improving delivery of government services to citizens, business and other stakeholders.

At the same time, in Lithuania, Belarus and Ukraine civil society organizations (CSOs) – from NGOs to business owners – have tended to devote their attention and resources to questions of connectivity, access and community development rather than to the matter of participation in eGov programming. As a result, 1) they lack information about the development of e-government strategies and about who exactly is and could be involved at the planning stages; and 2) bureaucratic procedures and special interest legislative processes have come to deprive citizens of the practical arts of deliberating and collaborating together [Naidoo, 2003].

The upshot is that new ICTs do not effectively serve their purpose – to improve communication among government, citizens, and parliament.

The State's present emphasis on e-services and access has negative consequences for good governance if it is focused at creating "markets of individual users" [Reilly, Echeberria, 2003] rather than at creating a collaborative and networked participatory e-government. Instead, citizen participation should become a core principle for eGov (e-government and e-governance) planning.

As things now stand, however, CSOs activists themselves sometimes omit "participation" in their ICT-sphere advocacy. This true even though practice demonstrates that merely saturating access discourages the will to participate on the part of receivers. By contrast, a small participatory project managed by the community itself would accomplish what no focus on access can ever do: namely, improve relations, generate participation, and promote genuine communication [Pasquali, 2002].

Issues of citizens and citizen groups participation in eGovs planning procedures has not become a political agenda in Belarus, Ukraine and Lithuania.

This policy paper suggests that this deficit could be met by

- identifying spaces for citizens' participation in eGov programming;
- developing an institutional design for citizens' participation;
- indicating barriers for citizens' participation in the three different contexts of Belarus, Ukraine and Lithuania and the ways to overcome them;

- developing of a general understanding of the respective roles and responsibilities of governments, existing international organizations and other forums as well as the private sector and civil society from the three countries.

Rationale for citizens participation in eGov programming

The concept of citizen participation has become popular worldwide with its integration in the declaration of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in 1992 [Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, 1992]. But there is no universal definition for citizen participation. It is often defined as action that influences or seeks to influence policy decisions [Nagel, 1987] or as an action that incorporates the demands and values of citizens into public administration services [Zimmerman, 1986].

At a basic level, however, citizen participation in eGov means participation by people who are not government officials. It is a process through which civil society actors take part in developing, administering, and amending local and national eGov planning and decision-making affecting their community.

Major characteristics of eGov programming in Belarus, Lithuania and Ukraine as described above result in two major consequences:

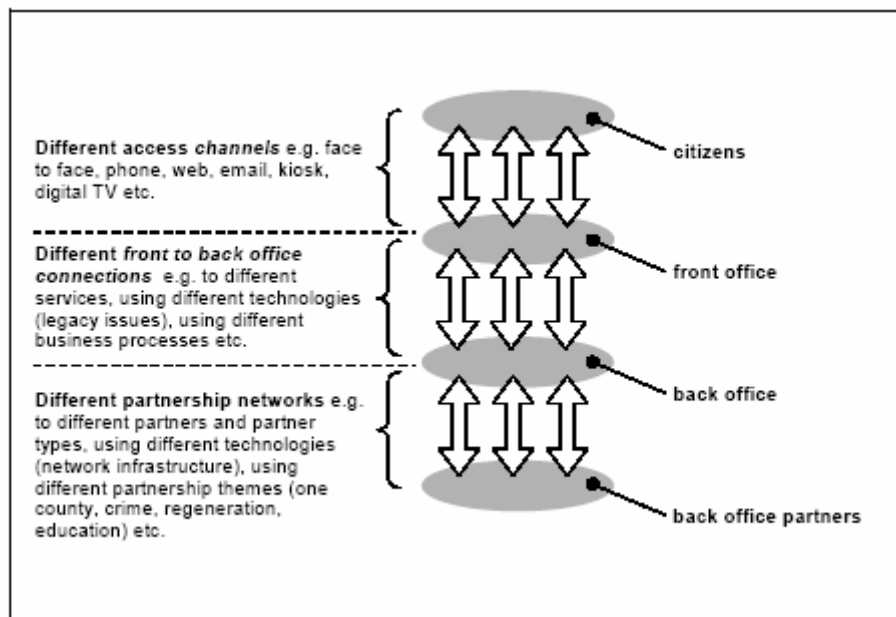
- 1) establishing a customer relationship management model [Shaw et al, 2003, Richter et al, 2005];
- 2) establishing strong “political masters” leadership in e-government initiatives [Reilly, Echeberria, 2003].

