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Summary

In recent years, there has been a notable shift towards greater public participation in urban development and decision-making, driven by rapid urbanization (Hofmann et al., 2020), technological advancements (Bonson et al., 2012), and democratic reforms. Governments are now focusing on e-participation initiatives to enhance public participation and overcome the limitations of traditional public participation forms. Kosovo, a young country in the Western Balkans, is pursuing an ambitious state-building agenda prioritizing digital transformation and public administration reforms (Doroci, 2022). However, despite the high internet and mobile phone penetration in Kosovo, e-participation and e-democracy remains low (Topić & Milivojević, 2022). This study analyzes how institutional and organizational factors influence the diffusion of Digital Participatory Platforms (DPPs) in Prishtina, Kosovo's capital. The primary objective is to understand how these factors affect the adoption, implementation, and institutionalization of DPPs. It provides a valuable contribution by addressing a gap in the existing literature on DPPs diffusion, which largely focuses on Western established democracies.

Using an explanatory case study approach, the research analyses three diffusion degrees of three different types of DPPs in Prishtina. This approach offered a broader understanding of e-participation diffusion in Prishtina's public administration. Semi-structured interviews with 12 participants, including public officials and NGO experts, were conducted to gather insights on institutional and organizational factors. For data triangulation, document analysis was utilized to analyze 14 documents regarding the organization of e-participation in Prishtina. The data were analyzed through thematic analysis to identify and interpret key themes and connections.

The findings reveal a complex interplay between institutional and organizational factors affecting the diffusion degrees of DPPs in Prishtina. Regulative aspects of institutions positively impact all stages of diffusion. Nevertheless, the successful institutionalization of DPPs required a supportive institutional culture and leadership. Weak intergovernmental networks and limited collaboration with NGOs hinder higher degrees of diffusion and sustainability of e-participation. Additionally, platforms that demand more effort from public administration, such as interaction and co-production platforms, faced more resistance compared to information provision platforms.

Keywords

Digital Participatory Platforms, e-Participation, adoption, implementation, institutionalization

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Abbreviations

| Abbreviation | Full form |
|--------------|------------------------------------------------------|
| AIS | Agency for Information Society |
| D+ | Democracy Plus |
| DPPP | Digital Platform for Public Participation |
| DPPs | Digital Participatory Platforms |
| EU | European Union |
| GPPC | Government Platform for Public Consultations |
| IAP2 | International Association for Public Participation |
| ICTs | Information and Communication Technologies |
| IT | Information Technology |
| MLGA | Ministry of Local Government Administration |
| NGOs | Non-Government Organizations |
| OGG | Office for Good Governance |
| OSCE | Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe |

1. Introduction

In recent years, there has been a notable shift towards greater public participation in urban development and decision-making processes driven by several factors. The rapid growth of urbanization has emphasized the overall life satisfaction of citizens on the living conditions in cities, drawing citizens toward more active engagement in decision-making processes (Hofmann et al., 2020). In parallel, technological advancements like Web 2.0 technologies have given rise to citizen-generated content, enriching socio-political discussion, diversifying opinions, and fostering the free flow of information (Bonson et al., 2012). In developing countries, this shift is catalyzed by the required democratic and institutional reforms. Information technology and digital tools are considered powerful tools to enhance administrative reforms in public organizations (Hassan & Gil-Garcia, 2008). Kosovo is a young country in the Western Balkans pursuing an ambitious state-building agenda to join the European Union. It is prioritizing e-governance and public administration reforms to create a modern, efficient, citizen-centric administration (Doroci, 2021). Inclusive and participatory decision-making processes are vital for European Integration and the successful implementation of democratic reforms. Furthermore, they ensure transparency for citizens and businesses (Zyra për Qeverisje të Mirë në kuadër të Zyrës së Kryeministrit, 2021).

However, public institutions in Kosovo should promote more inclusive public participation in decision-making processes. Besides regularly publishing draft laws and policy documents online, public consultations and involvement in reforms are still limited. Citizens, civil society and other stakeholders are not sufficiently engaged in the government's policy and legislative development processes (DG-NEAR, 2023). Despite the vital role of public participation, governments still face practical challenges in engaging the public through traditional channels due to their limited reach and resources, requirements of physical presence, and specific timing (Kleinhans et al., 2015). In 2023, compared to the previous year, there was a decline in traditional public participation in local government in Kosovo (Meta, 2023; Ubo Consulting, 2024). However, citizens are strongly willing to engage online with their municipalities. In Prishtina, 80.9% of citizens have expressed their willingness to engage with their municipality through digital platforms (Ubo Consulting, 2024). Hence, e-participation stands out as an innovative method to enhance public participation in decision-making. It fosters active citizenship by leveraging technology to improve access and availability, thereby promoting fairness and efficiency in society and government (Fegert, 2023). Recognizing the potential of digital tools to facilitate broader and more inclusive forms of engagement, efforts have been directed towards developing Digital Participatory Platforms (DPPs). Furthermore, adopting such tools can strengthen the transparency and accountability of local

government while empowering citizens to become more active in decision-making rather than just passive customers or clients (Hofmann et al., 2020). In its digital transformation process, Kosovo has embraced this trend. In 2017, the Prime Minister's Office in cooperation with the Agency of Information Society (AIS) developed the Government Platform For Public Consultation (GPPC) for citizen involvement in legislative and policy-making. Additionally, an e-participation platform for Parliament has been developed with international support. At the local level, e-Municipality has been recently launched as an extension of the main national e-governance platform: e-Kosova. Furthermore, in Prishtina as the capital city of Kosovo, many e-participation platforms have been developed and tested. Most of them come from various local and international NGOs in their efforts to aid the public administration toward more inclusive and participatory decision-making processes. Furthermore, in 2024 Prishtina joined Open Government Partnership Local and is now preparing its action plan aiming to utilize digital platforms to enhance transparency and public participation.

1.1. Problem statement

Significant advancements have been made in improving access to such technologies, with internet and hardware accessibility becoming mainstream worldwide (Fegert, 2023). In this regard, Kosovo has a very optimal environment for the implementation of e-participation with access to fixed broadband infrastructure for all households nationwide. Internet penetration reached 125% of households, surpassing the EU average of 89%. While Mobile telephony penetration covers about 95% of the population (DG-NEAR, 2023). However, the level of e-democracy and e-participation remains low in Kosovo (Topić & Milivojević, 2022). There is a lack of available data and studies on e-participation and factors influencing its diffusion in Kosovo. Existing literature on DPPs and the diffusion of e-participation within public administration primarily centers on established Western democracies such as the United States and Western Europe (Bonsón et al., 2012; Desouza & Bhagwatwar, 2012, 2014; Hovik, et al. 2022; Leclercq & Rijshouwer, 2022; Babelon, 2019; Li & Feeny, 2012; Chadwick, 2011; Abulseme et al., 2020; Randma-Liiv, 2022). This leaves a notable gap on understanding DPPs' application in non-Western public administrations. Especially in Western Balkan countries like Kosovo, which are undergoing significant institutional reforms and transition as part of the EU Stabilization and Accession Process (DG NEAR, 2023). The diffusion of technology-based innovations, such as e-participation, depends on an interplay between new technologies and the social systems they are used in. From a public administration perspective, the literature shows that overall the diffusion of e-participation in public administration poses challenges, negatively affecting the provision of e-participation opportunities (Steinbach, et al., 2019). Besides technological factors, there seem to be other influential factors affecting the diffusion of DPPs in public administration.

Studies show that social, administrative, and institutional factors are more influential in hindering the implementation of e-participation in comparison to technical factors (Chadwick, 2011; Zheng et al., 2014; Randma-Liiv, 2022; Fountain, 2001). Organizational and institutional factors such as budget constraints, leadership support (Chadwick, 2011), organizational structures (Zheng et al., 2014), personnel constraints, organizational centralization (Li & Feeny, 2012), and regulatory framework (Randma-Liiv, 2022), play a vital role on the successful diffusion of e-participation within public administration. Recognizing the pivotal role of institutional and organizational factors in DPPs diffusion, this study will focus on understanding how these factors influence the diffusion of DPPs in local government in Prishtina, Kosovo. Therefore, this study will contribute to the existing literature on DPPs' diffusion in public administration by addressing the gap of an understudied non-Western context. The results of this study may to some extent apply to other Western Balkan countries undergoing similar transitions as they move towards EU enlargement.

Furthermore, the existing literature highlights another gap in studies that simultaneously examine multiple degrees of the diffusion process, with many focusing solely on either the adoption or implementation of DPPs (Steinbach et al., 2019). Analyzing solely one degree of diffusion might provide limited knowledge on the overall diffusion of e-participation in public administration. Hence, to obtain a comprehensive understanding this study will analyze the adoption, implementation, and institutionalization degrees of DPPs diffusion in Prishtina. By conducting this analysis across three different case studies, varying degrees of diffusion are expected. This enables a deeper understanding of how institutional and organizational factors influence different degrees of diffusion. Additionally, there are various types of DPPs, ranging from one-way communication such as information platforms to co-production platforms that enable higher levels of e-participation. Different types of DPPs are expected to exhibit various diffusion degrees. To account for this, three case studies will be evaluated using a typology of DPPs based on citizen-government relationships (Falco & Kleinhans, 2018). This will offer a better understanding on how institutional and organisational factors of the public administration in Prishtina might hinder or facilitate various types of e-participation. In conclusion, this study is academically relevant as it will provide a broader understanding of how institutional and organisational factors can impact the diffusion degree of various types of DPPs, in an understudied context like Prishtina, Kosovo.

1.3. Research Question(s)

Main question:

How do institutional and organisational factors impact the diffusion degree of various types of Digital Participatory Platforms in Prishtina?

Sub-Questions:

1. How do institutional and organisational factors affect the a) adoption, b) implementation, and c) institutionalization of DPPs by the local government in Prishtina?
2. How is the diffusion degree of different types of DPPs affected by institutional and organizational factors in Prishtina?

Research objectives linked to sub-questions:

1. The research objective is to break down and examine the specific stages of diffusion: adoption, implementation, and institutionalization of DPPs, providing a detailed understanding of how institutional and organisational factors influence each stage in Prishtina's local government context. This provides a better understanding of the overall e-participation diffusion in Prishtina.
2. The objective is to investigate if and how institutional and organizational factors hinder or facilitate the diffusion of different types of DPPs. This helps in identifying how characteristics of DPPs (*the level of e-participation it enables*) can lead to varying levels of diffusion by the public administration in Prishtina.

2. Literature review

Public participation is widely regarded as crucial for upholding democratic values and fostering inclusive, improved policy-making processes. Regardless of its form, the concept of participation relies fundamentally on the sharing of power between the governed and the government (Bishop and Davis, 2002). It fosters shared problem-solving through two-way communication between the government and the governed to achieve better and more acceptable decisions (Suphattanakul, 2018). In recent years, several factors have driven a notable shift towards greater public participation in decision-making and urban development. The rapid growth of urbanization has emphasized the overall life satisfaction of citizens on the living conditions in cities, drawing citizens toward more active engagement in the decision-making processes (Hofmann et al., 2020). In the context of democratic deficit or distrust in public institutions, “participation becomes an attractive strategy not just for policy improvement, but for drawing disaffected citizens back to the political mainstream” (Bishop and Davis, 2002, p. 15). Besides the benefits of public participation, the implementation usually presents difficulties for governments. The characteristics of traditional participation present practical challenges for governments to actively engage citizens in decision-making due to lack of time, reach, financial resources, and motivation among citizens (Kleinhans et al., 2015). From a public administration perspective involving the public in decision-making among the funds, requires also adequate and skilled staff in public participation. Traditional public participation methods typically take longer and yield less satisfying results, often leading to even lower participation rates. Hence, a more simplified and effective engagement process is required (Abas et al., 2023).

