



FEASIBILITY ASSESSMENT

for development
of an online
platform on citizen
participation

This report was prepared by Kosovo Democratic Institute (KDI) for the DEMOS project, which is implemented by HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation

Disclaimer: The findings and conclusions expressed in this report do not necessarily represent the positions of SDC and HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation.

©*DEMOS*

Published: November 2021

Prishtinë/Priština, Kosovo

Contents

Introduction.....	5
Methodology	13
Understanding Citizen Participation.....	15
Assessment of current platforms within public institutions	21
I. Assessment of 38 Websites of Kosovo’s Municipalities.....	21
II. Assessment of other platforms that are built to help the digital citizen participation in Kosovo.	27
Analyze relevant and used platforms outside of the Kosovo government system.....	31
Criteria, considerations and characteristics on upgrading or developing new platforms	37
Potential solutions.....	43
1. Suggestions to make potential updates to current platforms to increase citizen participation.....	43
2. Suggestions to implement proven successful platforms for citizen engagement.....	47
3. Suggestion to create a new platform from scratch, based on the specific context of Kosovo and fulfilling best practices and standards....	44
Vision of the Ministry of Local Government for the Platform of Digitization of Municipal Websites - Municipalities.....	57
Orientation about costs and other resources related to potential solutions suggested .	60
Conclusions	65
Appendixes	69



Introduction

This feasibility assessment report has conducted an assessment of the current online websites of 38 Municipalities of Kosovo. Part of the assessment were also main platforms within the government system of Kosovo or supported by public institutions, platforms that are helping the open government processes, citizen participation (engagement) and digital government. In this process, we have assessed the actual design, functions, user access, mobile use and technologies enabling them. There is an analysis of the feasible options for a new sustainable online platform (or additional features within current platforms) that would enable and improve citizen participation at the local level.

All municipalities of Kosovo have their own websites. With small exceptions¹, all municipalities in Kosovo are active in publishing information materials through their websites. From a detailed scanning process of all websites, by cross-browsing them with different devices, browsers and by testing with different tools we can conclude that they are mobile responsive and have a unique content management system which is a very popular Open Source platform, known as Wordpress.

The content management system in question (Wordpress) offers the opportunity to have scalable websites that can extend features by integrating new components in a modulated way.

We conclude that there is a good base and there is doing good work, but it is very limited and does not satisfy the standards of mobile responsiveness, fast loading, user access and most important is not satisfying the minimum needs for an appropriate program of digital citizen participation. Limitations seem to be apparent from the template designed for the municipalities by procured company, years before, and also from the way how the IT staff of each respective municipality is interacting with these websites, how they are customizing and managing them.

¹ Municipalities in the northern part of Kosovo, with Serbian major population.

Actually, although websites are active, most of the municipalities of the Republic of Kosovo on their website do not offer sufficient tools to increase the participation of citizens in the governance and decision-making of local institutions. The Post Covid-19 situation has somehow boosted e-education and e-health, but the citizen participation in governance has not seen the same progress.

All platforms that we have assessed in our research, even at the local government level or in central government agencies, are using websites as tools for communication in one direction, the public institution → citizen, websites are serving as medium to share information but there is no interactivity between stakeholders (citizens, NGOs, media). Municipalities are not providing much space for discussion nor to get impression or views of the citizens in governing, planning or decision-making processes.

Characteristics of platforms that enable participation of citizens

Online debates with citizens, collection of citizens' proposals, participation of citizens in budget planning, measuring public opinions, expression of citizens' opinions through electronic voting, polls, surveys, or collaboration on drafting new laws and regulations, as features that are characterizing citizen participation friendly websites, are not adapted in websites of municipalities of Kosova and even in government level.

Most of the municipalities have only a contact form to report concerns, and they relate this tool specifically to report concerns regarding safety in the community, which limits the usability.

All municipalities have planned by default to have a FORUM software through their websites, but none of them have established it. In all websites where the menu named FORUM is still visible, it will redirect visitors to a broken link.

Although there are several external platforms to facilitate the participation of the citizens digitally, platforms that are developed with the support of public agencies, civil society or other international organizations, they are not maintained, and municipalities of Kosovo are not using them actively, only with small exceptions. The low level of engagement of public institutions to update their data on these platforms, have produced the consequence where the level of engagement of citizens is even lower.

Top case studies we can mention in our research are platforms²:

- a. **Konsultimet.rks-gov.net**, a platform designed by the Kosovo Government to facilitate digital public consultation. It is used by some central government institutions and from only 3 municipalities, even municipalities that are active on the platform are not using it regularly. This platform is a notification board, where citizens can be informed for all active or closed public consultations. It filters the events based on institutions who organize public consultation. The platform is limited because there are no options for citizens to participate online in these consultations. Beyond the information shared with citizens, there is no space for interactivity. Citizens through this platform are mostly informed about physical consultation meetings. Institutions who are organizing, date, place and contacting persons. The platform in itself is not offering tools to enable participation digitally, to add comments, to submit proposals (except if a citizen is sending an email to the person) or to vote. There is no other functions or feedback mechanisms. It is not mobile responsive, there is a space for improvement in design.
- b. The second case is **Digital Platform for Citizen Participants**. It is a platform developed with the support of OSCE for municipalities. Until now, only 5 municipalities have joined this platform, and most of them are not using it regularly. This platform satisfies mostly the digital citizen participation features, mobile responsiveness and easy to navigate.

To enable and foster citizen participation, Municipalities of Kosova should develop sub-systems or applications that can enable different forms and channels of citizen participation. And these tools should be developed within municipalities' websites or embedded on their landing pages. Citizens do not have the courage, skills and patience to search for citizen participation platforms at the country level, through search engines, to check which of them is working and updated, and after successful finding, to dig there to find their municipality and after it, to submit a query, request or to look for further citizen participation tools. Following too many steps, huge complexity, poor design and low speed of running reduces the courage and willingness of citizens to be engaged digitally.

All services of citizen participation for a certain institution should be within the website of this institution, in a hotspot position. But before developing any applications or in parallel with the development of further features, municipalities also need to address a lot of problems that their actual websites are facing. Problems are in design, in structure, in user equal accessibility and in performance.

² Many case studies are provided below. Case studies are selected based on characteristics that defines citizen participation platforms. Beyond the websites of 38 Municipalities, there are included all platforms that match characteristics above and were related to websites of any municipality or to The Ministry of Local Government Administration or to the Ministry of Public Administration.

Having poor design, complex navigation or too slow “page loading speed” can discourage any citizen from further engagement and respectively from participation. Citizens that have poor internet connections or old devices would experience a lot of difficulties in realizing their right of participation. Municipalities (other institutions) should address these obstacles in actual websites and also in whatever solution that can be designed finally, because these obstacles would devalue any excellent (suitable) solution that comes after it.

But until municipalities are developing new sub-systems/ applications, they can use the two platforms mentioned above, konsultimet.rks-gov.net and Digital Platform for Citizen Participants, with the focus on the last one as a more holistic solution.

Summary of assessment in structure, design, accessibility and performance

The websites of Kosovo municipalities share a common Wordpress theme, which has many performance problems and specifically problems with optimization for mobile devices, despite being “mobile responsive”. All active websites have very slow speed of running, and are complex to be navigated. For citizens to access the right information is not an easy and intuitive process.

Author has attached below a detailed report for all websites, in a separate section and also in annexes. For every municipality, there is a report of assessment with metrics.

One problem that characterizes almost all municipalities is the poor maintenance.

The very large number of “broken links” on the websites of municipalities damages the user experience, discourages users from continuing to be engaged in websites and also damages the reputation of municipal websites on search engines and social media platforms. This and other problems have come as a result that a common structure is pre-designed for all municipalities, but municipalities have not followed the same trend to enter their data and to edit the dummy or blank pages, as a consequence you can find a lot of blank pages, dummy pages and broken links within websites. To the visitors, this unintentionally gives the perception that these webpages are not maintained, not updated and incomplete. It would damage the trust of users. To attract the same visitors later with the newly developed features would be hard try, because of these experiences.

One of the obstacles for citizens regarding websites of the municipality is also the poor

design, it is unsuitable for an intuitive browsing, visitors' behavior regarding website platforms is accustomed unconsciously by big website platforms, such as news portals, social media websites and applications, visitors look everywhere to experience similar experiences when they are touching, scrolling and navigating a platform or application. Local institutions should update their design, their navigation structure to be more intuitive.

Website loading speed and optimization for mobile devices is also a big issue.

For the users, the loading speed and design problems as a bad experience are increased proportionally by their level of engagement, or by the level of population of websites with data, services or links.

The more active in publication is a website, the slower is the loading speed. The more active in publication is a website, it increased also the error rate proportionally.

One of the non-technical problems is also the fact that most websites of municipalities are not synchronized with the non-primary language of municipalities residents.

Social Media Presence

Facebook pages, is the main social media channel municipalities are using to communicate information visually to the public. Municipalities are using Facebook more frequently than websites. Facebook is offering a wider range of tools and applications to engage communities through this platform, but municipalities do not use most of them. They are using the random standard posts, posting images and videos associated with text descriptions. They used Twitter and Instagram with limits.

POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

By checking and balancing the strengths, weaknesses and opportunities, there is feasibility to build citizen participation applications, even on actual platforms, installing, configuring and customizing new platforms that are marketed in the global market, or developing a new one from scratch.

Municipal institutions and many of the central institutions have developed their websites in an open content management system known as Wordpress. Wordpress has a lot of options to improve performance and design.

- I. For Wordpress platforms, worldwide volunteer community members, INGO-s and international programming companies have developed several tools (plugins) which could increase civic participation. These plugins can be installed and integrated separately on actual websites of municipalities. They can be installed independently or in an integrated way. For the Wordpress as an open platform, new features can be developed from scratch and can be added to the websites as extension without harming or losing any functions on actual websites. Despite developing from scratch the already built features in the market can be installed as Wordpress plugins, those developed plugins should be configured for the specific context and translated in our language. Later on these needs to be updated and maintained. Among the IT staff of local and central institutions there are qualified IT staff to do it. In Kosovo market also there are a lot of developers who can develop and maintain it in economic cost.

This remains the simplest and noble solution that is suggested in this research, a short-middle term solution. Until this simple solution is established, local and central institutions can use as a temporary alternative utilization of two of the most successful platforms mentioned above. They can use these platforms subsequently or in a synergic way, many of them simultaneously to increase the channels and opportunities of citizen participations.

a. Utilization of actual external platforms that are offering some features of digital citizen participation that are not offered through websites of municipalities or other public institutions is an option that can be used in any scenario, for this reason we have not classified them as a solution on their own, or as a new solution because they already exist in the public. The analysis of their history in the last two years shows that nor municipalities nor citizens show these platforms as a potential/attractive solution. Regardless of the opinion above, public institutions can immediately link these platforms on their websites without obstacles, and from there, they can maintain activities. We are talking about [Platforma e konsultimeve publike - Bëjeni zërin tuaj të dëgjohet](#) and [Platforma Digjitale Për Pjesëmarrje të Publikut](#).