Customer relationship management model, while suggesting new opportunities, bears some risks presented in the table below.

Opportunities	Risks
Customer oriented	Close one-to-government communication; Tendency to provide online spaces for individuals’ polling rather than group and individual deliberation
Services provided more equitably	Less attention to the use of ICT as a tool for empowering citizens to solve their own problems or as a means to deliberate with other citizens and participate in agenda setting
Emphasis on efficiency and good quality of services	The fordist style approach to e-government is not a means to creative, curious and interested citizens
	Services confused with participation, transparency and accountability

(Source: Reilly, Echeberria, 2003)

In more practical terms, a customer-oriented approach in a local setting would feature the following characteristics: citizens are not directly connected to back offices; back office partners are not directly connected in front office; citizens are directly connected into the front office; the front office is directly integrated into the back offices; the back office is directly connected into back office practices [Richter et al, 2005]. These features make e-government a kind of a non-transparent black box (see the figure below).



[Source: Shaw et al., 2003]

Paradoxically, the “black box” model may result in weakening perceptions and understanding of the fundamental obligations of citizens and public servants. That is why the “black box of CRM-supported ICT” needs to be opened, to expose decisions corresponding to the design, deployment and procurement of these systems, in addition to their implementation [Richter et al., 2005].

K. Reilly and R. Echeberria pointed out problems connected with “political masters” leadership:

- it presents the temptation of creating a showpiece for the presidency rather than implementing real change, or picking easy targets for short term political gain, rather than fundamental change for long term societal gain,
- when masters change, the program disappears, or faces serious continuity issues
- the e-government leadership may be too far away from implementation terms to provide effective guidance and support
- strong leadership is often viewed as necessary in situations where there is a plurality of “leaders” in order to cut through and bring order. This situation is a tricky proposition and one that can easily backfire [Reilly, Echeberria, 2003].

These trends may result in disjuncture, misguided programming, lack of transparency and hidden agendas, as well as in undermining the desire of actors outside governments to offer support.

Therefore, if countries wish to reduce the tensions and to enhance legitimacy of their strategies, they should involve civil society actors in eGov programming.

Civic engagement in agenda setting provides a basis for a sustainable eGov strategy, increases the efficiency of policy implementation (by involving stakeholders in decision-making), enhances overall implementation capacity (through public-private partnerships and the sharing of knowledge and experience), catalyzes greater coordination via developing new partnerships and networks. Citizens and citizens groups will be able to forge a citizen-oriented e-governance that benefits not only themselves but the government as well, because

- Only citizens can provide the information needed to develop, maintain, and carry out an effective comprehensive plan. Professional planners and local officials need comments and ideas from those who know the community best: people who live and work there.
- Citizens' involvement educates the public about planning. It creates an informed community, which in turn leads to better planning.
- Citizens' engagement gives members of the community sense of ownership of the plan. It fosters cooperation among citizens and between them and their government. That leads to fewer conflicts and less litigation, which finally reduces costs for re-planning and conflict resolution and leads to a higher acceptance of results.
- Citizens' involvement is an important means of enforcing various laws. Having citizens informed about planning laws and giving them access to the planning process ensures that the laws are applied properly.

In sum, citizens and citizens groups will be able to forge a citizen-oriented e-government that benefits not only themselves but the government as well.

Key recommendations concerning public participation in eGov programming

Spaces for participation

In sum, citizen participation in eGov programming in Lithuania, Ukraine and Belarus is often reduced to participation of CSOs in implementation practices (local projects, training, education) and takes forms of administrative participation (monitoring, evaluation, benchmarking of administrative operations). This section addresses the topology for citizen participation in the process of eGov planning, i. e. spaces for political participation in deliberative process. More particularly, at what levels (global, regional, national, local), interfering with what state functions (operations, policymaking, regulations), through which forms (individuals, organized groups, multistakeholder partnerships), is such participation possible?