In this regard, e-participation stands out as an innovative method to foster active citizenship by leveraging technology to enhance access and availability, thereby promoting fairness and efficiency in society and government (Fegert, 2023). Gilman & Peixoto (2019) draw a differentiation between e-government and e-participation. They define e-participation “as a ‘civic technology’ that is explicitly designed and leveraged to increase and deepen democratic participation” [p.106]. Hence, the primary goal of ‘civic tech’ should be the enhancement of citizen-government effective communication and collaboration and not only ‘enhancing modernization and efficiency of basic public services’ (Gilman & Peixoto, 2019 p.106). According to Abusleme et al. (2020), e-participation allows people to be better informed on decision-making processes (inclusion), express their opinions (participation), and even influence policy outcomes (deliberation). The advent of Web 2.0 has introduced new opportunities for participation, such as reduced costs, enabling asynchronous and location-independent interactions, thereby reaching a wider audience (Le Blanc, 2020). Citizens nowadays are more likely to engage online with their government rather than going to see a public

servant (Abusleme et al., 2020). The promising potential of e-participation in enhancing inclusivity and engagement of hard-to-reach groups is acknowledged by a wide number of studies (Evans-Cowley & Hollander, 2010; Abuseme et al., 2020; Gilman & Peixoto, 2019). However, as Evans-Cowley & Hollander (2010), reasonably argue there is a need for further research on the digital divide to understand its implications for inclusive planning processes. Governments should be attentive to the digital divide and digital illiteracy of their citizens to ensure inclusivity and meaningful public participation.

2.1. Levels of e-participation

To obtain a more comprehensive understanding of e-participation scholars have unpacked and categorized it into different levels of e-participation based on various entry points. This approach aims to deepen the understanding of how the public engages in the decision-making process through digital tools. It goes beyond mere acknowledgment of participation to explore the depth and nature of involvement. One of the most influential works in this regard is Kingston’s (2002) “e-Participation Ladder”. Basic websites and online opinion surveys are placed at the bottom of the ladder indicating only information sharing and one-way communication. Moving up the ladder are higher forms of e-participation that enable two-way communication and collaboration between the citizens and the government. The ladder seems to comply with Arnstein’s Ladder of Citizen Participation as Kingston places online decision-making as the highest level of e-participation (Babelon, 2019). This implies shared decision-making power between the government and the public.

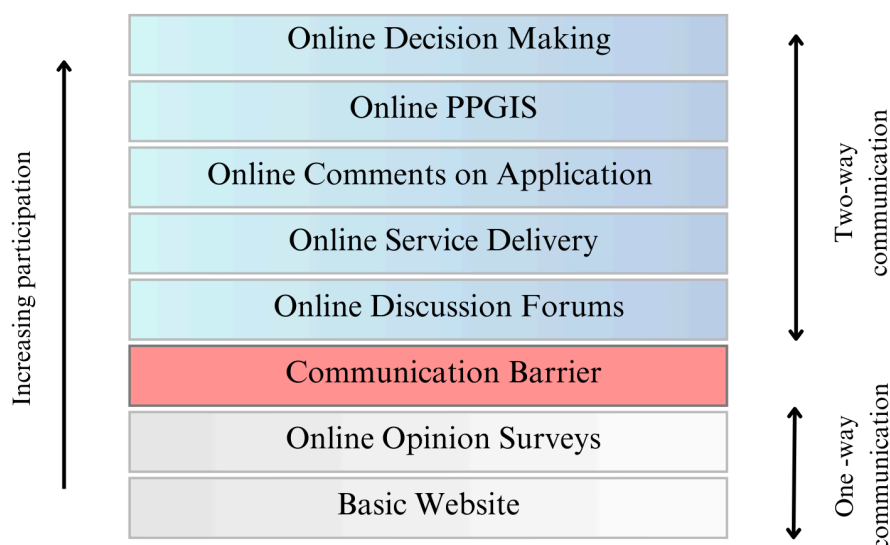


Figure 1. E-Participation Ladder, adapted from Kingston, 2002

2.2. Digital Participatory Platforms

The growing focus on e-participation to enhance public involvement has given rise to a plethora of digital tools. Governments worldwide use a variety of these tools, including citizen apps (Desouza & Bhagwatwar, 2012; Ertiö, 2015), social media (Abusleme et al., 2020; Kleinhans et al., 2015), Digital Participatory Platforms (Falco & Kleinhans, 2018; Babelon, 2019, De Filipi, 2020), and technology-enabled participatory platforms (Desouza & Bhagwatwar, 2014). Adopting such tools can strengthen the transparency and accountability of local government while empowering citizens to become more active in decision-making rather than just passive customers or clients (Hofmann et al., 2020; Desouza & Bhagwatwar, 2014). This study focuses primarily on one specific type of civic tech: Digital Participatory Platforms. These platforms are “defined as forums created to source, analyze, visualize, and share information, expertise, and solutions to advance social causes and/or solve social and policy problems” (Desouza & Bhagwatwar, 2014; p.30) They reduce traditional barriers to civic engagement and allow citizens to engage with local issues in more diverse ways (Desouza & Bhagwatwar, 2014). Falco & Kleinhans (2018) define Digital Participatory Platforms as a type of civic technology designed for participation, engagement, and collaboration, featuring functionalities like analytics, map-based input, and idea ranking. Precisely these functionalities make these platforms different from social media platforms used for participation by governments. While social media are used merely to inform and initiate public discussion, Digital Participatory Platforms offer room for effective “collaboration and co-production between citizens and governments” (Falco & Kleinhans, 2018; p. 52). In this line of thought, Fegert (2023) highlights some fundamental aspects of why governments should develop and implement DPPs for public involvement rather than the utilization of social media platforms. DPPs are necessary because they are designed specifically for inclusive, meaningful civic engagement, unlike social media networks prone to various risks and limitations. Relying on social networks controlled by private operators for public discourse and participation is risky. It can lead to issues such as misinformation and/or hate speech, as previously seen with Twitter (Frenkel and Conger, 2022).

To obtain a more comprehensive understanding on the levels of e-participation these digital tools enable, a plethora of typologies have been developed by scholars. These typologies in many cases reflect Arnstein’s (1965) ladder of participation or other influential categorizations of public participation such as IAP¹. Some of the most influential categorizations are presented in the figure below. Desouza & Bhagwatwar (2012) have provided a typology of citizen apps used for solving urban problems mainly in transportation and public services. They categorize these applications based on three main parameters: *a) the nature of the information used, b) the motivation for developing such*

¹ International Association for Public Participation - Spectrum on Public Participation

apps, and c) the goals of applications. Furthermore, to account for various functionalities, user experiences, and accessibility they categorize citizen apps according to their deployment platform: *web-based, mobile-based, or hybrid*. Another influential categorization of citizen apps is developed by Ertiö (2015) based on the type of data they collect (*people-centric or environment-centric*) and the information flow between citizens and planners, varying from *one-way to interactive communication*. In the empowerment dimension, the author assesses how apps enable citizen input to influence decision-making and convey the significance of their contributions.

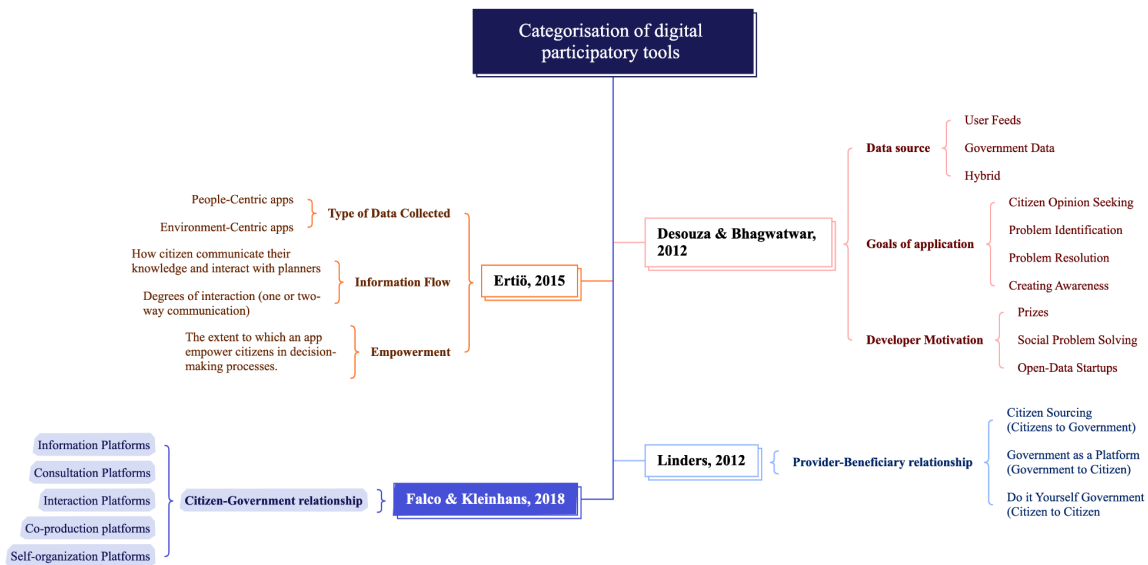


Figure 2. Categorization of digital participatory tools (Own elaboration)

Regarding digital tools for co-production, in her categorization, Linders (2012) builds on the “provider-beneficiary” relationship to capture power and responsibility distribution between government and citizens in enhancing service delivery and fostering civic engagement. Her typology consists of three categorizations of digital tools for co-production: *Citizen Sourcing, Government as a Platform and Do it Yourself Government*. Another influential typology of DPPS is developed by Falco & Kleinhans (2018) based on a citizen-government relationship as shown in the table below. In their extensive systematic review of DPPs, they list four levels with five sub-levels of citizen-government relationship. The citizen-government relationship levels serve as the entry point for their typology of Digital Participatory Platforms. They classify platforms from basic information-sharing to those that facilitate interactive communication and collaboration between citizens and the government, such as interaction and co-production platforms. This study will utilize this typology of Digital Participatory Platforms to evaluate the types of our three case studies.

| Typology of Digital Participatory Platforms | |
|---------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Information sharing | Informing: One-way communication ('broadcasting') from government to citizens. |
| | Consulting: One-way communication that require citizens to provide their views, comments and preferences through consultations and surveys but usually sustain no options for the government to provide feedback, thus lacking an interactive and co-productive potential. |
| Interaction | Two-way communication with dialogue and feedback between citizens and government representatives. |
| Co-production | Support collaborative problem-solving and decision-making processes, where the roles of citizens and governments converge towards co-production. |
| Self-organization | Public matters: Citizens create solutions independently that are to be recognised, facilitated or adopted by governments and require some government action. |
| | Private matters: Citizens share information and self-organize for matters of private interest that may develop into public demands requiring some government action. |

Table 1. Typology of Digital Participatory Platforms adapted from Falco & Kleinhans, 2018

Taking these categorizations one step further, Moller & Olafsson (2018) have provided a spectrum of DPPs based on how e-tools function as knowledge mediators, starting from leading to enabling. 'Leading' tools offer one-way communication, while 'enabling' tools facilitate collaboration and participation. Ultimately the latter can empower citizens and groups to engage in co-governance and self-governance (Moller & Olafsson, 2018).