II. Another option is to develop & customize citizen participation platforms that are in the world market, platforms that are proven successfully in large scale, in many countries and in dozens of small and big cities, applied with great success in developed and in developing countries. These platforms should be developed and hosted in a subdomain of every municipality, and it should be embedded on the landing pages. Because they cannot completely replace the actual municipalities' portals, they provide citizen participation programs. By investigating over twenty of similar platforms, most suitable and cost-benefit are **Consul Project** and **Decidim**, we would share details of them in other sections.

III. The third option is to develop a new platform from scratch, with all features and design specifications as we would define in the early phase. We detailed most of them in a separate section below. The Ministry of Local Government Administration ³ has drafted a plan and set the aim to develop a new holistic platform for local municipalities in a period of up to 2025. The platform e-Komunat will be at the service of citizens to increase their participation in decision-making at the local level, it will also be at the service of municipalities themselves for the digitalization of municipal services by increasing the efficiency of these services to citizens.

E-MUNICIPALITY platform will be an interoperable platform with all existing platforms operating in the public service. This platform will include the services of 38 municipalities of the Republic of Kosovo, providing services in official languages in Kosovo.

The platform will focus on monitoring of municipal bodies, increasing citizen interaction with local elected representatives, it would provide real-time monitoring and presentation of all investments, municipal budget and own source revenues,

³ Has drafted a plan and set the objective to develop E-Komunat as a holistic new platform to digitalize all services of municipalities, to increase the transparency and to enable and stimulate the citizens' participation.

open and interactive data, provision of services to citizens and online and postal businesses, neighborhood urban plans, building permits and conditions, introduction of the real-time municipal legality assessment process and many other services.



Methodology

The assessment of municipalities' websites is based on assessing their design, their performance, user access, mobile responsiveness and the compliance of websites for citizen participation functions. Every platform is tested by visiting manually each of one, by cross browsing through different browsers and devices, by using evaluation tools such as Google Lighthouse, GTMetrics and IBM Equal Access Accessibility Checker. A complimentary part of the report is also the assessment of the presence and engagement of municipalities on social media.

The author has collected data by direct experience and from different tools; they are parametrized and systemized numerically, technically and textually explain as well. This makes the research quantitative and qualitative at the same time.

We have navigated every website, tested their functions, services, and experienced the quality of service as an end user. We have done it from different devices and different platforms to experience and represent a wider range of citizens. On the subject websites, we have tested their usability, accessibility, multi-language, responsiveness, user-friendly (intuitive) design of User Interface and User Experience, social-media friendly, search-engine friendly.

The author has conducted the assessment in citizen oriented experience and he has enriched it as an IT Expert.

The combination of research techniques has enabled us to capture accurate “factual data” and in-depth insights.

This assessment was desk research. Data has been collected from the first hand, by visiting directly every website, inspecting in detail, testing them and their features, recording details in different dimensions, testing from different devices (to check mobile responsiveness and desktop) and building matrices for comparing and analyzing data.

We based our expert judgment on professional experience, standards in IT and governance, and also in accordance with reviewing the latest publication from prominent institutions. We have also used the results from searching on internet resources, and from publishing resources of educational institutions and international organizations.

Practical implications:

The research is user oriented, and would provide an assessment with richer explanations and not simple traditional statistical measurements. We expect this empirical research would accelerate the citizen-oriented evaluation of citizen participation through open & digital government practices, enrich and support IT expert judgment.

Value: This would be an original research and without a predecessor in Kosovo's context (at least not with public access), that would help to provide suggestions for strategic improvement of the citizen participation through e-government services.



Understanding Citizen Participation

Whether by law, mandate, mission, or values, public institutions at all levels of government are expected to engage citizens in a wide variety of issues. Such expectations will continue to grow given the calls for more participation in government.

What is Citizen Participation?

Citizen participation can be broadly defined as the processes by which public concerns, needs, and values are incorporated into decision-making. (IBM Center for The Business of Government | Tina Nabatchi, 2011)

Direct participation occurs when citizens are personally and actively engaged in decision-making.

This assessment report focuses on the evaluation of direct citizen participation in local government, through web technology. Government agencies in all levels should organize and enable the direct participation of citizens in the decision-making process, by enabling some level of interaction between the authorities and participants.

The International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) has identified core values for the practice of public participation.

1. Public participation is based on the belief that those who are affected by a decision have a right to be involved in the decision-making process.
2. Public participation includes the promise that the public's contribution will influence the decision.
3. Public participation promotes sustainable decisions by recognizing and communicating the needs and interests of all participants, including decision makers.
4. Public participation seeks out and facilitates the involvement of those potentially

affected by or interested in a decision.

5. Public participation seeks input from participants in designing how they participate.
6. Public participation provides participants with the information they need to participate in a meaningful way.
7. Public participation communicates to participants how their input affected the decision. (International Association for Public Participation, 2021)

Understanding Key Factors in Citizen Participation

Citizen participation can take a wide variety of forms depending on the presence and extent of many key features.

- **Size.** Size of a process can range from a few participants to hundreds or thousands, and online processes potentially involve millions.
- **Purpose.** Processes are used for many reasons: to explore an issue and generate understanding, to resolve disagreements, foster collaborative action, or to help make decisions, among others (NCDD 2008).
- **Goals.** Objectives can include informing participants, generating ideas, collecting data, gathering feedback, identifying problems, or making decisions, among others.
- **Participants.** Some processes involve only expert administrators or professional or lay stakeholders, while others involve selected or diffuse members of the public.
- **Participant recruitment.** Processes may use self-selection, random selection, targeted recruitment, and incentives to bring people to the table.
- **Communication mode.** Processes may use one-way, two-way, and/or deliberative communication.
- **Participation mechanisms.** Processes may occur face-to-face, online, and/or remotely.
- **Named methodology.** Some processes have official names and may even be trademarked; others do not employ named methodologies.
- **Locus of action.** Some processes are conducted with intended actions or outcomes at the organizational or network level, whereas others seek actions and outcomes at the neighborhood or community level, the municipal level, the state level, the national level, or even the international level.
- **Connection to policy process.** Some processes are designed with explicit connections to policy and decision-makers (at any of the loci listed above), while others have little or no connection to policy and decision-makers, instead seeking to invoke individual or group action or change. (IBM Center for The Business of Government | Tina Nabatchi, 2011)

What are the Goals of Citizen Participation in Public Administration?

Citizen participation can have many goals. When determining goals, public managers must be mindful not only of their own needs, but also the needs (and interests) of potential allies, stakeholders, and citizens. For example, participation can be used to:

- **Inform the public:** let citizens know about issues, changes, resources, and policies
- **Explore an issue:** help citizens learn about a topic or problem
- **Transform a conflict:** help resolve disagreements and improve relations among groups
- **Obtain feedback:** understand citizen views of an issue, problem, or policy
- **Generate ideas:** help create new suggestions and alternatives
- **Collect data:** gather information about citizens' perceptions, concerns, needs, values, interests, etc.
- **Identify problems:** get information about current and potential issues
- **Build capacity:** improve the community's ability to address issues
- **Develop collaboration:** bring groups and people together to address an issue
- **Make decisions:** make judgments about problems, alternatives, and solutions

Table 1 *This chart is adapted from the IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation

Increasing Level of Shared Decision Authority					
	Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	Empower
Goal of Public Participation	To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions.	To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions.	To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered	To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution	To place final decision-making in the hands of the public
Promise to the Public	We will keep you informed.	We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and aspirations, and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will look to you for advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decision to the maximum extent possible	We will implement what you decide
Examples	Websites, Mailing lists & Newsletter, Factsheets, Open meetings, Webcasts, Social Media Tools	Public Meetings, Focus Groups, Citizen Surveys, Public Comment Devices, Interactive Websites	Public Workshops, National Issues Forums, Deliberative Polling Wiki-planning	Committees, Town Meeting, Citizens Jury"	Delegated Decision-Making Processes. Participatory Budgeting

Studies also argue that to make public officials listen and respond, it largely depends on collective action and the pressures emanating from citizens. The literature suggests that ICT-based initiatives have increased the capacity of public officials to respond to citizens' requests by making them more aware of citizens' preferences, and that the nature of information and levels of transparency are essential to this flow of communication. (Stimulimi i pjesëmarrjes dhe përgjegjshmërisë brenda sistemit të qeverisjes lokale të Kosovës, DEMOS, 2021)

OBSTACLES/RISKS TO CITIZEN PARTICIPATION

What Are They?	How to Overcome Them?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Lack of trust. ● Lack of cooperation between the stakeholders. ● Limited access to information ● Little knowledge about rights and responsibilities ● Fear of the unknown ● Lack of self-confidence ● Limited or non-existent structures ● Lack of skills, culture of participation and experience in this field ● Lack of resources (e.g. experience, time, funds, skills) ● Lack of media attention to local issues ● Unrealistic levels of expectation ● Lack of awareness of the need for professional facilitation ● Risk of backfire ● Focus is on a minute issue rather than broad issues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Through civic education and training ● Public awareness campaigns ● Communication strategies ● Networking and building bridges ● Sharing experiences ● Partnerships and twinning ● Fundraising ● Managerial skills ● Introducing volunteerism

Inclusiveness and civility of discussion, according to Smith et al (2013) are important conditions for the effective operation of deliberative democracy. With the current uncertainties of covid-19 and the resulting impacts on social interactions, the momentum that had been building around deliberative processes might be lost by the time face-to-face meetings are possible again.

There is an appetite amongst local stakeholders to accelerate the move to online deliberations as the impacts of covid-19 have heightened the urgency to progress climate change policies and actions (Lansdell 2020/8). ‘...overwhelmingly people’s attention is now turning to how to bring these processes online.

Flexible formats for covid-19 context: The context of covid-19 has resulted in many individuals, community groups and other organizations developing a range of skills in using online conferencing technologies. Local authorities, businesses, event organizers and others are developing flexible formats for running online events, engagement processes and more. The flexibility of using synchronous (live) or asynchronous (e.g. pre-recorded, information or discussion based) approaches is enabling organizations to innovate in their engagement, consultation and deliberative processes.



Assessment of current platforms within public institutions

I. Assessment of 38 Websites of Kosovo's Municipalities

All municipalities in Republic of Kosovo share a common Content Management System for their website. It is the most popular one, - WordPress. They share also a common theme (template) design. In some limited cases they are customized differently but there is very low difference. They share also a same pre-designed structure. All of them are hosted in the same servers of the Kosovo's Agency for IT. For, reasons above they are experiencing the same issues/challenges in design, structure and performance. We have created special reports for every single municipality, and those are attached as Appendices. Below we are providing a single common evaluation for all websites, it is an average comment for all. It provides a statistical average, but also a general comment from IT expert perspective.

a. Technical and design evaluation of 38 websites of Kosovo's Municipalities

Our approach in interpreting the findings from audits is trying to emphasize the areas for improvement, it can unintentionally create the perception that things are “only black” but this is not the point, whatever is not included as an issue or a recommendation, it means that is fulfilling the minimum required standards. Qualifications (raised issues) in auditing results means concerns, the rest that remain unqualified means that it complies with minimum standards of the time.