Strategies

Civil society actors in Lithuania, Belarus and Ukraine should actively pursue a role in constituting the ways in which new technologies are conceived and put to use. Among the basic prerequisites for that are:

- 1) Capacity building:
Participation is most meaningful when supplemented by capacity- and awareness-building measures. E-governance topics frequently require technical knowledge and expertise. In order to participate in a substantial sense, stakeholders need information, knowledge, resources, and the opportunity to participate [WGIG, 2005].
- 2) Access to network tools:
Although the role of the state remains central in e-government programming in Ukraine, Belarus and Lithuania, and although the state's position strongly shapes the possibilities for citizens and citizens groups participation, there remains an opportunity for a public space between community, social capital networks and those elements of government open to the possibilities of democratic participation using the medium of communication networks. Access to network tools could create public spaces in which new forms of relationship-building can circulate and will allow for both the practical strengthening of grassroots democratic organizing and its growth and extension to new citizenship groups. For Belarus contacts with non-governmental organizations from neighbouring countries

could allow to overcome increasing isolation and stimulate the process of developing of civil society.

3) Creating a cross-border institutional space:

Belarusian- Ukrainian-Lithuanian E-citizens Network could become a cross border institutional space that will include governmental officials, parliamentarians, citizens and citizens groups in the three countries. More specifically, in e-governance sector it could a) provide basis for sustainability in e-governance policies in spite of changing elites and governments in the three countries; b) offer incentives for citizens and civic organizations to mobilize their efforts in order to improve the quality of e-governance; c) encourage government officials to understand benefits multi stakeholder approach can bring to e-strategies deliberation, planning and implementation process; and d) facilitate developing and diffusing of best practices in the area.

Institutional design

Modes of citizen participation (as defined above) in eGov planning, apart from traditional forms of joining associations, lobbying groups, referenda and etc should also include multistakeholder partnerships and direct citizens participation in the deliberative process.

Associations are internationally recognized as strategically important participants in the strategies development and implementation processes.

In the sphere of strategy design, associations serve as a medium for broad political discourse and so have important public-sphere effects such as facilitating public communication, representing difference, and representing commonality [Fung, 2003; Habermas 1989, 1996]. But the role of associations in the design of strategies is taking root only gradually with governments that continue to dominate decision making processes, while associations offer *additional channels for interest representation and public deliberation*.

Associations often become *watchdogs* to ensure government fulfillment commitments, equalize representation, enable social coordination and, in some cases, resistance [Ghaus –Pasha, 2005; Fung 2003 and others].

Participation in associations can *empower individuals and communities* by increasing their senses of efficacy, providing them with political information and political skills, developing their civic virtues, and teaching them to be critical [Ghaus-Pasha, 2004].

But as a mode of citizens' participation associations have some obvious limitations (see Box1).

Box 1 Associations	
strengths	weaknesses
contribute to the legitimacy of collective decisions by enhancing the quality of public deliberation	typically involve professional politicians and advocates at the peak levels
	often represent elite members of elected assemblies or the professional delegates of interest groups
articulate criticisms of state action as well as	groups seek rent from the public through

putting forward public arguments in favor of social alternatives.	attempts to advance their ideological agendas rather than working in partnerships that advance public ends
	Precious few associations in contemporary civil societies can claim to be democratic in the sense that their leaders and agendas are controlled by members and constituents. Most are guided by the impulses of their leaders.
opportunities	threats
can be venues in which members engage with one another to discuss the merits of various policies or politicians	the demands of strategic effectiveness create pressures toward hierarchy. If it is the case that secondary associations are largely oligarchical, they can hardly serve as sites of democratic deliberation among free and equal members
can advance justice by “equalizing representation”	well-organized groups can capture public resources and authority without attending to general interests or the needs of the unorganized
potentially offer a host of capacities to advance public ends that are unavailable to agencies of the formal state (if associations endorse policy, they can foster and enforce the compliance of their members)	

Some of these limitations can be overcome through direct citizens/participation in the deliberative process. Engaging ordinary citizens in deliberations about the operations of government can increase legitimacy, bring crucial local knowledge to bear on public action, add resources, and enhance public accountability. But experience reveals some critical concerns about direct deliberation:

- 1) the democratic character of processes and outcomes may be vulnerable to serious problems of power and domination inside deliberative arenas by powerful factions or elites;
- 2) external actors and institutional contexts may impose severe limitations on the scope of deliberative decision and action. In particular, powerful participants may engage in “forum shopping” strategies in which they use deliberative institutions only when it suits them;
- 3) these special-purpose political institutions may fall prey to rent seeking and capture by especially well-informed or interested parties
- 4) the devolutionary elements of direct deliberation may balkanize the polity and political decision making
- 5) empowered deliberation may demand unrealistically high levels of popular participation, especially in contemporary climates of civic and political disengagement;
- 6) Finally, these experiments may enjoy initial successes but may be difficult to sustain over the long term [Fung 2003,2004] See Box 2