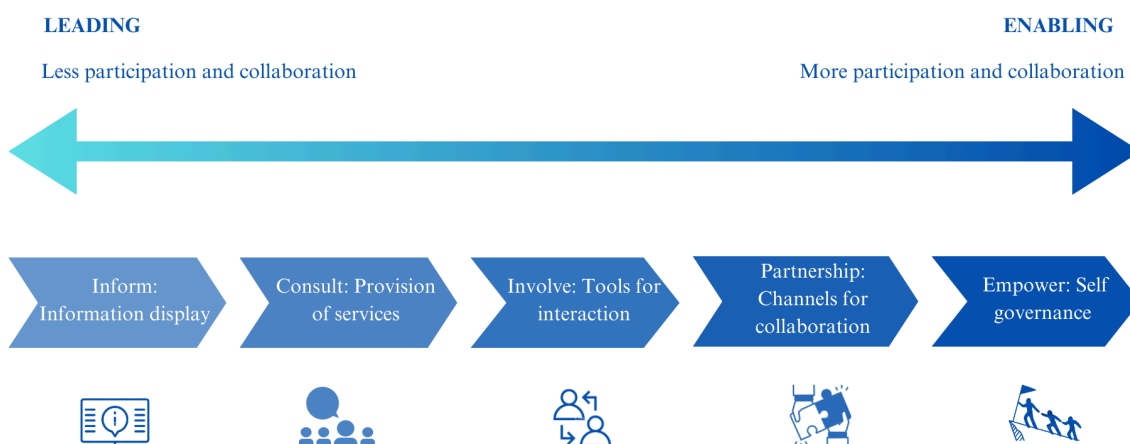


Figure 3. Spectrum of e-participation tools, adapted from Moller & Olafsson, 2018

2.3. The diffusion of DPPs

However, despite their potential, the practical application of these digital tools to enhance meaningful public participation, particularly in fostering two-way communication between citizens and government, lags behind (Falco & Kleinhans, 2018). In many cases, especially in developing countries, information technology has been regarded as a catalyzer of administrative reform (Hassan & Gil-Garcia, 2008). However, many e-government projects fail due to a poor understanding of how technologies, institutional arrangements, organizational factors, and socio-economic contexts interact. (Luna Reys & Gil-Garcia, 2011). Hence, it is crucial to acknowledge the multiple factors and stakeholders influencing the successful deployment of DPPs in public administration. From a citizens' perspective; awareness, user motivation, expectation management, re-establishment routines, and offline follow-up are seen as fundamental for the effective adoption of these tools by citizens (Kleinhans and Falco, 2022). From a technological point of view, significant advancements have been made in digital infrastructure improving access to such technologies, with internet and hardware accessibility becoming mainstream worldwide (Fegert, 2023). Other technological features such as interoperability and standardization of the platforms are crucial for ensuring successful utilization of DPPs by all citizens, including those with older or limited hardware and software accessibility. The design of platforms also plays an important role. Design features such as a multi-language platform, including also appropriate features for people with disabilities such as voice audio or transcription of video materials increase its accessibility and diffusion among users.

However, focusing only on technological factors has proven to be one of the reasons hindering the success of e-participation projects (Macintosh and Whyte, 2008). Fountain (2001) critiques such a technological determinism perspective, highlighting that technological success or failure cannot solely be attributed to digital artifacts but depends also on organizational complexity and institutional contexts. From a public administration perspective, the diffusion of e-participation in public administration poses challenges, negatively affecting the provision of e-participation opportunities (Steinbach, et al., 2019). Studies show that social, administrative, and institutional factors are more influential in hindering the implementation of e-participation in comparison to technical factors (Chadwick, 2011; Zheng et al., 2014; Randma-Liiv, 2022; Fountain, 2001). Acknowledging the mutual influences between technology and society, this study will not take either a technological or social determinist approach. However, the e-government research traditionally has focused on citizen attitudes, online service delivery, and government information provision. Thus, it is highly important to focus also on the internal structures and processes of government institutions to understand how these might influence the diffusion of digital tools (Fountain, 2001; Chadwick, 2011). Therefore, this

study will focus on the internal institutional and organisational factors of public administration in Prishtina to obtain an understanding of how these factors influence the successful diffusion of DPPs. In this regard, institutional theory ‘provides a lens to understand the complex interactions among technology, organizational factors, institutional arrangements, and socio-economic context within e-government and e-participation initiatives’ (Luna-Reyes & Gil-Garcia, 2011, p.2). Instead of focusing solely on technology, institutional theory encourages us to examine how organizational, political, and social factors affect the adoption and use of the Internet by government officials (Fountain, 2001).

Institutions stabilize and create meaning through regulative, normative, and cultural-cognitive elements, which serve as the core components guiding behavior and resisting change (Scott, 2014). Institutions influence how IT is selected, adopted, implemented, and used in governments, while also IT has the potential to shape organizational structures and institutional arrangements (Fountain, 2001). Adopting DPPs requires restructuring government organizations and human resources to handle citizen inputs effectively, requiring trained personnel, and overcoming outdated cultures that undervalue citizen input (Kleinhans & Falco, 2022). This can translate into an increased workload for public administration and pressure for timely feedback (Desouza & Bhagwatwar, 2012). Consequently creating structural inertia which hinders the ability of an organization to adopt innovation, as employees may resist change in technology, consumer, or goals (Hannan & Freeman, 1989). In this regard, regulative elements of institutions play a significant role in preventing resistance from government employees in incorporating e-government or e-participation tools within their routine practices and structures (Kim et al., 2009). In general, scholars emphasize the regulatory functions of institutions, noting that they restrict and standardize behavior (Scott, 2014). However, public administrators are not entirely determined by institutions; instead, institutions define the limits of acceptable actions while allowing for a range of strategies and choices (Yang, 2003). In this regard, support from decision-makers and public officials (change agents) is crucial for the successful diffusion of digital tools in public administration (Randma-Liiv, 2022; Purin, 2022). It can even overcome bureaucratic challenges such as unclear management direction, the absence of digital strategy, and technological knowledge gaps. (David et al., 2023). The power of actors’ will to the successful implementation of e-participation initiatives is also confirmed by Abusleme et al. (2020). He found out that one of the main reasons for e-participation failure in Columbia was that the political and administrative bodies didn’t have an objective to make policy processes more inclusive and participatory. This shows the complex interplay between institutional and organizational factors affecting the successful diffusion of digital tools in public administrations.

Furthermore, as Fountain (2001) argues in her Technology Enactment Theory, the effectiveness of a technology is significantly influenced by how users interpret, design, implement, and use the technology. Hence, the effectiveness of the same technology (e.g. DPP) can vary based on the context it is deployed. In their extensive systematic review, Falco & Klenhains (2018) argue that the study of DPPs is ‘limited to a few specific socio-spatial contexts like the United States of America or some parts of Europe’ (p.53). Most of the studies are conducted within Western contexts or developed countries (Bonsón et al., 2012; Desouza & Bhagwatwar, 2012, 2014; Hovik, et al. 2022; Leclercq & Rijshouwer, 2022; Babelon, 2019; Li & Feeny, 2012; Chadwick, 2011; Abulseme et al., 2020; Randma-Liiv, 2022). Therefore, it is important to extend the body of knowledge on the diffusion of DPPs in public administration within understudied contexts, such as Prishtina, Kosovo. This will enrich the existing literature on the diffusion of DPPs and e-participation. Moreover, existing literature highlights a gap in studies that simultaneously examine multiple degrees of the diffusion process, with many focusing solely on either the adoption or implementation of DPPs (Steinbach et al., 2019; Randma-Liiv, 2022). In their extensive review, Steinbach et al. (2019), call for more studies analyzing three degrees of DPP diffusion in public administration for a more comprehensive understanding of the process. They present three degrees of e-participation diffusion in public administration as shown in the table below.

| Diffusion degree of DPPs | |
|---------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1. Adoption | This term signifies the process through which organizations become familiar with and educate themselves about ICTs. It involves gathering information to assess potential benefits, such as technical and financial advantages, before deciding whether to acquire ICTs. |
| 2. Implementation | The second stage of diffusion involves integrating innovations into organizational processes and structures. This includes installing and delivering ICTs within an organization, diffusing them among users of an organization, and adapting organizational procedures and processes to accommodate the new ICTs. |
| 3. Institutionalization | The third stage, encompasses both a process and a state. It refers to the process by which ICTs become a recognized and routinized activity within an organization, ultimately leading to a stage of unquestioned repetition. Therefore, this stage involves efforts to maintain or sustain the innovations. |

Table 2. E-participation diffusion degrees adapted from Steinbach et al., 2019

Accounting for various diffusion degrees of e-participation is important as different barriers and challenges might occur for each degree. Thereby, Randma-Liiv (2022) calls for a differentiation of adoption and institutionalization when studying e-participation as “institutionalization of e-participation is not a linear and stand-alone process’ (p. 346). The adoption of digital tools by the public administration presents just the first step in a lengthy and complex process. On the other hand,

institutionalization is the highest diffusion degree of a technology which requires more time and institutional change (Randma-Liiv, 2022). Recognizing this gap, this research aims to fill the void by analyzing the adoption, implementation, and institutionalization of DPPs in Prishtina. By conducting this analysis across three different case studies, varying degrees of diffusion are expected. To conclude, the study will analyze how institutional and organizational factors of public administration in Prishtina might affect the diffusion degrees of three different types of DPPs. In this regard, information-sharing and consultation platforms are expected to be more widely adopted and accepted by the public administration rather than co-production platforms.

2.4. Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework illustrated in the figure below outlines the relationship between key concepts central to this study. The primary focus is on understanding how institutional and organizational factors within Prishtina's local government impact the diffusion degree of various types of DPPs. For institutional factors, this study narrows its scope to the **regulative elements of institutions, such as legislation and regulations** (Scott, 2014). As for organisational factors, based on existing literature on the diffusion of DPPs, this study initially examines **human resources, decision-makers' support, financial capacity, and bureaucracy**. These factors are anticipated to play a significant role in shaping the diffusion process, although additional influencing factors may emerge during data collection. To account for different diffusion degrees the analytical framework of Steinbach et al. 2019 is adopted which distinguishes between three degrees/levels of diffusion of e-participation in public administration. Furthermore, as mentioned earlier it is important to account for different types of DPPs to better understand which type is showing higher degrees of diffusion. The typology of citizen-government relationships developed by Falco & Kleinhans (2018) will be adopted to evaluate the type of platforms for our three case studies.

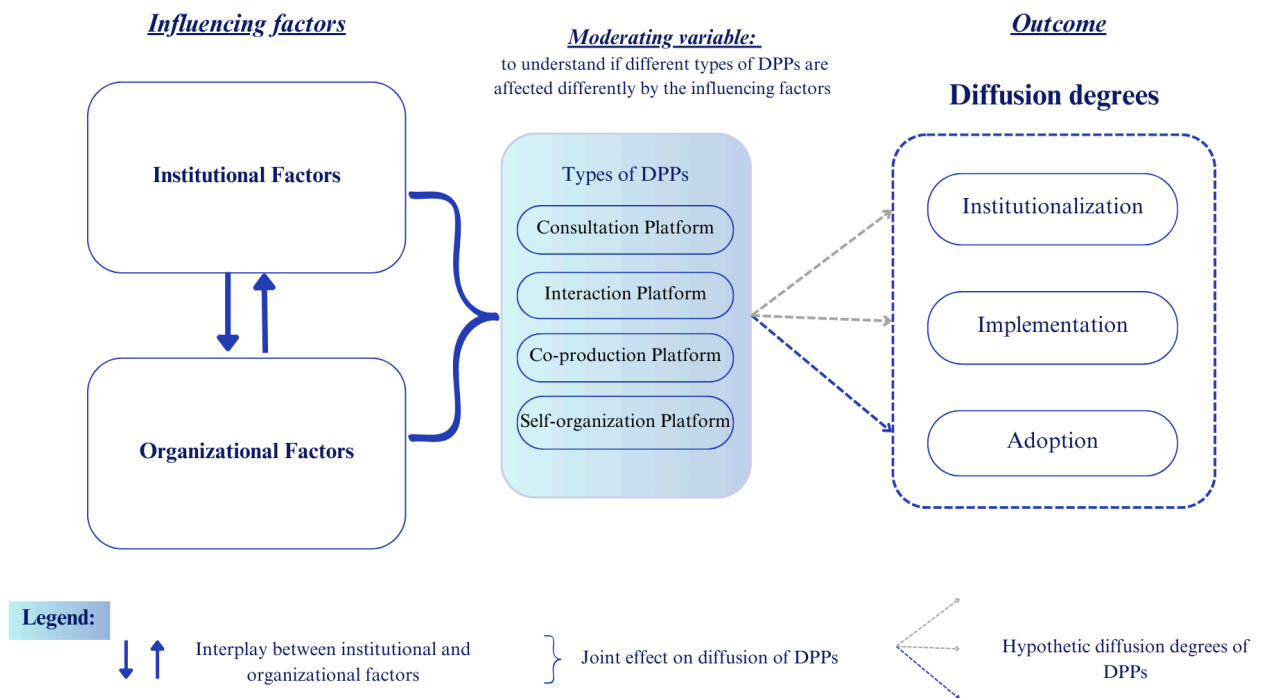


Figure 4. Conceptual framework (own elaboration)