The design of municipalities' websites has problems, there is a lack of consistency, there is a misuse of images (images have too much large file sizes, images have wrong encoding formats, low size encoding formats are not used, while the clarity of pictures in most of the time is blurred), there is a lack of optimization and compression.

The template of municipal websites creates network loads which on average go above 15MB. These lose attractiveness to visitors, as it affects tracking (navigation) and orientation, but also downgrades the speed of operation.

Detailed analysis for every website of municipalities are added as Appendixes!

COMMON CONCERNS FROM TECHNICAL EVALUATION

User Experience: Websites of municipalities are displaying images with incorrect aspect ratio and are serving images with low resolution.

Issues regarding Content Best Practices: Posts and pages regarding the browser auditing didn't have a <title> element and also, for the content, there is no meta description.

Image elements do not have [alt] attributes.

Crawling and Indexing. To appear in search results, crawlers need access to certain apps.

Links are not crawlable, robots.txt are not valid. This means that search engines are not encouraged to visit often and to make an index for every content. As a consequence, the content from municipalities websites is not search engine friendly. When it is combined with difficulties in navigation, it makes very hard to find the interest topic within websites from public.

Mobile friendly: Wordpress is a very mobile responsive CMS. It supports themes for responsiveness and can address all concerns regarding mobile responsiveness, as well as optimization and maintenance. In the websites of municipalities, although themes are mobile responsible, the structure and performance are fitting standards from 15%-30% only.

Social media friendly: Wordpress is a very "social media friendly" CMS. But the municipalities' themes (template) needs to be redesigned and to extend functions through plugins to make it more social media friendly. Content and images should be updated too.

Summary results from auditing of performance, quality of service and user accessibility

Performance of websites of Kosovo municipalities is on average 15%-22% (too low scores, from 100% of indicators). These results are from auditing all websites

with Google Lighthouse and GTMetrix. These tools relate most of the problems with the long periods of First Contentful Paint, Speed Index, Largest Contentful Paint, Time to Interactive and Total Blocking Time⁴.

Speed is a crucial aspect of providing a pleasant user experience to visitors on a website. It ensures that a visitor's limited attention span and time are spent on actual content and not wasted waiting for images and scripts to load. Speed is even more important for mobile device users, **as studies have shown that users are unlikely to tolerate more than a 3 second page load time on a mobile device.** If a website fails to offer a quick response, users will leave. **Websites of Municipalities of Kosovo have an average of 13.64s of page load,** most of them even slower page load. This is 4-5 times slower than the recommended standard.

In terms of SEO, Google already uses 'Page Speed' in their ranking algorithm, and plans to include 'Page Experience' as well. Google also marks high-performance pages as 'Fast pages'. This means that low-speed pages are not seem to be included in Google Results.

Accessibility scores from automatic auditing are going on an average of 73%. From manual auditing, results are becoming worse. This current status represents the percentage of elements within a website with no detected violations. This means that 73% of elements can be accessed from people with special needs. The tool for auditing is IBM Equal Access Accessibility Checker. This is a comprehensive accessibility assessment tool. IBM develops this tool to ensure that web pages are more usable by more people in less time.

Scoring results from this toolkit enable institutions to increase the accessibility of their websites. Equal accessibility to all people is basic human right.

Violations, accessibility failures that need to be corrected for municipalities websites go on average of 140 violations per website.

Recommendations from the auditing. There are enormous opportunities to apply best practices to further improve accessibility. For every website, there are a 61 and more recommendations.

4 0–49 is poor result, 50–89 average but produces user dissatisfaction and disengagement, 90–100 great results and satisfaction

b. Web Design Evaluation for Websites of Kosovo’ Municipalities

General evaluation of websites of municipalities, while they are sharing a common theme (template) and are facing almost common problems, a general evaluation fits to most of them. This rate of websites is according to the web design criteria of navigation, ease of use, the CRAP principles, audience appeal and suitability, and general overall impression. There is a scale from 1 to 10, with 1 meaning the criteria was NOT met and 10 meaning the criteria was met completely.

<i>Web Design Criteria</i>	
1. Navigation	Rating: 6 (1=NOT met.. 10=Met totally)
<p>Navigation options are clearly marked and self- explanatory.</p> <p>Links to other pages and back to home page are functional.</p> <p>All links work.</p> <p>Links to other sites are relevant.</p>	<p>While there is a standard or pre-required scheme of the main menu that includes a lot of menus and sub-menus, navigating menus is very difficult and complex for visitors.</p> <p>The footer menu most of the time is repeating the main menu.</p> <p>Menus need to be separated on three menu locations, top menu, main menu and footer menu. Top and footer menu would reduce the number of menus from the main menu, by moving there non-important menus. Pages and data that are standard and not changing often, such as contacts, officers (organizational chart), statutes, permanent committees, can be located on these menus.</p> <p>Dropdown menu should be “width fixed” in proportion to the parent menu width. It should be dropped down vertically in one column and many rows, and not as it is actually with many columns in one row.</p> <p>Other parts of navigation options are clearly marked and self-explanatory.</p> <p>Links to other pages and back to the home page are functional.</p> <p>Most of the links work.</p> <p>Links to other sites are relevant.</p>

<p>2. Ease of Use</p>	<p>Rating: 6 (1=NOT met.. 10=Met totally)</p>
<p>Users can navigate without difficulty.</p> <p>Users can locate needed information easily.</p> <p>Help features are available and easy to access.</p> <p>Download speed is acceptable.</p>	<p>Users can navigate without difficulty,</p> <p>Users can locate needed information with moderate effort.</p> <p>Information is located below the first screen's worth of site for graphical effect.</p> <p>Help features are missing except for font size increaser and decrease.</p> <p>Loading speed is to slow, from F=not met, A=met totally, almost all active websites are ranked with F.</p>
<p>3. CRAP Principles</p>	<p>Rating: 6 (1=NOT met.. 10=Met totally)</p>
<p>Contrast—colors support readability and understanding, headings and subheadings help with navigation</p> <p>Repetition—page design is consistent for all pages</p> <p>Alignment—page design helps users read the content</p> <p>Proximity—related items are close to each other. Information is easy to find.</p>	<p>Contrast on some websites is generally accepted and in some others not. There are some websites that are customized without addressing CRAP principles.</p> <p>Proximity is not acceptable in the scheme.</p> <p>Background images are overused and they repeat when they shouldn't.</p> <p>Design is not consistent from website to all inside pages, especially headers, backgrounds and sidebars.</p>
<p>4. Audience Appeal and Suitability</p>	<p>Rating: 6 (1=NOT met.. 10=Met totally)</p>
<p>Text is readable and in an appropriate font for the intended audience</p> <p>Media elements enhance the content</p> <p>Advertising does not interfere with content</p> <p>The site invites the user to explore</p>	<p>Text is readable and in an appropriate font for the intended audience</p> <p>Media elements should enhance more the content</p> <p>Pop Ups (Advertising) does not interfere with content</p> <p>The site performance and navigating is not inviting the user to explore more</p>

c. Assessment of 38 Websites of Kosovo's Municipalities for citizen participation features

Our assessment for digital citizen participation compliance on websites of 38 municipalities of Kosovo is based on these functions as main characteristics of actual digital citizen participation: Online debates with citizens, collection of citizens' proposals, participation of citizens in budget planning, measuring public opinions, expression of citizens' opinions through electronic voting, polls, surveys, or collaboration on drafting new laws and regulations. These are principal functions that are characterizing citizen participation friendly websites. Kosovo's municipalities do not adapt these functions in websites of municipalities of Kosovo and even at the central government level the situation remains the same.

Most municipalities have only a contact form to report concerns, and this tool in most of the municipalities is related specifically to report concerns regarding safety in the community.

All municipalities have planned by default to have a FORUM software through their websites, but none of them have established it. In all websites where the menu named FORUM is still visible, it will redirect visitors to a broken link.

Although there are several external platforms to facilitate the participation of the citizens digitally, platforms that are developed with the support of public agencies, civil society or other international organizations, they are not maintained adequately, and municipalities of Kosovo are not using them actively, only with small exceptions. The low level of engagement of public institutions to update their data on these platforms, have produced the consequence where the level of engagement of citizens is even lower.

There are no obstacles in using these platforms. It is the courage and commitment from the government's side, promotion of them by all stakeholders, and engagement of citizens. **Konsultimet.rks-gov.net** and **platformadigjitale.com** are a good points to foster citizen participation. Platformadigjitale.com is satisfying the design, user accessibility, mobile responsiveness and also the key features to ensure citizen participation.

Social media as a complementary alternative for citizen participation

We have audited 38 municipalities for their presence on top social media platforms. We have evaluated the presence, the frequency of activities, and if they are using so-

cial media to share information or also to interact with the public. Social Media remains the most active platform governments used to communicate information to the public. They made it in a common standard way, visually by providing pictures and videos, with text and with links. Frequency and the freshness of the news in social media is the best. And also it is the easiest way for citizens to share their inputs.

II. Assessment of other platforms that are built to help the digital citizen participation in Kosovo.

Beyond the Websites of Municipalities, the only platform developed by government authorities to enable and promote citizenship participation in public institutions is konsultimet.rks-gov.net.

1. Platform: Konsultimet. Platform of Public Consultations - Make your voice heard

Website: <https://konsultimet.rks-gov.net>

Management / Ownership: Office for Good Governance/Office of the Prime Minister

Description: Pursuant to REGULATION NO.05/2016 ON MINIMUM STANDARDS FOR THE PUBLIC CONSULTATION PROCESS that was adopted by the Government of the Republic of Kosovo on 29 April 2016, the Office for Good Governance/Office of the Prime Minister, must create and maintain the online platform, which is used by all public authorities to identify the stakeholders to develop public consultations. The Online platform shall ensure the implementation of minimum standards for public consultations under Regulation no. 05/2016. This platform shall provide the opportunity for all relevant parties to be invited and included in the decision-making and policy-making process.

This platform assists the ministries and agencies of the Government of the Republic of Kosovo to facilitate the public consultation process by including public and nongovernmental authorities, civil society organizations and other relevant partners in the policy and decision-making process.

Technological review: 'Konsultimet' is serving as a board of notification for public consultation within the public sector, consultation that are organized from any level of government and public agencies. It provides the user with many options on how to navigate to preferred consultation. Citizen can filter or navigate through institutions, through searching, through status of consultation (if they are open or closed). It pro-

vides the details of owner, title, date, detailed description, attaching draft documents and the contact details of the officer in charge for any public consultation. There is also an option to subscribe to certain municipalities or institutions and to be informed when they are posting any new public discussion.

But the platform is limited in interactivity. Beyond the information shared with citizens, there is no space for interactivity. Citizens through this platform, are mostly informed about physical consultation meetings. Institutions who are organizing, date, place and contacting persons. The platform is not offering tools to enable participation digitally, to add comments, to submit proposals (except if a citizen is emailing the person in charge) or to vote. There are no other features to create interactivity, to enable remote attendance, live streaming of meetings. There are no options to manage feedbacks and inputs from citizens.

It is not “mobile responsive”, there is a space for improvement in design, but only in sense of making it mobile responsive. In functional aspects the design meets criteria.