Box 2
Direct citizens' deliberation.

strengths	weaknesses
represent the population at large in the descriptive sense mirroring the demographic, economic, and social characteristics	typically engage a far smaller percentage of citizens than vote in low-turnout local elections, while those who participate are not elected and so cannot plausibly claim to represent the vast majority of non-participants
bring local knowledge, mobilizing social resources, and increasing compliance through increased legitimacy	address highly localized issues, it is unclear whether, and how, directly participatory institutions can be fashioned to address problems that unfold at greater scale
opportunities	threats
institutions that encourage direct participation may be less subject to the distortions of political equality that stem from unequal control of material and communicative resources	participatory institutions will attract those who have special interests, greater resources, or a peculiar taste for participation - generate unjust outcomes by facilitating the domination of local elites or by constructing democratic majorities who are insensitive to the needs and rights of minority interests

Direct citizen participation in deliberative process and of associations' input may be effective only if they are considered as complementary to each other.

1. Direct participation can make the leaders and agendas of interest groups and other associations more *responsive and accountable* to the interests of members and constituents.
2. When more common interests are threatened by the ecology of special interests or when accountability inducing reforms are unworkable, enhancing legitimacy, justice, or effectiveness may require *circumventing* the political grip of associations by shifting the locus of decision-making to alternative participatory arrangements. [Fung, 2003].
3. Deliberative citizens participation is often initiated either by state, or by CSOs, or emerges as the result of partnership between non-profit organizations and government officials or legislators seeking to solicit citizen input and enhance their own legitimacy.

This integrated approach is reflected in multistakeholder process as a form of citizen participation. In that context, stakeholders are defined as "those who have an interest in a particular decision, either as individuals or representatives of a group. This includes people who influence a decision, or can influence it, as well as those affected by it. The term multistakeholder processes is described as *processes which*

- *aim* to bring together all major stakeholders in a new form of communication, decision-finding (and possibly decision-making) structure on a particular issue;
- are based on recognition of the importance of achieving equity and accountability in communication between stakeholders;
- involve equitable representation of three or more stakeholder groups and their views;
- are based on democratic principles of transparency and participation;

- aim to develop partnerships and strengthened networks between and among stakeholders.

Major forms of multistakeholder include traditional forms of participation (consultations, debate, dialogue, discussions, hearings, forums) as well as new ones, such as global policy networks and new social partnerships and stakeholder forums [Hemmati, 2002]:

- Global public policy (GPP) networks - multisectoral collaborative alliances, often involving governments, international organizations, companies and NGOs. They 'take advantage of technological innovation and political liberalization'; 'pull diverse groups and resources together'; 'address issues that no single group can resolve by itself'; and, by doing so, rely on 'the strength of weak ties'
- New social partnerships - people and organizations from some combination of public, business and civil constituencies who engage in voluntary, mutually beneficial, innovative relationships to address common societal aims through combining their resources and competencies. Similar to MSPs (but in more of a 'business-type language'), new social partnerships are characterized by societal aims, innovation, multi-constituency, voluntary participation, mutual benefit and shared investment, and what is described as the 'alchemical effect of partnerships';
- Stakeholder forum – a setting where views are stated and discussed. Forum-type events tend to make use of various forms of interaction (plenary presentations, break-out groups, panel discussions, and so on) and allow a lot of space for informal exchange.

Major principles of design for organized citizens' participation in eGov programming may be summed up in a following way.

I. General participation/engagement activities of organized groups of citizens or/and government include awareness-raising, building capacity to mobilize, research for advocacy (information generation), lobbying to influence planning and policy formation, citizen-based deliberation, monitoring and evaluation, implementation (including partnerships) and auditing.

II. A space in which any particular mechanism of citizen participation can be located in the space constituted by the scope of participation, mode of communication and decision, and extent of authorization. That means that participants roles (governments, associations, individual citizens) should be clearly identified and defined.