3. Research design, methodology

Research design presents the framework on how the study will be conducted while specifying the strategies and methods used to answer the research question (Van Theil, 2007). As the primary focus of this study are the internal institutional and organizational factors of the public administration in Prishtina a qualitative research design is chosen. Only a qualitative approach would be suitable to capture and understand the relationship between technology and internal factors within public administration (Chadwick, 2011)

3.1. Research Strategy

To answer my research question, an exploratory case study strategy is adopted to investigate how institutional and organisational factors influence the diffusion degree of three DPPs in Prishtina. Explanatory case studies focus on exploring how events happen and what factors influence specific outcomes. Adopting case studies, researchers aim to deeply understand situations and the perspectives of those involved (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006). Three Digital Participation Platforms operating in

Prishtina were selected based on a list of four selection criteria. By incorporating three case studies I expect to obtain a wider picture of e-participation diffusion in Prishtina. The first criterion was a specific type of civic technology - Digital Participatory Platforms as defined by Falco & Kleinhans (2018). However, platforms that serve only as information providers like the official website of the municipality are excluded from our analysis as it does not offer room for citizens' input. Secondly, the maturity of the platform (established year and active status) was considered. Only platforms that were still active and not in their infancy stage were considered. The third criterion was the type of the DPPs as per the typology of citizen-government relationship developed by Falco & Kleinhans (2018). This criterion was selected to offer a diversity of platforms as different types of DPPs are expected to exhibit different degrees of diffusion. Lastly, the platform provider presents another selection criterion; by whom the platform was initiated and managed. In this regard, platforms that were initiated and managed by the government itself and NGOs were selected to offer a diversity of platform providers. I expect platforms provided by the government itself will show a higher degree of diffusion in comparison with other platforms provided by external actors such as NGOs. The table below presents a summary of the three case studies selected.

| Case | I | II | III |
|--------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Name | Government Platform for Public Consultations (GPPC) <i>Platforma Qeveritare e Konsultimeve Publike</i> | Digital Platform for Public Participation (DPPP) <i>Platforma Digitale per pjesemarrjen e publikut</i> | Fix.com <i>Ndreqe.com</i> |
| URL | https://konsultimet.rks-gov.net/ | https://platformadigitale.com/ | https://ndreqe.com/ |
| Established | 2017 | 2016 | 2018 |
| Policy area | All | All | Public services |
| Platform provider | Office of the Prime Minister / Office for Good Governance Supported by the European Union Office in Kosovo | Appdec (a private company) Supported by OSCE office in Kosovo | DemocracyPlus (a local NGO) Supported by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark & Swiss Cooperation and Development Office in Kosovo |
| Type | Interaction | Co-production | Interaction |

Table 3. Summary of case studies

3.2 Data collection methods

Research methods present “simply a technique for collecting data” (Bryman, 2012, p.46). Key methods on e-participation literature include interviews and focus groups, analyzing online discussions, and document analysis (Macintosh & Whyte, 2008). The focus of this study is the diffusion of DPPs from a perspective of public administration, thus qualitative research methods were utilized. This decision is reinforced by the lack of available data on e-participation in Prishtina. Primary data were collected through semi-structured interviews balancing a defined question plan with the flexibility of exploring new themes. Open-ended questions were used to gain a deeper understanding on organizational factors such as the bureaucratic organization of e-participation, human resources, financial capacity, and decision-makers’ support. Some of the questions were tailored solely to public officials or experts, while the main questions on e-participation were kept the same for both groups to offer room for comparison and validity of the findings. Furthermore, semi-structured interviews were used to evaluate the diffusion degree of each case study. Purposive sampling was applied as a sampling technique. This involves selecting a sample with a specific purpose in mind, enabling the researcher to gather rich insights, even if they are not representative of the entire population (O’Leary, 2004). Sample selection criteria included public officials and NGO experts who are involved in the field of public participation and transparency, e-participation, and development of Digital Participatory Platforms in Prishtina. Understanding the complexity and the nature of the issue, the sample composition was intended to be very diverse to get a better understanding of the situation and compare the data. The figure below illustrates the sample composition. While a detailed list of respondents and their characteristics can be found in Appendix 4.

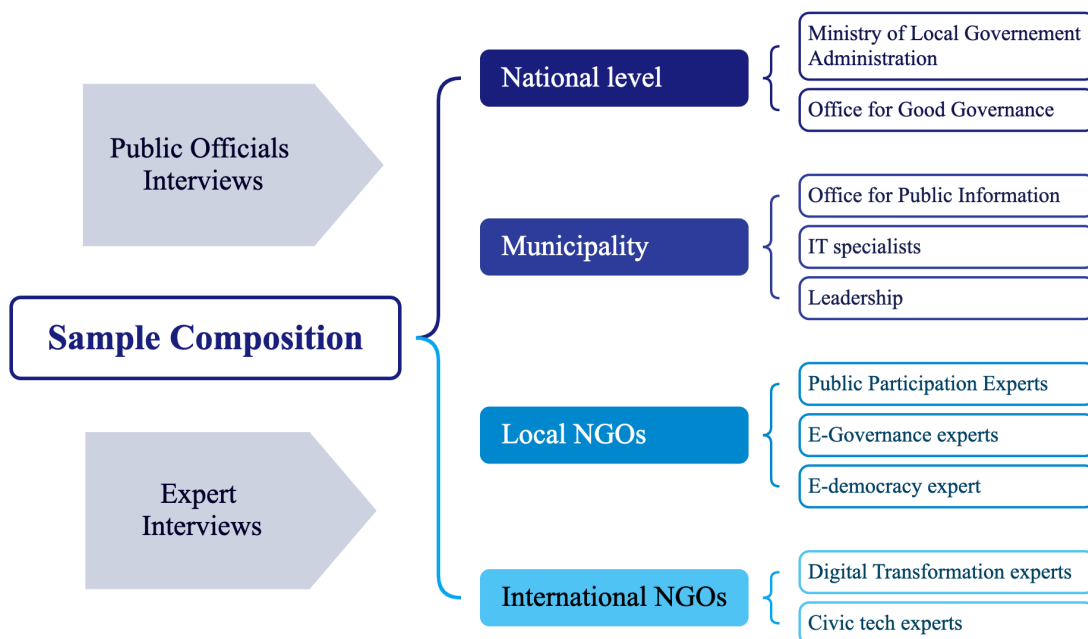


Figure 5. Sample composition

Twelve semi-structured interviews were conducted. The average length of interviews was 40 - 60 minutes. In total 25 people were contacted for the possibility of an interview. The process was characterized by a lot of back-and-forth communication, rescheduled interviews, and referrals which highlights the challenges of qualitative data collection. From all the respondents, local executive public officials were the most unresponsive in this process. On the other hand, administrative levels of public officials were very responsive and willing to participate in this research. The response rate was higher among NGO experts, followed by references where the primary contact couldn't participate. The participation was completely voluntary and no financial or other incentives were promised to any of the participants. The interviews were conducted in an online format. Upon the interviewee's consent, the interviews were voice recorded to ease the process of transcription and analysis of the data.

Furthermore, document analysis was used to collect and analyze various textual sources as primary data relevant to this study (O'Leary, 2004). This method was employed to collect and analyze data for regulative institutional elements such as laws, regulations, strategies, and policy documents on e-participation. The selection criteria for document analysis are grounded in four crucial factors: authenticity, credibility, representativeness, and meaning (Morgan, 2022). Authenticity ensures that the selected documents are genuine and sourced directly from the primary, final versions. Credibility focuses on the reliability of authors, confirming that they are trustworthy sources. Representativeness involves choosing documents from various authors and sources to achieve a diverse and representative

sample. Lastly, meaning emphasizes the relevance and significance of the documents in addressing the research question. These criteria ensure a rigorous and comprehensive approach to document analysis, enhancing the validity and depth of the research findings.

3.3. Data Analysis Method

This study employed thematic analysis to analyze and interpret the data. Thematic analysis is a widely used method among qualitative researchers for identifying and interpreting patterns or themes within a dataset, often leading to new insights and understanding (Naeem et al., 2023). A systematic thematic analysis approach was chosen for this study because its step-by-step structure helps ensure thoroughness, consistency, and clear links between data, interpretations, and conclusions, while also reducing bias (Naeem et al., 2023). Following this approach, the analysis was an iterative process of building blocks. The first step was to get familiarized with the data while carefully reading the transcripts and documents. As transcripts were created manually due to the lack of a transcription system for the Albanian language, it helped me get even more familiarised with the data. The coding process was a long journey of coding and recoding, finding and refining themes according to their relevance to my research question. The coding process was primarily deductive, guided by variables in the operationalization table. However, acknowledging the understudied nature of e-participation in Prishtina, inductive coding was incorporated leading to the emerge of new themes: cultural-cognitive institutional elements and networks, which are further explained in the findings section. The document analysis method was used to analyze the regulative aspects of institutions like laws and regulations influencing the diffusion of DPPs in Prishtina. Fourteen documents are analyzed on how they regulate and organize e-participation at the local level. The list of documents can be found in Appendix 6. ATLAS.ti was used for data analysis. The themes are presented and interpreted in the following chapter backed up by verbatim quotes.