Web Design Criteria and evaluation for konsultimet.rks-gov.net	
1. Navigation	Rating: 8 (1=NOT met.. 10=Met totally)
Navigation options are clearly marked and self-explanatory. Links to other pages and back to home page are functional. All links work. Links to other sites are relevant.	Navigation options are clearly marked and self-explanatory. Links to other pages and back to the home page are functional. All links work. Links to other sites are relevant. *Navigation is hard from mobile devices.
2. Ease of Use	Rating: 10 (1=NOT met.. 10=Met totally)
Users can navigate without difficulty. Users can locate needed information easily. Help features are available and easy to access. Download speed is acceptable.	Users can navigate without difficulty. Users can locate needed information easily. Help features are missing. Download speed is very good. From F=not met, A=met totally, this website is ranked with B.
3. CRAP Principles	Rating: 8 (1=NOT met.. 10=Met totally)

<p>Contrast—colors support readability and understanding, headings and subheadings help with navigation</p> <p>Repetition—page design is consistent for all pages</p> <p>Alignment—page design helps users read the content</p> <p>Proximity—related items are close to each other. Information is easy to find.</p>	<p>Contrast—colors support readability and understanding, headings and subheadings help with navigation</p> <p>Repetition—page design is consistent for all pages</p> <p>Alignment—page design helps users read the content</p> <p>Proximity—related items are close to each other. Information is easy to find.</p>
<p>4. Audience Appeal and Suitability</p>	<p>Rating: 6 (1=NOT met.. 10=Met totally)</p>
<p>Text is readable and in an appropriate font for the intended audience</p> <p>Media elements enhance the content</p> <p>Advertising does not interfere with content</p> <p>The site invites the user to explore</p>	<p>Text is readable and in an appropriate font for the majority of audience. But people with special needs cannot change sizes to adapt to their needs.</p> <p>Media elements should enhance more the content.</p> <p>Pop Ups (Advertising) does not interfere with content</p> <p>The site performance and navigating is not inviting the user to explore more.</p>

Performance Report from GTMetrix & Google Lighthouse:

Fully Loaded Time: 2.3s

GTmetrix Grade (A the best, F the worst): B

Performance (from 0 -100%): 86%

Structure: (from 0 -100%) 82%

Largest Contentful Paint: 1.8s


Total Blocking Time: 0ms

Cumulative Layout Shift: 0

ACTIVITY LOG/STATUS: This platform is used quite enough from ministries and other bodies in the central level of Government. But municipalities and citizens do not use it enough at the local level.

From 38 municipalities at the country level, only 3 municipalities at all have used this platform at all, and only during 2021.

Municipality of Malisheve has used 3 times only; Municipality of Peje 1 times only, Municipality of Rahovec 15 times. There are no details about the participation of citizens in these public sessions.



Analyze relevant and used platforms outside of the Kosovo government system

In the selection process of platforms outside of Kosovo government system we have been based on platforms that meet functional characteristics of Citizen Participation Platforms such as: Online debates with citizens, collection of citizens' proposals, participation of citizens in budget planning, measuring public opinions, expression of citizens' opinions through electronic voting, polls, surveys, or collaboration on drafting new laws and regulations. Beyond this, we have included also platforms that were related with links in websites of municipalities, or have been easy to access through search engines.

1. Platform: Digital Platform for Public Participation

Website: <https://platformadigitale.com>

Management / Ownership: Supported by OSCE. Developed by Appdec company.

Description: Digital Platform for Public Participation is a web-based digital platform that enables interactive and transparent communication between residents and local government in municipalities by allowing you as a resident to share your views online and vote for certain improvements or issues in the local community or municipality.

Technological review:

The Digital Platform is well designed, easy to navigate, multi-language and it is mobile responsive. It gives citizens the opportunity to make proposals and give comments or votes on the events, on the plans and proposals that are uploaded to the system, even by citizens or municipalities. It gives the opportunity to the citizen to raise concerns, re-

port fixes to municipalities, make proposals, participate in plans, or propose new plans. Also, the performance is satisfying the expectations.

Web Design Criteria and evaluation for https://platformadigitale.com/	
1. Navigation	Rating: 9 (1=NOT met.. 10=Met totally)
<p>Navigation options are clearly marked and self-explanatory.</p> <p>Links to other pages and back to home page are functional.</p> <p>All links work.</p> <p>Links to other sites are relevant.</p>	<p>Navigation options are clearly marked and self-explanatory.</p> <p>Links to other pages and back to home page are functional.</p> <p>All links work.</p> <p>Links to other sites are relevant.</p>
2. Ease of Use	Rating: 10 (1=NOT met.. 10=Met totally)
<p>Users can navigate without difficulty.</p> <p>Users can locate needed information easily.</p> <p>Help features are available and easy to access.</p> <p>Download speed is acceptable.</p>	<p>Users can navigate without difficulty.</p> <p>Users can locate needed information easily.</p> <p>Help features are missing.</p> <p>Download speed is very good. From F=not met, A=met totally, this website is ranked with B.</p>
3. CRAP Principles	Rating: 8 (1=NOT met.. 10=Met totally)
<p>Contrast—colors support readability and understanding, headings and subheadings help with navigation</p> <p>Repetition—page design is consistent for all pages</p> <p>Alignment—page design helps users read the content</p> <p>Proximity—related items are close to each other. Information is easy to find.</p>	<p>Contrast—colors support readability and understanding, headings and subheadings help with navigation</p> <p>Repetition—page design is consistent for all pages</p> <p>Alignment—page design helps users read the content</p> <p>Proximity—related items are close to each other. Information is easy to find.</p>
4. Audience Appeal and Suitability	Rating: 6 (1=NOT met.. 10=Met totally)
<p>Text is readable and in an appropriate font for the intended audience</p> <p>Media elements enhance the content</p> <p>Advertising does not interfere with content</p> <p>The site invites the user to explore</p>	<p>Text is readable and in an appropriate font for the majority of audience. But people with special needs cannot change sizes to adapt to their needs.</p> <p>Media elements should enhance more the content.</p> <p>Pop Ups (Advertising) does not interfere with content</p> <p>The site performance and navigating is not inviting the user to explore more.</p>

Performance Report from GTMetrix & Google Lighthouse:

Fully Loaded Time: 2.9s

GTmetrix Grade (A the best, F the worst): C

Performance (from 0 -100%): 72%

Structure: (from 0 -100%) 70%

Largest Contentful Paint: 2.7s

Total Blocking Time: 0ms

Cumulative Layout Shift: 0.06

ACTIVITY LOG/STATUS: Only municipalities of Prishtina, Gjakova, Prizren, Kamenica and Junik are using it, and also they are not using it on a regular basis.

- Municipality of Junik: citizens have not used the service at all. And the Municipality for two years has published only one announcement, during 2020 (another is only a demo post), which did not provoke citizen participation or engagement by giving any comment or vote.

- Municipality of Gjakova: citizens have not used the service at all. The municipality has used it only in the period 2018-2019, and that only to post application forms related with the process of construction legalization. A total of 8 notices were posted with application forms for the legalization process. The use of posts did not produce citizen engagement, comments or voters.

- Municipality of Prizren: The Municipality of Prizren is the difference in itself. There is a commitment of the citizens but there is no commitment of the Municipality at all. The citizens of Prizren have used this platform to make 17 publications, of the total, 4 are suggestions and others are complaints. Only 2 posts have received comments and 28 votes were exploded across all posts. The platform was in use during 2020 and 2021.

- Municipality of Prishtina: The Municipality of Prishtina is another good news to show. Prishtina citizens for the period 2016-2021, have published about 319 posts. From the total, 5 of them are ideas, 3 requests for discussion and others are complaints. On the other hand, the Municipality of Prishtina has published only one questionnaire during 2017, and nothing else.

- Municipality of Kamenica: Municipality of Kamenica was very active in this platform from 2019-2021. There are a total of 46 posts, 4 from citizens and 42 from the Municipality. Interactivity remains too low, as most of the posts are informative only. From the

total publications, there are two plans and three discussions, the rest are information. In all posts there are 0 comments and 15 votes distributed across all posts.

2. Platform: Ndreqe

Website: <https://ndreqe.com>

Management / Ownership: Demokrasi Plus (D+) in Partnership with NDI Washington.

Description: ndreqe is an online platform that collects citizens' complaints about municipal public services and portrays them on an interactive map. The platform enables citizens to easily and quickly report complaints, while enabling municipal institutions to channel these requests in an easily accessible place.

Technological review:

Ndreqe is well designed, easy to navigate, and it is mobile responsive. It gives citizens the opportunity to report problems to municipalities. Ndreqe does send citizens reports directly to the local authorities.

Ndreqe also publishes them online so that others in the community can read, discuss, and offer advice where needed. Also, the performance is satisfying the expectations. But recently the platform has some troubles with the maps and street database, it isn't finding locations and addresses, this bug disables users to make new reports. Also, to generate reports for municipalities or in country levels there are appearing errors.

<p>1. Navigation</p>	<p>Rating: 9 (1=NOT met.. 10=Met totally)</p>
<p>Navigation options are clearly marked and self-explanatory.</p> <p>Links to other pages and back to home page are functional.</p> <p>All links work.</p> <p>Links to other sites are relevant.</p>	<p>Navigation options are clearly marked and self-explanatory.</p> <p>Links to other pages and back to home page are functional.</p> <p>All links work.</p> <p>Links to other sites are relevant..</p>
<p>2. Ease of Use</p>	<p>Rating: 10 (1=NOT met.. 10=Met totally)</p>
<p>Users can navigate without difficulty.</p> <p>Users can locate needed information easily.</p> <p>Help features are available and easy to access.</p> <p>Download speed is acceptable.</p>	<p>Users can navigate without difficulty.</p> <p>Users can locate needed information easily.</p> <p>Help features are missing.</p> <p>Download speed is very good. From F=not met, A=met totally, this website is ranked with B.</p>
<p>3. CRAP Principles</p>	<p>Rating: 8 (1=NOT met.. 10=Met totally)</p>
<p>Contrast—colors support readability and understanding, headings and subheadings help with navigation</p> <p>Repetition—page design is consistent for all pages</p> <p>Alignment—page design helps users read the content</p> <p>Proximity—related items are close to each other. Information is easy to find.</p>	<p>Contrast—colors support readability and understanding, headings and subheadings help with navigation</p> <p>Repetition—page design is consistent for all pages</p> <p>Alignment—page design helps users read the content</p> <p>Proximity—related items are close to each other. Information is easy to find.</p>
<p>4. Audience Appeal and Suitability</p>	<p>Rating: 8 (1=NOT met.. 10=Met totally)</p>
<p>Text is readable and in an appropriate font for the intended audience</p> <p>Media elements enhance the content</p> <p>Advertising does not interfere with content</p> <p>The site invites the user to explore</p>	<p>Text is readable and in an appropriate font for the majority of audience. But people with special needs cannot change sizes to adapt to their needs.</p> <p>Media elements should enhance more the content.</p> <p>Pop Ups (Advertising) does not interfere with content</p> <p>The site performance and navigating is inviting the user to explore more.</p>

Performance Report from GTMetrix & Google Lighthouse:

Fully Loaded Time: 3.29s

GTmetrix Grade (A the best, F the worst): A

Performance (from 0 -100%): 92%

Structure: (from 0 -100%) 94%

Largest Contentful Paint: 1.6s

Total Blocking Time: 0ms

Cumulative Layout Shift: 0.08

ACTIVITY LOG/STATUS: Ndreqe is active. It is limited to reporting street problems like potholes and broken street lights. Citizens then sent problem reports to authorities for fixing. Most of the municipalities are not using it in regular basis, also citizens are not using it, in last two months in country level are reported only 11 fixes.