III. The organized citizen participation in communicative government planning (as in the case of eGov) should go through the following stages:

1. Issue generation – issues derive from multiplicity of sources
2. Issue identification – scoping, defining aspects of an issue by appropriate body (clear definition of the problem, information and date, preliminary list of stakeholders, the history of issue)
3. Identification of process parameters – the non-negotiable aspects of a decision process should be clearly stated and defensible reasons for that developed (for eg. by government)
4. Clarifying decision makers – a statement of whom has final authority to make the decision.
5. Goals and Timelines determination – time limitations, costs, staff availability, technical complexity, public interest, political climate, size and nature of stakeholder groups
6. Citizen participation process determination – ways of citizens engagement (individual judgements and opinions, focus groups interviews, random sample surveys, response forms, newspaper inserts, workshops, deliberative participation, discussion forums , and

- etc). Complicated and technical issues might best use advisory or ad hoc committees, workshops.
7. Informing- compiling information, educating members of community
 8. Discussion and consultations
 9. Decision making. Those charged with making final decisions review the recommendations developed and act upon it. This could involve acceptance or revisions of the product. The decision and rationale behind it are communicated to the public
 10. Implementation
 11. Evaluation

IV. Specific strategies applied in direct citizens deliberation presented in the table below were summed up by A. Fung [Fung, 2001]

Strategies	Tactics	Principles	Results
Education	Educative forum	A focus on specific needs	Individuals and community empowerment, will formation and articulation
Collaboration Persuasion	Participatory advisory panels	Involvement of ordinary people affected by those problems and officials close to them	develop linkages decision makers to transmit preferences after they have been articulated and combined into a social choice
	Participatory problem solving	Deliberative development of solutions to these problems	will formation and reasoned social choice solving particular collective problems reasoned social choice

V. For direct citizens deliberation process the following elements of institutional design are important :

- 1) participants selection and recruitment,
- 2) structure and scope of discussions (stakes and subject),
- 3) deliberation mode (organizational style of discussions)- public spheres should be constructed in ways that first and foremost allow those without voice and will to find and form it
- 4) frequency of discussions (recurrence and interaction),
- 5) monitoring (to observe and consider consequences what sorts of decisions are likely to work in various contexts(learning) and to pressure officials to serve public ends and plans (accountability),
- 6) citizens empowerment

VI. Ways of recruitment of participants of deliberative discussions:

- voluntary self expression (normally well off people);
- selection of participants who demographically mirror the general population using opinion poll methods;
- recruitment through affirmative action – publicizing the event in communities that would otherwise underrepresented.

VII. Structure and scope of direct deliberation, i.e what if anything citizens are likely to contribute in terms of insight, information or resources. Some areas would benefit very little from deliberation because they require highly specialist kinds of knowledge or training. What the citizens possess a comparative advantage over the actors such as politicians, administrators and organized interest groups. In some areas citizens:

- contribute information about their preferences and values
- may be better positioned to assess the impacts of policies and deliver these feedback to officials
- enhance public accountability when civic engagement allows them to monitor potentially corrupt or irresponsible officials.

VIII. The quality of institutional design factors has a number of functional consequences:

- Character of participation (quantity of participation and quality of deliberation),
- Informing (informing officials, informing citizens, fostering skills of citizenship).
- State action (official accountability, justice of policy, efficacy of policy, wisdom of policy).
- Political (popular mobilization)

The table below presents major functional consequences of institutional design factors (x – important, xx- highly important)

		Recruitment	Subject	Mode	Recurrence	Stakes	empowerment	monitoring
Character of participation and deliberation	quantity	xx	xx		x	xx	xx	
	bias	xx	xx			xx	xx	
	Del quality		xx	xx	x	xx	xx	x
Information pooling and individual transformation	Informing of officials		xx		xx			xx
	Informing of citizens		xx	xx	xx	x	x	x
	Democratic skills				xx	xx	xx	
Popular control and state capacity	accountability		xx				xx	xx
	Justice of policy	xx	xx	xx			xx	xx
	Efficacy of policy		xx	xx	x		xx	xx
Political effect	Popular mobilization		xx	xx		xx	xx	

Source: Fung, 2003 Recipes

Risks and opportunities for parliaments

In this part the impact of NICT-enabled participatory mechanisms on parliaments in the three countries will be studied. Shortcomings in current eGov strategies due to parliaments' passive roles in eGov programming will be examined. Possibilities of applications of eDemocracy strategic guidelines worked out in the frameworks of EU PRISMA and PUMA projects will also be investigated.

Conclusion.

1. General understanding of the respective roles and responsibilities of governments, existing international organizations and other forums as well as the private sector and civil society from the three countries.
3. Policy steps for specific topics and priorities for each of the three countries

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