3.4. Operationalization

The operationalization of concepts presented in the conceptual framework together with variables, indicators, and data collection methods are presented in the table below

OPERATIONALIZATION TABLE

| Concept | Dimension | Variable | Author | Indicator | Method | Data source |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Digital Participatory Platforms (Falco & Kleinhans, 2018) | Types of DPPs | Consultation Platform | Falco & Kleinhans, 2018 | One-way communication requires citizens to provide their views, comments, and preferences through consultations and surveys. Usually, there are no options for the government to provide feedback. Thus lacking an interactive and co-productive potential. | Document/Artifact analysis | https://konsultimet.rks-gov.net/instituti-ons.php https://platformadigital.com/ https://ndreqe.com/ |
| | | Interaction Platforms | | Two-way communication with dialogue between citizens and government representatives flowing both ways. | | |
| | | Co-production Platforms | | Support collaborative problem-solving and decision-making processes, where the roles of citizens and governments converge towards co-production. | | |
| | | Self-organization Platforms | | Public matters: Citizens create solutions independently that are to be recognized, facilitated, or adopted by governments and require some government action. | | |
| | Diffusion of DPPs | Adoption | Steinbach et al., 2019 | 1. Awareness on DPPs (three platforms used as case studies in this study) = Absence/Presence of Awareness 2. Evaluation of potential benefits (technical and financial benefits) = Has the local government undertaken such analysis 3. Aquirement of DPPs = decision whether to acquire or not the DPPs | Interviews | Public officials NGO experts |
| | | Implementation | | 1. The diffusion of DPPs among users within local governments; 2. The adoption of public participation procedures and processes to the DPPs (as a new technology) (Cooper and Zmud 1990) | | |
| | | Institutionalization | | Level of integration of DPPs into organizational routines and structures | | |

| | | | | | | |
|--|------------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| | Institutional factors | Regulative elements of institutions | Scott, 2014 Fountain, 2001 | 1. Rules, laws, policies, and programs guiding the public participation and e-participation | Document analysis | National and local regulations & policies regarding e-participation, National e-government strategy, Digital Agenda 2030, City statut etc. |
| | Organizational factors | Bureaucracy | Fountain, 2001 | 1. Hierarchy - Process Structure: - Presence/absence of clear guidelines or protocols outlining the roles and responsibilities of different departments or officials in the DPPs adoption, implementation, or institutionalization process. 2. Responsible unit for utilization of DPPs: - Is there a designated department or team tasked with managing and monitoring DPPs. 3. Control Mechanism Structure: - The presence of procedures for monitoring platform usage, managing user feedback, and addressing technical issues. - Accountability: the existence of mechanisms to ensure that government officials are held responsible for (non) utilization of DPPs to enhance public participation. | Interviews | Public officials NGO experts |
| | | Decision-makers support | David et al., 2023 | Support/encouragement from the leadership/executive local bodies for the adoption and implementation of DPPs | Interviews | Public officials NGO experts |
| | | Financial capacity | Randma-Liiv, 2022; Chadwick, 2011 | Sufficient financial means for development, maintenance, utilization, and upgrade of DPPs | Interviews | Public officials NGO experts |
| | | Human resources | David, 2023 | Sufficient (technical) staff; Skills/knowledge | Interviews | Public officials NGO experts |

Table 4. Operationalization table

3.5 Limitations

The diffusion of DPPs is affected by an interplay between technology and the social system they are deployed in (Steinbach et al., 2019). As presented in the literature review there are multiple factors and stakeholders affecting their diffusion. However, this study focuses solely on the diffusion of DPPs from internal institutional and organizational factors of public administration in Prishtina. Citizens' perspectives and broader technological factors besides the types of DPPs, are not the subject of this study. Hence, it can not be considered as a comprehensive study covering all possible factors affecting the diffusion of e-participation in Prishtina. Additionally, the study is limited in Prishtina's context, which presents challenges in generalizing the findings to other locations within or outside Kosovo. Prishtina, as the capital of Kosovo, has unique characteristics, such as a more developed economy, a larger population, and a vibrant NGO community. As a good part of the findings can be valid throughout Kosovo such as regulative and cultural-cognitive institutional elements, it's essential to be cautious of these limitations. Different cities may reveal new or varying institutional and organizational factors that influence DPPs diffusion. Moreover, the adoption of qualitative methodology adds another layer of limitations, as the findings are context-specific and not easily generalized.

4. Findings, analysis, and discussion

The data collection and analysis have uncovered a complex interplay between institutional and organisational factors influencing the diffusion degree of e-participation platforms in Prishtina. Distinguishing between a variety of factors influencing solely one diffusion degree is challenging as they are intertwined. To provide clarity and structure to the chapter, I will first present the typologies and diffusion levels for each case study. A more detailed description of case studies can be found in Appendix 2. In the following part, I will present the findings from document analysis and interviews, exploring how each variable and emerging themes influence the diffusion of DPPs in Prishtina. Finally, the chapter will conclude with an analysis and discussion directly addressing my research questions.

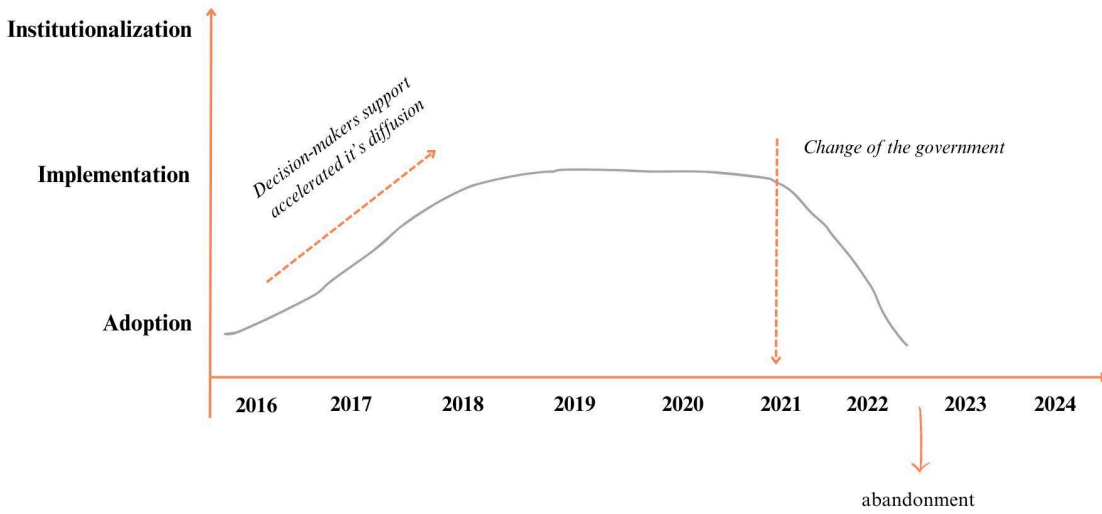
4.1. The typology and diffusion degrees of case studies

The following table describes the types of three case studies based on the typology of citizen-government relationship (Falco & Kleinhaus, 2018).

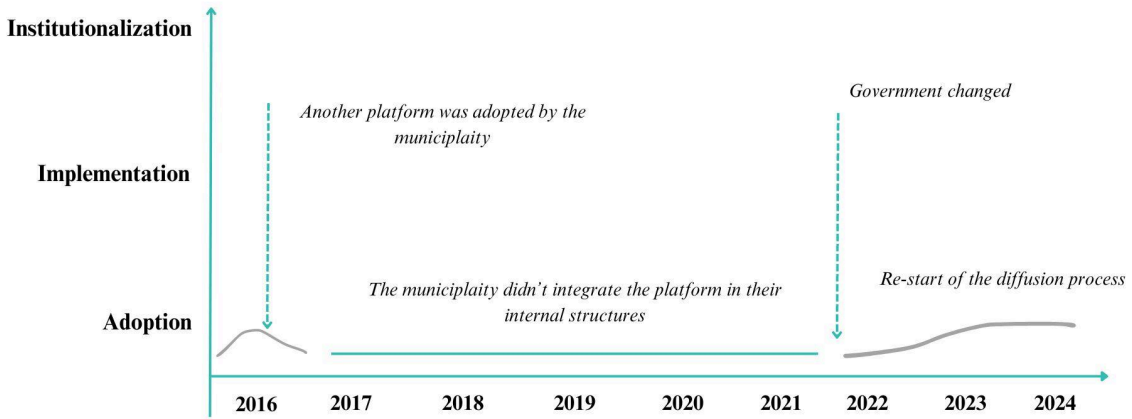
| Platform | Type | Communication flow between government and citizens |
|---------------------------------------------|-----------------------|----------------------------------------------------|
| Digital Platform for Public Participation | Co-Production | Two-way communication |
| Ndreqe | Interaction/Reporting | Two-way communication |
| Government Platform for Public Consultation | Interaction Platform | Two-way communication |

Table 5: Typology of the case studies

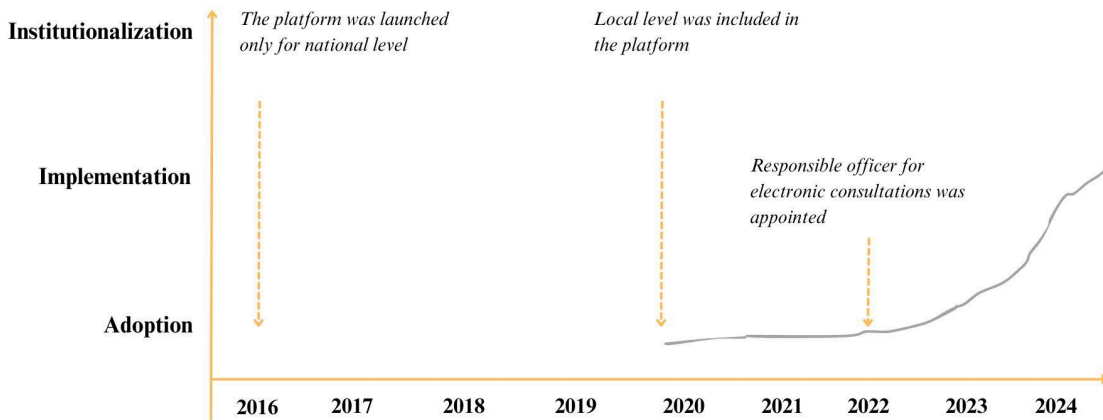
The diffusion degree of case studies and the key tipping points in their diffusion timeline are presented in the following graphs.



Graph 1. Digital Platform for Public Participation diffusion degree



Graph 2. Ndreqe diffusion degree



Graph 3. Government Platform for Public Consultation diffusion degree

4.2. Institutional factors

4.2.1. Regulative institutional elements

Findings from document analysis revealed that there are no specific laws or regulations organizing e-participation in Prishtina. From the analysis of fourteen documents regarding public participation, transparency, e-governance, and digital transformation at both local and national levels, in none of them was e-participation mentioned or regulated. The only type of e-participation that is formally regulated is electronic consultation. The use of digital tools is mostly regulated for e-government and transparency purposes. The following table presents the current state of regulations and policy documents addressing e-participation and electronic consultations in Prishtina.

| Document | Level | Regulation of e-participation | Regulation of electronic consultations |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------|-------------------------------|----------------------------------------|
| Regulations on Public Participation | | | |
| Law on Local Self-Government | National | | NO |
| Administrative Instruction (MLGA)_NR.06/2018 for Minimum Standards of Public Consultation in Municipalities | | | YES |
| Administrative Instruction (MLGA)_N0.04/2023 on Open Administration in Municipalities | | | YES |
| Strategy for Local Self-Government 2016-2026 | | | NO |
| Statute of the Municipality of Prishtina/ 2010 | Local | NO | NO |
| Action Plan for Transparency in Prishtina | | | YES |

| Regulations/strategies on digital transformation | | | |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------|----|----|
| Digital Agenda of Kosovo 2030 | | | |
| Kosovo Strategy for Electronic Government 2023-2027 | | | |
| Regulation_(QRK)_NR.06/2018 for Project Management in the Field of Information and Communication Technology | National | NO | NO |

Table 6: The regulation of e-participation and electronic consultations in Prishtina

To offer a clear picture of the process, a timeline of key laws and regulations guiding public participation in Prishtina is presented in the figure below.

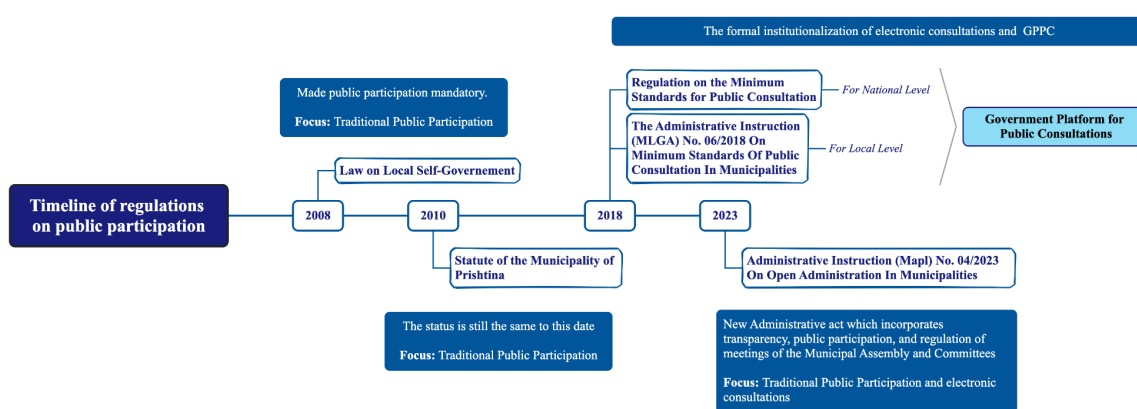


Figure 6: Timeline of key regulations governing public participation and electronic consultation in Prishtina, Kosovo (Own elaboration)

The findings show that only electronic consultation is formally regulated in Prishtina. The mandatory platforms for electronic consultations are the official website of the municipality and the Government Platform for Public Consultation. No other platforms are specified. Consequently, only the GPPC is formally regulated in comparison to two other case studies or any other DPP. However, the latest Administrative Instruction mentions that the municipality may use any other platforms or communication channels to increase public involvement.