3. Other platforms that actually are not accessible or are passive.

Platform name	Website	Description	Management / Ownership	Status
e-Takimet Akteret Lokal	https://akl.rks-gov.net/	e Local Stakeholder Meetings is a platform supported by MLSW and GIZ, which is intended to operate with pilot Municipalities of Ferizaj, Gjakova, Mitrovica and Vushtrri, in order to implement activities to promote youth employment.	Municipality of Ferizaj, Gjakove, Mitrovica and Vushtrri, MPMS (MLSW) & GIZ.	The access for $\frac{3}{4}$ municipalities part of the project is not possible. The municipality of Gjakova has access but the webpage is not developed.
Asamblea Virtuale	https://asamblea-virtuale.com/	Virtual Assembly platform created by Anibar. This unique online platform enables young people aged 16-29 to push their ideas for community change with support from local institutions. Young people from Peja, Gjakova, Klina, Istog, and Deçan can submit their project proposals through some very simple steps. Be an active citizen, make a difference for yourself and your community!	Anibar, USAID, Municipalities of Peja, Gjakova, Klina, Istog, and Deçan	The platform is not working.



Criteria, considerations and characteristics on upgrading or developing new platforms

Trends and perceptions

Officials of many municipalities that were respondents on a research done recently⁵ considered online spaces as the main space to engage with citizens. For example, in the capital there were told that, “the effect of digital platforms, in my opinion, is 3-4 times higher than the effect of public hearings in the municipality (physically), and this makes communication easier and more effective. In the same research we can see that during the pandemic period, the number of requests (feedbacks) received by municipalities is enormous higher than in physical public hearings.

Required skills and resources for administering future platforms

Human resources

Usually all municipalities have only one officer that is dealing with IT issues, for maintaining websites and also all IT infrastructure. For these reasons, the proposed solutions should consider the fact that human resources are limited in municipalities. Limitations in financial resources are impacting the human resource aspect. The study research of DEMOS, “Stimulating participation and accountability within the Kosovo

⁵ “Stimulating participation and accountability within the Kosovo local government system, DEMOS, 2021” (org.al. Stimulimi i pjesëmarrjes dhe përgjegjshmërisë brenda sistemit të qeverisjes lokale të Kosovës, DEMOS, 2021)

local government system” emphasize that, while a lack of resources may limit the ability of municipalities to respond to the needs of citizens, increasing resources in low-performing areas may not achieve the desired results.⁶

Financial resources:

Municipalities have limited budgets and the solution should be oriented on open source platforms, one-time purchase, or new developed platforms with affordable cost to be maintained. It should be accessible for every municipality, regardless of their size and financial capacities, to own and to maintain.

Design and technological criteria for any platform

- **Utilizing a clean URL.** *Google has proven that the shorter the URL, the better. Often, a link that has numbers, dashes, symbols and letters scattered throughout the URL will appear as spam, beyond this, those domains are difficult to be remembered and typed, whereas, if you use a short and concise URL that tells users exactly where they're going, they will be much more likely to trust the website.*
- *One of the major problems within municipalities of Kosovo, maybe it is beyond the influence of external stakeholders, are website domains of municipalities, they are too much leveled. Even the main domain of all municipalities is a third-level domain <https://kk.rks-gov.net> and then all municipalities are hosted on a deeper level than that, they are hosted on sublevels, such as the example: <https://kk.rks-gov.net/prishtine>*
- **Easy to use**, similar to previous experience and UI/UX of most popular softwares that governments and citizens have in use, almost intuitive.
- **Being mobile responsive.**
- **Ensuring equal accessibility** for every kind of users, including diverse smart devices, IT literacy, physical and mentally abilities or limits. An equal accessible website should also be accessible to everyone including blind, disabled or the elderly.
- **Being light and faster to run.** Light to load easily from any device and internet speed connection (even for 3G users). Speed is a crucial aspect in providing a pleasant user experience to visitors of any website. It ensures that a visitor's limited attention span and time are spent on actual content and not wasted waiting for images and scripts to load. Speed is even more important for mobile device users, as studies have shown that users are unlikely to tolerate more than a 3 second page load time on a mobile device. If your site fails to offer a quick response, your users will leave. (GTmetrix, Google 2021)
- **Being able to be translated in multi-language.**

⁶ Ibidem

- **Having well planned Information Architecture.** Information should be organized and presented better on next websites, because it is vital for good usability.
- **Effective Navigation.** Good navigation is one of the most important aspects of website usability. It is equally important for the navigation to be clutter-free. Try to limit the number of menu items as far as possible. A drop-down menu or sub-navigation may work better on large sites with many sections and pages.
- **Being social media friendly.** Beyond linking social media accounts to the website, it should enable users to easily share the content on any social media apps (Facebook, twitter, Instagram, WhatsApp, Viber, etc). Showing social proof, like share counts. Making sure those features work well on Mobile. Auto-optimizing content for the social media platforms. Integrate Comments Section.
- **Being search engine friendly.** Actual domains of municipalities websites are harder to reach or to be remembered directly. Public users are mostly using Google search to access websites. They also are hard to navigate, and search tools are not very efficient. For this reason, the new solution should be search engine friendly.
- **Integrity:** Data integrity is the overall accuracy, completeness, and consistency of data. Data integrity also refers to the safety of data in regard to regulatory compliance — such as GDPR compliance — and security. It is maintained by a collection of processes, rules, and standards implemented during the design phase. When the integrity of data is secure, the information stored in a database will remain complete, accurate, and reliable no matter how long it's stored or how often it's accessed. Common threats that can alter the state of data integrity include: Human error, Unintended transfer errors, Misconfigurations and security errors, Malware, insider threats, and cyberattacks
- **Security.** Security is a major concern to today's web visitors. Institutions need to make sure that their websites follow industry standards and guidelines. For example, if there is a user registration feature, you want to make sure that user passwords are encrypted and not displayed in plain text. You also want to ensure that the website is secure and uses SSL encryption. If you've forgotten a password feature, you do not want to provide a reset password feature without asking the security questions to the user.

Must-Have Features for any platform

Debates

Anyone can open threads on any subject, creating separate spaces where people can discuss the proposed topic. Debates are valued by everybody, to highlight the most important issues.

Proposals

A space for everyone to create a citizens' proposal and seek support. Proposals which reach enough support will be voted and so, together we can decide the issues that matter to us.

Participatory budgeting

Participatory budgets allow citizens to propose and decide directly how to spend part of the budget, with monitoring and rigorous evaluation of proposals by the institution. Maximum effectiveness and control with satisfaction for everyone.

Voting and surveys

Ask your community questions to better understand their needs and expectations. Secure voting system for citizen proposals and enquiries from the institution. Everyone can decide easily on the most important issues from their phones.

Collaborative Work Features

Any legislative or other format text can be shared with the public to receive comments on any particular part of it. The comments are associated with the discussed parts using a color code, which allows an easy visualization of improvable parts. It also enables the creation of related debates previous to the text drafting, for better subsequent development. In wordpress it can be integrated through Collaborative Editing Solutions for WordPress.

Webcasting and video conferencing

A webcast is a media presentation distributed over the Internet using streaming media technology to distribute a single content source to many simultaneous listeners/viewers. A webcast may either be distributed live or on demand. Essentially, webcasting is "broadcasting" over the Internet.

Video conferencing

A video conference is defined as an event during which multiple computer users can

communicate with each other at the same time using cameras over the internet. There are generally options to present slides and share screens and audio is transmitted through your computer or smart devices. Video conferences usually include both audio and visual components, as well as instant messaging, document collaboration, and sub-conferencing capabilities.

Forum or community

Both forum software and online community platforms offer online discussion forums, which provide a place for citizens and governments to come together, ask or answer questions, voice concerns, and get peer-to-peer support.

Forum. The only feature of forum software is discussion forums, while online communities have a host of other features like blogs, resources, libraries, and numerous other ways to keep your citizens engaged and offer them added value. While online communities tend to be the all-in-one option for customer engagement, forum software only offers the single option of discussion boards (which is sometimes enough). Though forum software is simpler than an online community platform, it does tend to have a shorter implementation time. Due to this, budgetary restrictions and time constraints may make forum software appealing to organizations that don't need additional features and capabilities.

Online communities provide more robust information resources, allowing users to browse files, videos, and blogs, then interpret them with other community members or experts from your company through two-way conversations. Discussion forums, Q&As, and comments in an online community often make it easier for users to understand information, instead of just consuming it.

Issue reporting and tracking

It is an online platform that collects citizens' complaints about municipal public services and portrays them on an interactive map. The platform enables citizens to report complaints easily and quickly, while it enables municipal institutions to channel these requests in an easily accessible place.

Knowledge Center

Knowledge base software collects a wealth of information all in one place so it is easily accessible and searchable. In our case, all relevant information about any procedure that municipalities are providing as a service or are the key point authority, can be made easy to understand to the wider public through a knowledge center. While most of the problems are common in all municipalities it can be helpful to design a one common knowledge center for all.

A knowledge base is similar to a resource or file library, meaning that its essential function is often included within an online community. Standalone knowledge bases are more limited with little to no interaction or social element. The information is there for the taking, but users must find and interpret it on their own.

Potential solutions

1. Suggestions to make potential updates to current platforms to increase citizen participation

- 1.1. The potential synergy between the actual platforms outside the websites of municipalities, to encourage citizen participation.

Case 1# Platforma Konsultimet

Municipalities can use without any obstacle the Platform “Konsultimet”. All municipalities have a pre-built space there, and the management of all users and the platform is in the responsibility of the Prime Minister Office for Good Governance.

Challenges to integrate/migrate.

The only way to ‘integrate’ Konsultimet is to link this platform with icons and links in every municipality’ websites. Many municipalities have done this step. This platform has no direct relation with any website, for this reason there are no challenges on migration or integration (there is no need to migrate, only to relate). The team that is managing the platform has created topics/rooms for all municipalities in Kosovo and other public agencies and ministries.

A person in charge from the municipality’s side should publish and maintain information on this platform. Updates in time and promotion to the wider public are the main challenges. It’s poor features, the lack of mobile responsiveness, remain a challenge in attracting citizens to be engaged.

Case 2# Platforma Digjitale

Platforma Digjitale can be 'integrated' in the same way as Konsultimet. But here we have a challenge, because actually from 38 municipalities only 5 are part of the platform. And to include all municipalities, there should be a cooperation with OSCE and the company who has developed it, Appdec. This platform is serving all municipalities within a certain subdomain, users on government sides and in public sides also are restricted to operate only within their respective municipality. For this reason, there should be created sub-domains, sub-systems for 33 municipalities.