The lack of laws or regulations for the implementation of e-participation through DPPs in Prishtina is also confirmed by interviews with public officials.

“No, we do not have any document that suggests or obliges us to use these platforms (except GPPC). For example, Digital Platform has been used at the time just because the local government wanted to.” (A8, semi-structured interview, 2024).

The same findings are confirmed also by the expert interviewees:

“As far as I know, because I am not aware of new updates that might have happened, but there is no applicable legislation in place for the utilization of these platforms, as per my current knowledge. All of these platforms (referring also to Digital Platform) were implemented based on the different political will or municipality’s objective” (A7, semi-structured interview, 2024).

The findings show an interesting pattern. There is a substantial emphasis on transparency (informing the public), public consultation, and e-consultations in these regulations. While other participatory mechanisms, such as co-production, receive comparatively less attention, except participatory budgeting. This shows a fragmented approach towards public participation in the regulative framework, with a focus mostly on one-way communication types of public participation and e-participation.

4.2.2. Cultural-cognitive institutional elements

My initial research framework focused solely on the regulative elements of institutions. However, the triangulation process proved highly successful, as the interviews uncovered another dimension: the cultural-cognitive elements of the institutions. The cultural-cognitive elements of institutions encompass multiple levels, from local cultural definitions to broad national ideologies, all of which shape and are shaped by individual and collective beliefs. These cultural elements, ranging from deeply embedded routines to more fluid beliefs, influence and reinforce institutional and organizational structures and behaviors (Scott, 2014). The findings revealed a set of cultural-cognitive elements negatively affecting the diffusion of e-participation in Prishtina.

Misunderstanding of e-participation

A significant challenge hindering e-participation initiatives in Prishtina is the widespread misunderstanding of what e-participation actually is. As Kosovo is new in the digital transformation of public administration, the digital illiteracy and understanding of these processes are evident among public officials. Many public officials, both at the local and national level, mistakenly equate e-participation solely with electronic consultation, e-services, transparency, or a specific platform like Prishtina Online (a website of the municipality) or e-Kosova (e-government portal). When asked how e-participation is implemented in Prishtina, this was the response from one of the local public officials:

- *“.. initially a contact person is appointed, in this case, it was the municipality Internal Audit who besides his official responsibility is also responsible for **implementing this e-participation as you are calling it, which in another form we have named Prishtina Online.** This is a municipality’s platform where announcements, emails, and contact persons*

are published. Then we receive questions from citizens or NGOs on different matters.” (A3, semi-structured interview, 2024).

There is a huge focus on electronic services and transparency which then is misunderstood as e-participation. Even though these concepts complement each other they are different and each serves a specific goal. There’s also a common belief that just posting on social media and official websites constitutes e-participation. This is more linked to a transparent and open government rather than to meaningful e-participation. Publishing just for the sake of transparency can be considered the first and the lowest level of e-participation which is information provision. But e-participation as explained in the second chapter entails so much more. To this misunderstanding, a huge contribution comes also from the lack of a general framework or regulation on e-participation and an overemphasis on transparency and e-services. Furthermore, the current regulations on public participation and transparency exacerbate the situation as there is an inconsistency of the terms used in various documents at the local and national levels.

Lack of Serious Commitment to Public Participation

Lack of serious commitment to public participation is another cultural-cognitive element hindering the diffusion of DPPs in public administration in Prishtina. Leadership often views it as reactive, one-way communication rather than a means to involve the public meaningfully. There is little motivation to engage with citizens’ feedback, which is often seen as unimportant. This attitude is evident in the enactment of GPPC by the public administration in Prishtina. Even though this is an interaction platform enabling two-way communication between the public and the government, currently it is being implemented only as a one-way communication platform from public to municipality. Citizens are consulted, but there is no feedback from the municipality on how the citizens’ contributions shaped the final outcome. The platform is used mainly to fulfill the minimal standards of public consultations without fostering a culture of partnership with citizens.

Lack of Political Will and Overemphasis on Politics

Political will seems to be essential for the successful diffusion of DPPs, especially when there are no strong regulations guiding e-participation. Unfortunately, in Prishtina, the implementation of e-participation is often dismissed as an unimportant investment. It doesn’t feature prominently on the leadership’s agenda, as it isn’t considered a ‘hot topic’ that could win votes. When IT projects are prioritized, it’s often more about claiming achievements during a mandate than enhancing citizens’ involvement. This is in line with Abusleme et al. (2020) political assumption which emphasizes that one of the main reasons why e-participation initiatives fail is because political bodies in their natural state do not intend to make processes more participatory. In e-democracy studies, this is referred to as a “middleman paradox”, where decision-makers often resist citizen participation due to fears of losing power and status (Randma-Liiv, 2022).

Successive governments fail to build on existing platforms and instead develop new ones, even when the old platforms were successful and have gained societal momentum. Findings show that this was the reason Ndreqe was dismissed by the municipality in favor of building their own platform; The Digital Platform for Public Participation. The same logic is still present, for instance, the national government recently launched the e-Municipality platform, which integrates features from our three case studies. It is like a one-stop-shop where citizens can report, be consulted, initiate ideas, and monitor Assembly meetings. At the same time, the municipality of Prishtina is preparing to upgrade Prishtina Online to include similar features. This reflects an overemphasis on political gains rather than sustainability and enhancement of e-participation.

Attitudes towards change and technology

Attitudes toward change and technology among public officials in Prishtina present another cultural-cognitive institutional element significantly hindering the diffusion process of DPPs. Fear of increased workload and pressure for timely feedback hold public officials back from adopting such technologies. In our case, this was more evident with DPPP and Ndreqe platforms. Unlike the GPPC, which allows citizens to comment only on existing open consultations, DPPP and Ndreqe empower citizens to initiate ideas/projects for their neighborhood or submit complaints. As a result, these platforms demand more effort from public administration. Furthermore, these platforms increase visibility and accountability, exposing everything to the public, including citizen inquiries and the municipality's response rate. Hence, the fear of transparency and exposure these platforms can bring makes leaders and public officials hesitant to adopt them. This was highlighted also by an e-participation expert involved in the Ndreqe platform:

"..the problem here is that, especially at the beginning, the problems we have with public officials, including the Municipality of Prishtina and also in other municipalities, is that if there are many inquiries/reporting, we will not be able to fix them in time and then it will look bad for us. So this is their mentality, it is not good to have many citizens' inquiries or complaints because we will look bad then...." (A12, semi-structured interview, 2024)

Furthermore, the fear of being replaced by technology makes public officials hesitant to adopt these platforms. This fear is exacerbated by the lack of clear communication from leadership regarding the role of these digital tools. Many officials misunderstand technology's purpose, seeing it as a potential threat rather than a tool to make their jobs easier and more effective. A clear example of this was presented by one of the public officials with extensive experience in e-governance and digital transformation:

"I have a concrete example with this product from Kosovo, Shqip.ai. It is a complete AI tool built in Kosovo that helps with transcription. For example, they even transcribed an assembly session of several hours in a few minutes, and they put it online to see what is possible. Do you know what was the feedback from the entire transcription office of the municipality? They said that since we are responsible for transcription they will remove us.....So there is a lack of

knowledge among public officials on what digital transformation really means, there is a huge fear that they will be replaced by technology.” (A4, semi-structured interview, 2024)

Lack of a growth mindset

In general, there is a lack of a growth mindset among public officials in Prishtina. Many consider these innovative tools as unclear, unpaid additional work rather than recognizing their potential benefits. This mindset has particularly hindered the deployment of the Digital Platform for Public Participation and Ndreqe. In the words of an e-participation expert involved with the Ndreqe platform:

“..in addition to other problems, which is the motivation of the staff, for example, when we cooperated with the Municipality of Prishtina for Ndreqe, they used to consider it as a favor they were doing to us, but technically they were doing their job. But their mindset was like we don't have it in our job description, this is an extra job we are doing, so it's like a clash with the mentality of the officials in the municipalities, the motive they have.” (A12, semi-structured interview, 2024)

This perception has made it difficult for Ndreqe to transition from adoption to full implementation. The lack of motivation to grow among public officials is fueled by organizational challenges such as low compensation and unclear communication from leadership. There is no clear strategy for capacity building, nor is there a connection between skills development, performance evaluation, and promotion. This demotivates public servants from pursuing further development.

4.3. Organizational factors

4.3.1. Bureaucracy

Among all interviews, bureaucratic organization of e-participation and public participation was one of the most frequently mentioned challenges of the public administration to successfully implement DPPs in Prishtina. There is no clear strategic orientation regarding e-participation or the implementation of DPPs. The municipality lacks a comprehensive strategy for e-participation, digital transformation, or even a communication strategy. Public participation planning is only briefly addressed in the Action Plan for Transparency in Prishtina. The only other relevant document I could find was a plan for public consultation² documents, which was not helpful. Decisions to adopt and implement these platforms are often reactive, driven by external funding and projects. This is particularly evident in the case of the Digital Platform for Public Participation and Ndreqe, as they lack the formal regulation afforded to the Government Platform for Public Consultation. Relying on external funds and projects to implement DPPs negatively impacts the diffusion degree and sustainability of a platform. For instance, prior to the Digital Platform for Public Participation, D+ successfully established a partnership with the municipality to adopt Ndreqe for enhancing citizen engagement in improving public services. However, Ndreqe couldn't move higher than the adoption level because shortly after the municipality had agreed to adopt it, they moved on to develop a new

² Which was not online but I had to write an email to the municipality to get access to it. Even though they are obliged to publish it on the website.

one in cooperation with the OSCE Mission in Kosovo. Hence, the municipality decided to drop Ndreqe in favor of adopting the Digital Platform for Public Participation as their primary DPP. This shift was not driven by the development of a comprehensive e-participation plan or long-term strategy as explained by a local IT official:

"We are failing to orient citizens, the orientation of citizens for public participation is mainly done based on international funds. For example, the OSCE Mission in Kosovo has financed the Digital Platform for Public Participation and we turned our focus on digitization. At that time, the Major tried to organize as few physical debates as possible to persuade citizens and us to use the Digital Platform for Public Participation." (A8, semi-structured interview, 2024)

Additionally, the municipality considered the Digital Platform for Public Participation as their own, which made them more likely to adopt it. In contrast, Ndreqe managed and owned by an NGO, did not have the same appeal. This confirms my expectation that governments tend to adopt more their own platforms compared to platforms that are managed by external actors.

Lack of a strategic orientation regarding e-participation brings another highly significant bureaucratic challenge such as the absence of clear guidelines outlining roles and responsibilities. This has negatively affected the diffusion of DPPs in Prishtina. In contrast, examples from Dutch, Scottish, and Spanish e-participation initiatives reveal that high diffusion degrees are positively correlated with clear and transparent rules and processes of e-participation (Randma-Liiv, 2022). Explaining the failure of the Digital Platform for Public Participation a local public official emphasized:

"... there is a lack of a mechanism that shows who is responsible and then the platform is simply shut down, it is inactive." (A4, semi-structured interview, 2024)

This then leads to a lack of accountability for the (non-) implementation of these platforms by the municipality. Public participation and implementation of DPPs are typically regulated by ad-hoc decisions from leadership, but there is no system in place to ensure the successful implementation of these platforms. Currently, the Digital Platform for Public Participation and Ndreqe are not being actively implemented in Prishtina. When these two platforms were initially adopted, an IT specialist was appointed by the leadership as a contact point for the successful implementation of the platforms. However, no controlling and accountability mechanisms were established to ensure their successful use. As emphasized by a local IT public official who was constantly engaged with the implementation of these platforms:

"So always you need to have a controlling mechanism in place because when you don't have it you can not follow who is doing what." (A8, semi-structured interview, 2024)

In contrast, the situation with the Government Platform for Public Consultation is somewhat different due to national regulations. According to the administrative instruction, the municipality has

appointed a responsible official for the GPPC, who oversees public consultation processes in the municipality. Despite this, the municipality has not established any monitoring or accountability mechanisms to ensure the platform's effective implementation.

National monitoring mechanisms

There are no national monitoring mechanisms in place for the implementation of the DPPP and Ndreqe, as these platforms are not governed by any national or local regulations. On the other hand, the implementation of the Government Platform for Public Consultation will now be monitored as part of the public consultation processes. With the new administrative act, the municipality is obliged to report for electronic consultation to two institutional bodies at the national level: 1) the Office for Good Governance (OGG) under the Office of the Prime Minister and 2) the Ministry of Local Government Administration (MLGA). However, the implementation of this platform was not monitored until now. When asked why the OGG didn't publish any reports on local governments' implementation of this platform, a public official from OGG said:

"...the annual reports for the local level are still not published in the GPPC because it wasn't our responsibility as per the Regulation for Minimum Standards for Consultations with the public. But now I believe that very soon we will start as an office with the training for the local level and with the implementation of the new Administrative Instruction for public consultations together with the MLGA because the MLGA is the responsible body for coordination at the local level." (A11, semi-structured interview, 2024)

On the other hand, when MLGA was asked if they monitor the implementation of electronic consultations through GPPC by the municipality they indicated:

"No, we monitor them only through the official websites, so on the official website, each municipality has its own links, for example, the budget, the assembly, the executive, the public consultations. In the consultation section they should have the consultation plan, the consultation notices that have been organized, the explanatory memorandum, and the final report of the public consultations" (A10, semi-structured interview, 2024)

However, the document analysis yielded different results. The old administrative act appoints MLGA as the main responsible unit for overseeing the implementation of the act and preparing the annual report for minimum standards of public consultation. However, it is nowhere mentioned that they are responsible for monitoring only the official website of the municipality. The lack of monitoring on the successful implementation of electronic consultation through GPPC has impacted the low level of informal institutionalization of this platform by the municipality of Prishtina.

Furthermore, the interviews and the document analysis revealed a very important national monitoring mechanism; the Agency of Information Society. This national agency under the Ministry of Internal Affairs is responsible for overseeing and managing digital solutions of all public institutions at national and local levels. It serves as a monitoring and controlling mechanism to ensure all the IT projects in public institutions are aligned with applicable laws and standards of the Republic of Kosovo. When it comes to this agency there are different perspectives on its role both from public officials and NGOs. Public officials view this agency more positively, while NGOs particularly those involved in developing digital solutions for the municipality, express a different perspective regarding the role of this agency. When asked about the role of AIS, this represents the common perspective among public officials:

“..there is a template where you get permission/approval from ASHI to go further with the procedures. ASHI does not hinder the process, ASHI makes sure that you can build an IT project that hasn't been developed before and you don't need to spend money for something that has been already developed. If the system/project was already developed they give it to you to adapt it towards your needs and make sure you own it. It has several 'checkpoints' before approving the project, so how this Agency is created and thought is very healthy.” (A4, semi-structured interview, 2024)

While NGO experts particularly the ones that were involved with Ndreqe and Digital Platform for Public Participation share a slightly different perspective. In the words of a public participation and democratization expert:

“I had the impression that they (AIS) wanted to centralize it, at least maybe for security reasons, I don't know, but recently many platforms have been developed in the framework of various projects, and of course, you know that not many of them are not in coordination with each other. Now someone develops a platform, someone else another, there have been different donors, different funds, aiming to do something good, but at the same time I spread it...” (A7, semi-structured interview, 2024)

They believe that the municipality is overly dependent on the agency's approval, which delays the implementation or upgrading of their websites and platforms. An e-participation expert involved with the Ndreqe platform said:

“For example, they don't even have the right sponsor posts on Facebook, they don't have the right to hire a company that maintains the website, for example. They have to depend on AIS or tendering procedures that take years, so in terms of staff and management, they have some complicated procedures in this aspect.” (A12, semi-structured interview, 2024)

The findings show that the roles and responsibilities are not yet clear among local and national bodies responsible for monitoring and implementation of electronic consultation and e-participation. This led

to an unclear process of e-participation which hindered the ability of the platforms to move beyond adoption (Ndreqe) or implementation (DPPP & GPPC).

4.3.2. Human resources

When it comes to human resources both experts and public officials consider it as a huge challenge significantly hindering the ability of the public administration in Prishtina to adopt, implement, and institutionalize these platforms. The implementation of these platforms is usually appointed as an additional task to existing public officials whose primary job is something else. So there are no new structures created that are responsible solely for overseeing the implementation of e-participation or public participation in general for that matter. The official responsible for implementing the GPPC is the same public official tasked with overseeing all public consultation processes for the municipality, whose official role is as the municipality's Internal Auditor. While responsible for the implementation of DPPP and Ndreqe.com, was an IT public official. This implies an increased workload for them on top of their primary duties which leads to difficulties in the successful implementation of current DPPs. Usually, it is only one person appointed which indicates insufficient staff for the implementation of these platforms. This was particularly evident during the implementation of interaction and co-production platforms such as Digital Platform for Public Participation and Ndreqe. Through these platforms citizens were able to initiate ideas and report a significant number of inquiries on various issues, which increased the workload across multiple municipal departments.

Beyond the issue of understaffing, another significant challenge is the lack of sufficient knowledge and skills in e-participation and technical expertise to implement DPPs. While IT officials are more experienced in hardware technology, they lack the capability to deploy digital solutions like DPPs. Public officials responsible for implementing the three case studies received training or guidelines on platform use, but findings indicate that further training on e-participation and digital transformation is still needed. As a municipal IT official noted:

“First of all, the municipal staff are not even trained for e-participation, they need to be prepared. I think that it is the most important process of a local government when you have the trained people.”- (A8, semi-structured interview, 2024)

However, skills development, performance evaluation, and promotion should be incorporated in a clear capacity-building strategy. Right now this process remains unclear, leaving public officials unmotivated for further development. The digital literacy gap among public officials and managers has created further problems such as procurement dependencies on external economic operators. In

many cases, the municipality was unable to draft correct contract terms, such as ensuring the ownership of the final product. As a result, when the contract ended, the operator took over the product, leaving the municipality back at square one. Although this scenario didn't apply to our three DPPs, it represents a significant risk to the sustainability of digital solutions in Prishtina. Hence, support from national bodies such as AIS becomes vital for capacity building and the successful deployment of digital solutions in municipalities.

4.3.3. Decision-makers' role

Decision-makers' roles have greatly impacted the diffusion of our three case studies, particularly of Digital Platform and Ndreqe, which are not regulated by any law or administrative instruction. Changes in local government bring new priorities and projects that do not usually align with those of its predecessor. For example, the Digital Platform for Public Participation reached a high diffusion rate in Prishtina, moving toward institutionalization. This success was largely due to the commitment of the previous government to advancing digital participation over traditional forms. However, after the government shift in 2021, the platform's implementation began to decline. It was no longer a priority, leading the public administration to neglect citizens' inquiries from the platform. This is a clear example of the powerful role of decision-makers support in DPP's diffusion in public administration in Prishtina. Ndreqe faced a similar situation. The platform initially benefited from good cooperation, but the shift in leadership was problematic. The new leadership needed to be reintroduced to the platform and everything had to be presented from the beginning, effectively restarting the cooperation process. This took time, including the effort to convince the new leadership to continue using the platform. As a result, the platform's usability for citizens was also affected. When citizens used the platform to report issues and engage in public life but didn't get feedback from the municipality they were discouraged.

Decision-makers' role is less significant when it comes to GPPC, mainly because the municipality is obliged by law to implement the platform. However, the municipality started using the platform only in 2022, two years after municipalities were included in the platform. This was affected by broader administrative procedures such organization of training, the lack of a responsible official for implementation of this platform, and also COVID-19. The appointment of a responsible person for the implementation of the GPPC was done at the end of 2022, by the new government one year after they came into power. Furthermore, for a period of two years, only 10 documents were published on GPPC which shows that it is still not implemented as much as it should be.

4.3.4. Financial resources

Contrary to existing literature (Chadwick, 2011; Batara et al., 2017), financial resources do not appear to be a significant challenge for the public administration in Prishtina in implementing the three case studies. Both public officials and experts come to agree that the deployment and maintenance of these tools is not a financial burden for the municipality. As one of the digital transformation experts indicated:

“So it’s not a financial problem, they have enough money, money is not a problem because they return millions at the end of the year.”(A5, semi-structured interview, 2024)

The municipality does not bear any financial burden for the utilization of the GPPC. All maintenance, development, and upgrade costs are covered at the national level. The same applies to Ndreqe, which was developed, maintained, and upgraded by D+. Regarding the Digital Platform for Public Participation, the municipality did not have any financial burden for the first five years. The OSCE Mission in Kosovo was responsible for the platform’s development and maintenance. However, when the OSCE wanted to hand over the platform to the municipality, the issue was not a lack of financial resources for its maintenance. Instead, it was the lack of political will to take over the platform.

4.3.5. Networks - Lack of a collaborative approach among stakeholders

The interview data analysis process revealed another emerging theme that was not initially included in my research model: the networks. As per Fountain’s (2001) Technology Enactment Framework networks refer to the formal and informal relationships and connections between individuals, organisations, and other actors involved in the technology adoption and enactment process. In this regard, the municipality of Prishtina had good cooperation with NGOs for the implementation of DPPs, particularly for Digital Platform and Ndreqe.com. However, the data revealed some interesting insights when it comes to how these relationships might impact the successful implementation of DPPs in Prishtina. From a public administration point of view, there are so many NGOs approaching the municipality with different projects based on their current objectives. Nevertheless, it is not usually very clear how these projects will help the municipality in the long term or how well these projects are aligned with the municipalities long-term goals. In general, there is no clear communication between the municipality and the NGOs to come to joint benefits for both of them. Consequently, this creates doubts and resistance in external projects from NGOs, which makes it harder for these projects to survive in such an environment. This was evident, especially in the case of Ndreqe, which was considered as an external platform managed by a NGO. Since what the platform

offered wasn't their priority at the time, there was resistance to accepting it. From public officials, it was more considered as a favor they were doing to this NGO rather than a good cooperation opportunity to enhance citizens' involvement. On the other hand, the very good formal cooperation with the OSCE Mission in Kosovo accelerated the implementation and the success of the Digital Platform for Public Participation for Public Participation. This cooperation emerged due to the alignment of objectives between the major at the time and the OSCE, both aiming to enhance public participation through innovative tools.