Stimulating citizens and authorities to increase the level of engagement

Based on this assessment of quantitative engagement of citizens and also based on findings from the research paper published by DEMOS, "Stimulating participation and accountability within the Kosovo local government system, 2021" we confirm that although there is an improvement of the citizen's participation during the last year, but still the numbers remain low. Institutional donors, civic society, media and central government authorities should coordinate their actions, support and measures to stimulate the participation and accountability on both sides, on citizens and local authorities.

1.2. Suggestions to make upgrade and extend the same website platforms of municipalities by adding new features, improving performance and design through new plugins, themes and optimization

Development and use of WordPress plugins to perform the functions of citizen participation in decision making, improve the performance by better optimization and customize.

For this solution, there is no need to make migration, because the actual WordPress platform would remain as it is. New features or functions would be added as extensions. These new added features would only enrich and extend actual websites, nothing would be affected, nothing would lose, no substitution for actual websites or functions would happen. Implementation of this solution needs only skilled/trained IT staff in municipalities. Actual IT needs extra training and guidance because they actually have the skills to managing and customizing the same system.

Examples of how WordPress plugins can fix and improve missing features and problems on design, structure and performance:

I. Optimization of design, structure and equal user access.

- a. Consistency in design, especially of "headers" across all pages should be the same.

The background of the headers and landing page should be colors and not image.

- b. Organizing menus by adding more menu places, having menus in different sections (positions) such as top menu, main menu, footer menu, and making all of them drop-down, would make navigation simpler and the main menu would be discharged from all the actual submenus.

II. Speed optimization

- a. Optimize images in size, resolution and format by using WebP compression images.
- b. Optimize cache. Install and configure plugins to optimize “Cache”.

Citizen participation features

III. Increasing citizen participation functions through Plugins. Below we are giving the plugins which can be added to realize the citizen participation functions.

i. BuddyPress - Community. BuddyPress helps you build any kind of community website using WordPress, with member profiles, activity streams, user groups, messaging, and more.

ii. bbPress - Forum. bbPress is forum software from the creators of WordPress. Quickly set up a place for asynchronous discussion, subscriptions, and more!

iii. Voting, polling, opinions, surveys - Dozens of solutions are there.

iv. Proposals - Plugin. Proposal plugin enables citizens to submit their proposal to the host.

v. eRoom - Zoom Meetings & Webinar; Agora Video for WordPress or Video Conferencing with Zoom

Vi. Knowledge Center. Knowledge Center plugins for WordPress are very important tools to easily build a knowledge base for any audience.

Vii. Collaborative Editing Solutions for WordPress. There are solutions for collaborative editing, integrated with Google Docs and also independent plugins.

IV. Social Media management:

a. Facebook. A lot of facebook applications and tools remain free and very effective to be used to increase citizen participation. These tools can be embedded also within municipalities websites. Facebook tools for pages, groups and communities)

- i. Live broadcast and voting
 - ii. Facebook Groups
 - iii. Hosting online events
- b. to YouTube (Live webcasting, video archive)
 - c. Twitter (is not used by most of the municipalities)
 - d. Instagram (is used only from two municipalities, although it is one of the top social media apps for young people under 30).

a. Challenges to integrate/migrate

Costs are related to hiring an expert as project leader, a small team of experts or a small company (with up to 5 developers), to prepare training and build the 1st common prototype for all municipalities. Maintenance later, can be realized within the same resources of municipalities. Administrative and management staff should increase skills in a similar level of teachers in schools that have used e-education platforms to manage and moderate sessions. No other external stakeholder can affect or prolong the project development. Municipalities own the new platform.

2. Suggestions to implement proven successful platforms for citizen engagement

Two successful platforms for citizen engagement (participation) that are built and in use in dozens of countries and municipalities are Consul Project and Decidim.

CONSUL - 1ST PROPOSED SOLUTION OUTSIDE OF CURRENT SYSTEMS

Consul is a free software platform that allows institutions and organizations to carry on the most important direct citizen participation processes. It includes citizen proposals, consultations, voting, participatory budgets, collaborative legislation.

The platform is flexible, allowing each institution/organization to adapt it to suit their specific needs. All functionality can be turned on or off, the home page and other information pages can be personalized without programming, the look and feel of the website can be adapted to suit the corporate image of the institution. It's also multilingual, and it's been translated to 45 languages.

The project was originally developed by the Madrid City Council, and it's now being used by more than a hundred local, regional, and national governments.

The mean use of CONSUL, however, is in cities, ranging from small towns with a few thousands inhabitants to big cities like New York, Buenos Aires, Quito, Montevideo and Madrid. Over 90 million citizens around the world can make decisions using participation websites deployed with CONSUL.

The CONSUL project is also working together with supranational and international institutions and NGOs like United Nations Development Program, Open Government Partnership, the World Bank, Banco Interamericano de Desarrollo, Unión de Ciudades Capitales Iberoamericanas, Nesta, Participatory Budgeting Project and others.

CONSUL is being translated to more than 40 languages, also in a collaborative process that is carried out in Crowdin: <https://crowdin.com/project/consul>

Sharing the CONSUL technology has allowed all these cities, governments and entities to work together and create a community to share best practices, knowledge and ideas. There are online spaces where people working in all this project can work together and support each other. The CONSULCon conference, held every year since 2017, it's an opportunity to meet participation experts, IT people working on the development and implementation of CONSUL, activists, politicians and other people work-

ing on direct democracy and citizen participation.

There is more information about the project, including documentation and videos at consulproject.org.

Technology:

The backend is developed in Ruby using the Ruby on Rails framework. The database is PostgreSQL. The frontend is javascript implemented on JQuery with Coffeescript. The page styles have been developed using SCSS on Foundation.

The server-side code is divided into Models (database abstraction + business logic), Views (html/json rendering) and Controllers (connecting models and views). There is a role-based permission system determining what each user can do on the system - main roles are regular user, moderator and administrator. Regular users can verify their accounts by providing some personal information stored on the city inhabitants census to gain some extra permissions.

The tools chosen to implement the solution are common-use; any developer familiar with Ruby on Rails apps should be able to install and extend it. Furthermore, there are specific extension points (in the form of folders specifically thought of for customization).

Given that we use a standard ruby on rails app, scalability can be done in the usual ways: the database can be replicated/scaled independently from the application servers. Application server instances are added to the system and put behind a load balancer. We use plenty of open-source libraries & ruby gems. The main ones are Ruby on Rails, JQuery, PostgreSQL, CoffeeScript, SASS.

All the source code is licensed under the GNU Affero General Public License v3 (AG-PLv3) and is available in our Github account: <https://github.com/consul/consul>. There are a hundred developers contributing code to the project, and many more people are helping with documentation and other needs of the project.

The technical documentation for the project is available at <https://docs.consulproject.org>

The user's guide, administration guide and other end-user documents are available at: <http://consulproject.org/en/#documentation> (Source: <https://consulproject.org/>)

DECIDIM - 2nd PROPOSED SOLUTION OUTSIDE OF CURRENT SYSTEMS

Decidim is a free open-source participatory democracy for cities and organizations.

Decidim, from the Catalan for “let’s decide”, is a digital infrastructure for participatory democracy, built entirely and collaboratively as free software. Decidim is a web environment (a framework) produced in Ruby on Rails that allows users to create and configure a website platform or portal, to be used as a social network, for democratic participation. The portal allows any organization (local city council, association, university, NGO, trade union, neighborhood or cooperative) to create massive democratic processes for strategic planning, participatory budgeting, collaborative regulatory design, urban spaces design and elections. It also enables the organization of in-person meetings, signing up for them, the publication of minutes, proposing points for the agenda and receiving notifications of the results. Decidim can also help organize governing bodies, councils or assemblies, the convening of consultations and referendums or channeling citizen or member initiatives to impact different decision making processes. All together, Decidim makes it possible to digitally structure a complete system of participatory democratic governance for any organization.

Decidim is a digital platform for citizen participation. It is free and safe technology. With all democratic guarantees. Reprogramming democracy is now possible with Decidim.

decidim helps citizens, organizations and public institutions self-organize democratically at every scale.

FEATURES

The power of a political network

It takes deliberation, collaboration and decision to a massive dimension, with thousands of people participating in real time.

Citizens initiatives and consultations

Empower your community through citizen initiatives. Promote relevant voting through consultations.

Participatory budgets

It analyses the submitted proposals and promotes a new way of distributing common resources.

A democratic and flexible system

Thanks to its modular architecture and scalable logic, you can configure a powerful system of democratic governance in all kinds of organizations.

We take democracy very seriously. Decidim ensures transparency, traceability and integrity of information like never before. It provides security, privacy and confidentiality to all participants.

It's yours. share it. improve it. A platform designed entirely with free software, open and collaborative content thanks to the community Metadecidim.

Thanks to Decidim you will be able to configure spaces for participation (initiatives, assemblies, processes or consultations) and enrich them through the multiple available components (face-to-face meetings, surveys, proposals, voting, follow-up of results, comments and many more).

Spaces for participation for participants to make proposals and make decisions

Participatory processes to democratize common issues, step by step

Processes is a space that allows to create, activate/deactivate, and manage various participatory processes. These are distinguished from other spaces by being structured in different phases within which all of the components can be incorporated. Examples of participatory processes are: an election process for members of a committee, participatory budgeting, a strategic planning process, the collaborative writing of a regulation or norm, the design of an urban space or the production of a public policy plan.

Assemblies, the power of collective self-organization

Is a space that offers the possibility of setting decision-making bodies or groups (councils, working groups, committees, etc.) that meet up periodically, detailing their composition, listing and geolocating their meetings, and allowing to take part in them (for instance: attending if the seating capacity and nature of the assembly so permits, adding items to the agenda, or commenting on the proposals and decisions taken by that body).

Consultations, the right to decide with all democratic guarantees

Consultations is a space that makes it possible to coordinate referendums, trigger discussions and debates, get voting results published; it can be connected to a secure e-voting system.

Initiatives, setting everyone's agenda, within everyone's reach

Initiatives is a space that allows participants to collaboratively create initiatives, define

their trajectory and goals, gather endorsements, discuss, debate and disseminate initiatives and define meeting points where signatures can be collected from attendees or debates opened to other members of the organization.

Proposals, your ideas in detail

The proposals component allows the user to create a proposal using a creation wizard, compare it with the existing ones, publish it on the platform and include additional information such as geolocation or attached documents and images. This component also allows you to navigate, filter and interact with a set of proposals. In addition, with the proposal-incubator you can create collaborative proposals.

Voting, decide your vote. The voting component offers organizations the possibility of activating different voting or support systems around proposals: unlimited, limited to a given threshold, weighted, cost-based, etc.

Results, no proposal without an answer

The results component is used to turn proposals into results and give official responses concerning their acceptance or rejection, merging various proposals into a single result.

Accountability, transparency from beginning to end

The accountability component offers the possibility of subdividing results into projects, defining and applying progress statuses around their implementation, as well as displaying the extent of the results' implementation grouped by categories and scopes.

Meetings, to meet and not miss anything

The meeting component offers organizations and participants the opportunity to convene meetings, determine their location and time, register and limit attendees, define the structure and content of the meeting as well as publishing the minutes, and the resulting proposals.

Participatory texts, to analyze, synthesize, and build in common

The participatory texts component can be used to convert lengthy text documents into various proposals or results and, vice versa, to compose and display a unified text based on a collection of proposals or results.

Dare to combine the components. design and deploy a powerful democratic system in an easy way and adapt it to your organization's needs

Conference, where big events are premiered

The conference component allows an organization to create a website for a big event by joining up a series of predefined meetings (chats, workshops etc.), putting together a unified program and managing attendees.

Surveys, because the opinion of your community matters. The surveys component can be used to design and publish surveys and to display and download their results.

Sortation, equality and the justice of randomness

The sortation component allows to select a number of proposals (e.g. candidates for a jury) with random, yet reproducible, procedures that guarantees non-biased and uniform distributions.

Comments, building a collective intelligence

The comments component enables users to add comments, to identify the comment as being in favor, against or neutral in relation to the commented object, to vote comments, respond to them and to receive notifications about responses.

Pages and blogs, your community, informed and up to date

The pages component is used to create informative pages with rich text formatting, embedded pictures and videos. The blog component makes possible the creation of posts or news, and to navigate them chronologically.

Notifications, personalized information on interesting contents. Decidim enables you to track any space or component to receive updates every time they happen.

Newsletter, simple but powerful. The newsletter component makes it possible to send emails to everyone registered in the platform or, more selectively, to those who participate in a specific space.

GENERAL FEATURES OF DECIDIM

Below, we will outline a series of the platform's general features and characteristics which do not appear in the spaces or components, or in the features directly associated with participants.

Installation and settings

Decidim can be easily installed using the command prompt in any GNU/Linux server with the following installed services: PostgreSQL 9.4+, Ruby 2.4.1, NodeJS with yarn (JavaScript dependency manager), ImageMagick and PhantomJS. An automatic installation script allows you to deploy the whole dependency system, libraries, databases and other automatically required services in Heroku or Docker [feature expected for 2018Q4].

The portal's settings are customisable in the following fields that are filled out on a form from the administration panel: Name of the portal, social network profiles (Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Github); brief description; welcome text; default language; home image; the organisation's logo; favicon; reference prefix (unique identifier that will apply to the portal's elements) and the organisation's URL.

Integration with other services and compatibility/creation of additional services

Decidim can be easily integrated with the following services that can be installed or configured with Decidim:

OpenStreetMap: to show events and proposals with geo-location

Piwik: website traffic analysis

Pad: collaborative real-time writing boards (technology to be determined)

Digital identity and signature: integration with OAuth2 digital-identity management system, systems based on blockchain and recognised institutional digital identity and signature management systems.

Distributed filing system: Disseminating or copying proposals or other elements from the platform in a distributed filing system (blockchain or IPFS type) [Missing feature].

Microblogging: integration/compatibility with a standardized and open microblogging protocol/service such as GNU Social or StatusNet type for participants' activities (proposals, observations and messages).

Decidim automatically generates the following services besides the ones that can be browsed on the website or accessed through an API:

SMTP: sending emails.

Calendar: integration and compatibility with calendar-management systems and automatic creation and updating of events calendars, etc.

Multitenancy

The multi-tenancy of the platform can be used on the basis of a single installation. In other words, a single instance of Decidim software allows you to deploy as many portals (tenants) as you want under specific settings for each of the tenants. That way an organisation can create participatory portals for its sub-organisations or various organisations can share a server and reduce the maintenance costs of its portals.

Multi-language

Decidim is a multi-language platform. Its available languages will be configured during its installation. Menus, administrative forms and, generally, the platform's fixed texts are available in several languages (Spanish, Catalan, Basque, Italian, French, Dutch and Finnish). A collaborative translation system in <https://crowdin.com/project/decidim> enables new languages to be incorporated into the platform.

As for content, once the official languages of the instance have been set during the installation, all the content that is created from the administration panel has the option of being generated in these languages. The administration panel allows content to be managed in several languages through tabs. The content generated by users is displayed on the platform in a single language (the one chosen by the participant through the language selector in the upper part of the menus or automatically through its browser's language settings).

Statistics, open data and downloads

Besides the application programming interface (API) which automatically provides access to public data, Decidim's home page features a general statistics table with the following fields: number of participants, processes, proposals, results, meetings, observations and votes.

Another statistics table for each participatory process shows the number of meetings, proposals, votes and results of a specific process.

The administration panel lets you export the proposals, results and observations of a participatory process in CSV and JSON format and responses to surveys for processing and/or integration with other management systems. Participants can download the results of a participatory process and the extent of its implementation through a CSV file.

Decidim also has a data-display component at its disposal on the platform's general level and on a specific level (showing data from a specific Participatory Space) [Feature expected for 2018Q2-3, AjB-Lote2Mod4]. The following are included among the graphics that are displayed:

Interactive graphics in the form of a timeline showing the development of the various components' counters.

Heat map of all the meetings, proposals or other content with geo-location tags.

Interactive diagrams (bar or pie charts) with the results of a process (amounts of each of the participatory budget projects, filter by category and status of the proposals - whether selected or not, etc.)

All of these displays are accompanied by an option for downloading data in CSV format [Feature expected for 2018Q2-3, AjB-Lote2Mod4].

API, adaptable website design and mobile app

Decidim has an application programming interface or API which is a series of independent service calls and data from Decidim's website interface. This allows third parties to develop services on the platform, automatically release data or develop new interfaces, or integrate other services with decidim.

The API comes with documentation and a formal participatory ontology [Not completed]

Decidim's website design is completely adaptable (responsive), using mobile-first design philosophy (designed first for mobiles and later extended to desktop systems and tablets).

Both the website's design and the API enable the development of mobile apps for Decidim, and a Mobile App is expected to be developed soon.

Content-classification systems

As for content classification, the following to be distinguished and adjusted in Decidim: fields, categories and labels (or tags).

Scopes are generic throughout the platform and divided up into territorial and topic types. Territorial areas, once defined, allow the spaces' elements to be classified by territory (e.g. if a process or a body or an initiative affects a district or two, the entire city, a region or country, depending on the organization). Topic areas are likewise defined for the entire platform and allow classification of the various elements of the participatory spaces.

Categories and subcategories are used for classifying content within the various spaces and are defined for each of the levels of the spaces. So, for example, a participatory process may include several categories and subcategories (the process administrator defines them) whereas the process' meetings, surveys, proposals and other components can be classed under these categories.

In contrast to fields and categories, labels or tags are cross-cutting and freely defined by participants and can apply to any level or component. Labels can be created, embedded and defined in the administration panel. A label-suggestion system allows the people taking part to choose labels similar to the ones that they are suggesting for labelling any of the platform's elements. Elements can be browsed by labels and the most popular labels displayed.

Contextual help system, usability, and evaluation tests

Decidim includes editable contextual help for guiding individual and administrative participants in using the platform. It also includes automatic evaluation surveys to be conducted on participants for the purposes of identifying usability and participatory-procedure errors and improving the democratic quality experience of the software.

3. Suggestion to create a new platform from scratch, based on the specific context of Kosovo and fulfilling best practices and standards

Analyzing, and designing total new solutions for citizen participation services. Designing & building from scratch.

A new platform should be developed by including characteristics described in the sections of this document: [*Criteria, considerations and characteristics on upgrading or developing new platforms*](#) , [*Design and technological criteria for any platform*](#), [*Must-Have Features for any platform*](#), and also to adapt features of Decidim and Consul Project.

Vision of the Ministry of Local Government for the Platform of Digitization of Municipal Websites - Municipalities

This platform will be at the service of citizens to increase their participation in decision-making at the local level, will also be at the service of municipalities themselves for the digitalization of municipal services by increasing the efficiency of these services to citizens.

E-MUNICIPALITIES will be an interoperable platform with all existing platforms operating in the public service. This platform will include the services of 38 municipalities of the Republic of Kosovo, providing services in official languages in our country.

The platform will focus on monitoring of municipal bodies, increasing citizen interaction with local elected representatives, real-time monitoring and presentation of all investments, municipal budget and own source revenues, open and interactive data, provision of services to citizens and online and postal businesses, neighborhood urban plans, building permits and conditions, introduction of the real-time assessment process of municipal acts and many other services. The platform will serve as a pilot project for the government plan for E-GOVERNANCE.

This platform will be web based, as well as applications within the Android and iOS system.

Municipal Assemblies Features

Monitoring the work and performance of each Municipal Assembly member individually for each Municipality.

Creating profiles for each Municipal Assembly member (each Municipal Assembly member will have his own profile on the E-KOMUNAT platform, all information and history will be stored forever);

Citizens will be able to engage in direct communication with their local elected representatives. They can ask and send requests publicly (via the Direct Chat Forum) on various issues and problems to Municipal Assembly member (the purpose is for Municipal Assembly member to be overseen on these issues and the status of their responses); Citizens have the opportunity to monitor the voting history, decisions of Municipal Assembly member; Based on the monitoring data we will analyze and publish quarterly reports on the performance of Municipal Assembly member (interactive presentations).

The citizen will have access to every meeting of the Municipal Assembly through live broadcast (livestream special section based web, android, ios).

Within this platform, citizens will have access to the declaration and comparison of

assets of Municipal Assembly member over the years (interactive presentations).

Pursuant to Law 03 / L-040 it will allow citizens to initiate, sign and submit petitions online and in writing to municipalities.

Through the E-KOMUNAT platform (through the notification system through addresses) the citizens of a neighborhood, village or municipality can be initiated and informed about the issues or problems about which there is a need to initiate petitions or to inform the citizens about the petitions that are in process.

Monitoring the status and responses of Municipal Assemblies in relation to petitions submitted by citizens.

Identifying specific problems, for example in a neighborhood or village, organizing advocacy campaigns together with the citizens of a certain area (through the notification system through addresses), in that area and following the development of the advocacy campaign through the E-KOMUNAT platform until the problem find solutions from relevant institutions.

In order to recognize and evaluate the work and commitment for the public good by Municipal Assembly member, MLGA for each year will award the “Annual Award for Municipal Assembly member of the Year” (this selection will be based on performance data, these data obtained from the E-KOMUNAT platform).

Through the E-KOMUNAT platform, the status will be presented in real time from the moment of voting the acts in the Municipal Assemblies, their transmission to the central level, their status and the final decision that is sent to the Municipal Assemblies.

Citizens’ participation in public debates on the annual planning of the municipal budget through the E-KOMUNAT platform.

Citizens will be able to mobilize directly through the platform, identify priorities in communities, neighborhoods (through the notification system through addresses) or their municipalities and submit requests within the public hearing processes that municipalities organize within the planning process of budget. Public debates will be broadcast livestream. These requests will be recorded on the platform and the process of their non-involvement in municipal budget planning will be overseen.

Municipal Executive

The E-KOMUNAT platform will focus on monitoring public spending at the local level in the field of road infrastructure, education, health, etc. There will also be periodic reporting on public spending where citizens will have quick access to and easily in this data.

Creating profiles for each Mayor, Heads of Municipal Directorates (each Head of Municipal Directorate to be monitored will have their own profile on the E-KOMUNAT platform, all information and history will be stored forever.

Citizens will be able to engage in direct communication with Mayors and Heads of Municipal Directorates. They can ask and send requests publicly (through the Direct Chat Forum) on various issues and problems to Mayors and Heads of Municipal Directorates (the purpose is for the Mayors and Heads of Municipal Directorates to supervised in relation to these issues and the status of their responses); Citizens have the opportunity to monitor the history of decisions of Mayors and Heads of Municipal Directorates.

Based on the monitoring data we will analyze and publish quarterly reports on the performance of Mayors and Heads of Municipal Directorates (interactive presentations for each Municipality).

Monitoring and presentation of expenditures of Mayors and Heads of Municipal Directorates (official lunches and dinners, fuel, per diems, etc.).

Within this platform, citizens will have access to the declaration and comparison of wealth of Mayors and Heads of Municipal Directorates over the years (interactive presentations).

Through the E-KOMUNAT platform, citizens can report on problems and other issues directly to the relevant institution (photos, videos, etc.).

Orientation about costs and other resources related to potential solutions suggested

1.1. The potential synergy between the actual platforms outside the websites of municipalities, to encourage citizen participation. No cost for development. They need to complete the access, using them, promoting them through social media and websites. Managing and moderating well. External stakeholders (out of municipalities, such as AIS, PM office, OSCE and Appdec company) are included. Platforms are maintained and updated from Product Owner institutions described above.

Both platforms need a budget to promote, stimulate and increase the accountability.

Platforma Digjitale while is developed and maintained from OSCE and private IT Company (developer) it may need extra costs for extra maintenance resources.

1.2. Suggestions to make upgrade and extend the same website platforms of municipalities by adding new features, improving performance and design, through new plugins, themes and optimization, it has the lowest cost as a solution that needs development-programming. As a solution that needs developing and programming, by integrating all actual websites with their data, this remains also the easiest way to integrate all new functions and features. All it needs is to hire an expert or a company of experts (up to 5 staff) with experience in the fields, to build the 1st demo prototype and to provide training for municipalities IT staff. It can be established quickly and with lowest cost, compared to any solution. The fruits of this scenario can be picked up, from the 3rd month.

Suggestions to implement proven successful platforms for citizen engagement:

Implementation of Consul Project or Decidim. It needs to have a team of 6-10 IT experts and related staff. And a period of work for 6 months on developing, and two months on training and supporting municipalities. Platforms needed to be holistic solutions, they need to be fully translated and completely customized for local context. This includes also setup.

Suggestion to create a new platform from scratch, based on the specific context of Kosovo and fulfilling best practices and standards

A new platform should be developed by including characteristics described in the sections of this document: [Criteria, considerations and characteristics on upgrading or developing new platforms](#) , [Design and technological criteria for any platform](#), [Must-Have Features for any platform](#), and also to adapt features of Decidim and Consul Project.

It needs to hire a company, with more than 20 experienced staff that would be included

in development of the project, and to allocate at least 18 months as a period where “delivery of the first working software version can happen”. The cost can be from > 1 million EURO.

Maintenance later should be realized from external companies.

Other external stakeholders are deeply involved in the project and can prolong the project development. Municipalities own the new platform.

Potential Solutions	Costs to authorities and donors	Time for authorities	Costs to participants	Time for participants	Participant satisfaction
<p>1.1. The potential synergy between the actual platforms outside the websites of municipalities, to encourage citizen participation.</p> <p>Konsultimet.rks-gov.net & platform-adigitale.com</p>	<p>No costs. They need to complete the access, using them, promoting them through social media and websites. Managing and moderating well. External stakeholders (out of municipalities, such as AIS, PM office, OSCE and Appdec company) are included. Platforms are maintained and updated from Product Owner institutions described above.</p> <p>Costs may be needed to promote, stimulate and increase the accountability.</p>	<p>The practice can be established within three weeks in all municipalities.</p>	<p>Quality of participation and limits on tools for participation.</p>	<p>Cost of time on using it, they must always go on these different platforms and it is on their own to collect and to map the information distributed on many platforms.</p>	<p>Participant satisfaction is low. These actual platforms are offering only the options to participate in debates by reading and sending texts, no other forms of citizen participation is offered through these platforms.</p>
<p>1.2. Suggestions to make upgrade and extend the same website platforms of municipalities by adding new features, improving performance and design through new plugins, themes and optimization</p> <p>Upgrading actual WordPress platforms.</p>	<p>Costs are related to hiring an expert as project leader, a small team of experts or a small company (with up to 5 developers), to prepare training and build the 1st common prototype for all municipalities. Maintenance later can be realized within the same resources of municipalities. Administrative and management staff should increase skills in a similar level of teachers in schools that have used e-education platforms to manage and moderate sessions. No other external stakeholder can affect or prolong the project development. Municipalities own the new platform.</p>	<p>From 4 - 9 months most of the tools would be operational and delivered to the public. Agile approach in delivering software would enable the team to deliver all the time pieces of applications. At the end of this period staff should be trained and operational.</p>	<p>They must learn and adapt to new tools, technologies and practices.</p>	<p>From the first two months they would enjoy the differences, from 4 to 9 months all of the tools would be in public.</p>	<p>Participant satisfaction is relatively high.</p>

The 1st and 2nd solutions can happen independently, consecutively or parallel.					
Developing & customizing citizen participation platforms in local context, Consul Project or Decidim .	This needs to hire a team of 6-10 developers that would work for a period of 6 months on developing, and 2 months on training and supporting. Costs would be from 150.000-220.000€ in the local market price.	8-10 months is the net period to develop the project and to deliver the software in public.	They must learn and adapt to new tools, technologies and practices.	Participants must wait for at least 5-7 months before the 1st working softwares is delivered in public. Participants would be deprived from using the comfort tools of citizen participation, until they are delivered they need to continue using the same tools and trying to participate physically until tools are developed.	Participant satisfaction is relatively high.
Analyzing, and designing total new solutions for citizen participation services. Designing & building from scratch	It needs to hire a company, with more than 20 experienced staff that would be included in development of the project, and to allocate at least 18 months as a period where "delivery of the first working software version can happen". The cost can be from > 1 million EURO. Maintenance later should be realized from external companies. Other external stakeholders are deeply involved in the project, and can prolong the project development. Municipalities own the new platform.	18-24 months is the net period to develop the project and to deliver the software in public.		Participants must wait for at least 6-8 months before the 1st working softwares is delivered in public, and up to 18 months before most of the software is delivered. Participants would be deprived from using the comfort tools of citizen participation, until they are delivered they need to continue using the same tools and trying to participate physically until tools are developed.	Participant satisfaction high

* Time schedule proposed in the table above is optimistic, it is based on completing procurement procedures in normal situations, and there is a presumption that hiring a qualified staff or procuring a qualified company is not facing obstacles. The commitment of IT staff and mayors of municipalities is more than necessary.



Conclusions

Based on global trends in developed and developing countries, the global agenda is moving fast to save and promote democracy through direct citizen participation. Digital citizen participation in the digital era is the way how citizen participation is taking form. In 2021, the post Covid-19 situation is an undeniable fact in front of us. The post Covid-19 situation is accelerating dramatically the need to establish the technology and all other enablers of complete citizen participation in digital gateway.

Kosovo government institutions in all levels have a good IT infrastructure, its IT infrastructure and ecosystem is supportive for further scalability and extension. Municipalities have the minimum requirements for developing further citizen participation programs. Wider public, especially the young and middle age, have the minimum required IT literacy to use it.

The Government of Kosovo is working to position the country as a regional hub for information technology (IT)-related products and services, building on the strong IT skills within the workforce.

The Ministry of Local Government Administration has drafted a plan and set the aim to develop a new holistic platform for local municipalities in a period of up to 2025. The platform will focus on monitoring of municipal bodies, increasing citizen interaction with local elected representatives, it would provide real-time monitoring and presentation of all investments, municipal budget and own source revenues, open and interactive data, provision of services to citizens and online and postal businesses, neighborhood urban plans, building permits and conditions, introduction of the real-time municipal legality assessment process and many other services.

Internet users as a percentage of total population is : 93%⁷. Kosovo's Internet access is higher than the EU average. Mobile Internet users as a percentage of total population: 78%. Active social media users as a percentage of total population: 45%.⁸

⁷ According to Eurostat's publication "Basic figures on Enlargement countries" – Edition 2019, in 2018, Kosovo had the highest percentage of households with home-based Internet access in the region (93%).

⁸ Source: Datareportal- Digital 2019: Kosovo

From scanning and analyzing the municipalities' websites, we conclude that there are developed websites which are used to publish information about offices, officials, publishing news, vacancies, decisions, tenders and other information. All of these create a good base to continue further. But, all of these activities are a passive way of information and communication with public. A key distinguish element of citizen participation platform is interactivity between all stakeholders, especially by public authorities and citizens. For this reason, there is an urgent need to create changes that enable this interactivity. There are feasibility options to develop many solutions on many levels. From extending, fixing and optimizing actual platforms; promoting and networking between platforms, to upgrading actual platforms and adding new features and the most advanced and suitable solution to develop new platforms.

To have an inclusive approach that is scalable and enable piloting: We suggest that improvement of digital citizen participation from Kosovo municipalities and other public institutions to be planned and implemented in three phases, these three phases include significant improvements at low cost or in very cost/benefit plan:

I. Phase I.

- a. Improve performance and design, for this step is needed only awareness, dedication and small & simple training and intervention.
- b. Utilizing actual platforms that are offering some features of digital citizen participation that are not offered through websites of municipalities or other public institutions. Public institutions can immediately link these platforms in their websites, and maintain activities, we are talking about [Platforma e konsultimeve publike - Bëjeni zërin tuaj të dëgjohet](#) and [Platforma Digjitale Për Pjesëmarrje të Publikut](#).***

Phase I can start immediately and can be realized within up to two weeks of intense work and dedication from IT staff of municipalities and mediators.

II. Phase II. Developing missed features and functions to enable digital citizen participation through actual websites (platforms) of municipalities that are using WordPress platform (all of them are WordPress). For this phase, it is needed only to upgrade and integrate new components through already made WordPress plugins (adding, configuring, customizing and populating). For this process, there is only training and showing examples.

III. Phase III. Analyzing, and designing new total solutions for citizen participation services. Designing & building from scratch or installing, configuring and customizing any of suggestions from top platforms.

Suggestions and solutions proposed here, are in IT expert perspective and in a relation how IT Experts and entrepreneurs project the relation between - Platforms & Public. The field of implementation has many enablers and disablers, promoters, supporters, but also hesitators and antagonists. All of them need to consider findings and recommendations on research “Stimulating participation and accountability within the Kosovo local government system, DEMOS, 2021” to address challenges and to boost stimulations.



Appendixes

1. ***Matrice of Assessment of the 38 municipalities websites and their linkage with other online platforms.docx***
2. ***Cumulative results from the auditing of the performance, speed and optimization of websites of 38 municipalities of Kosova..docx***
3. ***Cumulative results of Equal Access Accessibility Checker.docx***
4. ***Cumulative results from auditing the Social Media Presence and engagement of 38 municipalities of Kosova.docx***