In the case of the Government Platform for Public Consultation, NGOs have played a very significant role in the institutionalization of it at the national level. The external pressure from NGOs monitoring the implementation of public consultation in this platform by the national bodies has pushed them to be more attentive and fulfill their obligations. Moving the platform from implementation to institutionalization of it at the national level. This is consistent with existing literature which confirms that external pressure can act as a catalyst for the adoption of communication technologies by public managers (Lee & Feeney, 2012). However, since these NGOs are more concerned with the national level the platform has not reached the same level of diffusion at the local level yet. The great cooperation with civil society as a success factor for the institutionalization of GPPC at the national level was elaborated further by a public official from OGG:

"Then also the Civikos platform is an umbrella organization for 200 NGOs which are also our partners in all processes. Not only do they monitor it as a process, but they also help us promote the platform and support it as a process..." (A11, semi-structured interview, 2024)

Good cooperation with NGOs was highlighted as a success factor in enhancing public participation and e-participation also from another public official from MLGA:

"...now there are municipalities that cooperate a lot with civil society, which play their role in informing the citizens, promote municipal public participation initiatives through their platforms, social media, I mean, I think that this has played a role.." (A10, semi-structured interview, 2024)

Furthermore, beyond NGO-municipality networks, there is a lack of intergovernmental cooperation and coordination. As explained earlier in the cultural-cognitive section there is a lack of joint efforts in the development and implementation of e-participation initiatives in Kosovo. This is often translated into a duplication of projects (e-Municipality and upgrade of Prishtina Online) and a lack of unified action. This reflects a weak intergovernmental cooperation network which is hindering the success and sustainability of e-participation initiatives in Prishtina, Kosovo. Hence, as Yang (2003) highlights, there is a need for better strategic management building stronger intergovernmental relations, and collaboration with interest groups and think tanks. The findings are in line with Fountain (2001)

emphasizing that strong, well-functioning networks can enhance the likelihood of a technology adoption, while weak or fragmented ones can hinder it.

4.4. Analysis and discussion

The findings confirm the complex interplay among institutional and organizational factors in determining the diffusion degree of DPPs in Prishtina. It is important to emphasize that even though different factors might be more influential for a specific diffusion degree, the interplay between them affects the whole e-participation and DPPs diffusion process. Hence, to answer my first research question, for the first part of the analysis, I will focus on the most significant factors affecting each stage. Reflecting on my conceptual framework I will then elaborate more on the interconnectedness between institutional and organizational factors affecting the whole diffusion process of DPPs in Prishtina. The last section will answer my second research question on how these factors affect the diffusion degree of different types of DPPs.

4.4.1. Adoption

Adoption presents the first degree of diffusion of a DPP. At this level the public administration becomes aware of the DPP, analyzes it, and decides whether to acquire it or not (Steinbach et al., 2019). The most influential factor negatively impacting this stage is the lack of regulations. As Kim et al. (2009) argue regulations play a significant role in preventing resistance to technology adoption by government employees. Furthermore, regulations aid the sustainability of the platforms in the long run (Randma-Liiv, 2022). This becomes even more relevant in a developing country with ongoing institutional reforms where public participation is merely driven by institutional reforms and legitimacy. The lack of regulations is then reflected also in the bureaucratic organisation of e-participation with a lack of clear guidelines and strategic orientation towards e-participation. As a result, platforms that are not formally regulated face more difficulties in the process of adoption by the municipality in comparison to the platforms that are formally regulated. In the absence of regulations, in Prishtina's context, decision-makers' support and political will become determinant whether a platform gets adopted or not by the municipality.

4.4.2. Implementation

This is the second degree of diffusion where the DPP is still in experimental status within the organization. The organization is in a state of transition where old and new processes are being aligned (Steinbach et al., 2019). New roles and structures emerge, resulting in a more complicated diffusion degree than adoption. This stage inherits the factors influencing the adoption of a DPP, but

the situation becomes more complex with other factors coming into play. For implementation, other organizational factors such as human resources become very significant. The lack of sufficient and capable staff to integrate the platform within public participation processes negatively affects the possibility of a platform to move from adoption to implementation. Additionally, cultural-cognitive elements of institutions negatively affect the successful implementation of a DPP. Fear of increased workload and timely feedback can hold public officials back from integrating the platform within existing traditional processes of public participation. This was especially evident with interaction and co-production platforms in Prishtina. In this regard, confirming the existing literature (David et al., 2023; Randma-Liiv 2023), the findings show that decision-makers' support is a vital factor in overcoming these challenges. The strong support from the mayor of the Digital Platform for Public Participation was a determinant success factor for the implementation of this platform. This way the decision-makers step out in the role of change agents actively supporting, reinforcing, and promoting a platform, positively influencing higher diffusion degrees.

4.4.3 Institutionalization

Institutionalization presents the highest level of diffusion of a DPP. This is the phase where the DPP has become embedded in the daily operations of an organization. It is now a standard, unquestioned part of the organizational routine when it comes to e-participation or public participation processes (Steinbach et al., 2019; Randma-Liiv, 2022). The presence of regulations for the utilization of a platform positively affects the adoption, implementation, and formal institutionalization of a DPP. However, the findings show that this is not enough for a platform to become fully institutionalized. Informal institutionalization goes beyond merely implementing formal rules; it involves internalizing these rules so they shape the daily practices, beliefs, and norms within the organization. Achieving informal institutionalization requires not just the establishment of formal guidelines, but also the active support from powerful actors, such as leadership and public officials, who must perceive the DPP as desirable (Randma-Liiv, 2022). In this regard, while regulative aspects of institutions facilitate the formal institutionalization of a platform, cultural-cognitive aspects of institutions in Prishtina seem to hinder the informal institutionalization of a platform. They play a vital role in the sustainability and informal institutionalization of a platform. As we have seen even when a platform has reached the implementation phase, a lack of political will and prioritization can lead to the abandonment of the platform by the public administration. Moreover, in an institutional context where leadership shows limited commitment to meaningful public participation and prioritizes political gains, the sustainability and the institutionalization of platforms are often sacrificed for new political priorities and projects. Ndreqe and the Digital Platform for Public Participation were clear examples of this as explained earlier. In conclusion, the weak institutional culture of public participation/e-participation in Prishtina shows that institutionalizing such platforms requires more than just regulations. These

regulations need to be backed up by informal cognitive-cultural factors for them to become embedded in the organization's environment. Hence, there is a need for substantial cultural and organizational change regarding e-participation and public participation for these platforms to become institutionalized in Prishtina.

4.4.4 The interplay between institutional and organizational factors

As we can see there is a complex interplay between all these factors in various amplitudes, which together influence the diffusion of e-participation in Prishtina. Analyzing the factors in isolation might obscure the complexity of the situation and provide wrong assumptions and recommendations.

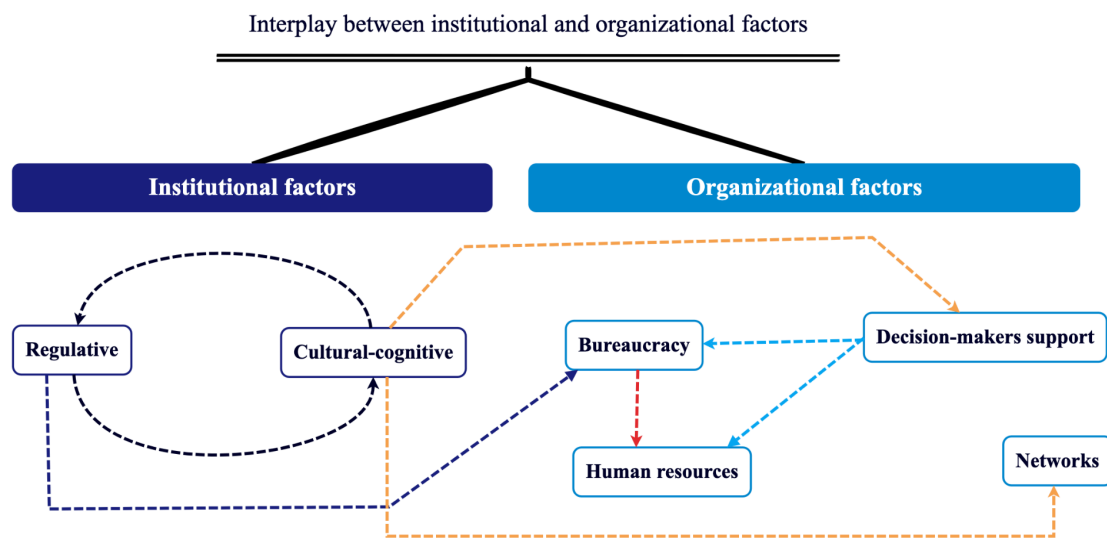


Figure 7. The interplay between institutional and organizational factors affecting the diffusion of DPPs in Prishtina (own elaboration)

An institutional perspective emphasizes the importance of understanding both formal and informal institutions and their interactions (Fountain, 2007). Furthermore, Scott (2014) highlights that “rules, norms, and meaning arise in interaction, and they are preserved and modified by human behaviour” [p.57]. The findings confirm that regulations are affected by the overall cultural-cognitive aspects of institutions towards e-participation and public participation in Prishtina. Insufficient understanding and commitment toward e-participation are reflected in the regulations and strategies analyzed. Technology is mostly regulated for e-government and transparency purposes, followed by a focus mostly on one-way communication methods such as public consultations and electronic consultations. The insufficient commitment towards effective public participation is also reflected in the evaluation of public participation. The evaluation of public participation initiatives at the local level tends to focus more on quantitative measures than qualitative outcomes. For example, the main focus is the number of public consultations and meetings held, rather than assessing what happened to the citizens'

feedback and how it influenced the final outcome. This creates an enforcing feedback loop between regulative and cognitive elements of institutions negatively affecting meaningful e-participation in Prishtina. Furthermore, the lack of formal regulation on e-participation contributes to a disoriented bureaucratic e-participation process, with a lack of a long-term strategy, clear guidelines, and internal controlling mechanisms governing the implementation of DPPs. This is then reflected in human resource challenges such as the inability of public officials to fully integrate DPPs as part of their routine due to heavy workloads. Hence, a well-embedded and clear organization of e-participation would also help overcome these challenges. Two other significant factors that impact the diffusion degree are the decision-makers' role and the networks. Both of these factors are highly affected by the overall cultural-cognitive institutional elements. A very political focus affects the ability of stakeholders for joint and coordinated digital solutions. Currently, it's more of a solo dance, many times with overlapping projects.

4.4.5 How different types of DPPs are affected by these institutional and organizational factors?

The findings show that mostly cultural-cognitive institutional elements negatively influence the diffusion of interaction and co-production platforms in Prishtina. Fear of increased workload and timely feedback provision has hindered the diffusion degree of co-production and interaction platforms like the Digital Platform for Public Participation and Ndreqe. These concerns seem to be less significant for the GPPC platform although it is an interaction platform. This can be explained by Fountain's 'technology enactment' and 'objective technology' concepts. At the organizational level, enacted technologies refer to the specific features of a technology that are implemented and integrated into existing information systems. On the other hand, objective technology presents the full range of possible features that are available but not chosen for use by the public administration (Puron-Cid & Gil-Garcia, 2004). In our case, the objective technology presents the real type of GPPC which is an interactive platform enabling two-way communication between the public and the municipality. However, the municipality is currently using it only as a consultation platform with one-way communication, from citizens to the government. This reveals how public administration's mindset and lack of serious commitment toward public participation can shape the way technology is being used despite its technological features. Responding to citizens and maintaining a culture of two-way communication is not prioritised and is often dismissed under the justification of heavy workload. The findings show that as a result of these cultural-cognitive institutional elements, information and consultation platforms (*one-way communication*) tend to be more widely adopted by the public administration in Prishtina than co-production and interaction platforms.

5. Conclusions

This research explored how institutional and organizational factors affected the diffusion degree of DPPs in Prishtina. By examining the stages of diffusion - adoption, implementation, and institutionalization this study aimed to understand how these factors influence each stage within the context of local government in Prishtina.

5.1 The influence of institutional and organisational factors in diffusion degrees of DPPs

The findings revealed that the diffusion of DPPs is deeply intertwined with the broader institutional and organizational environment, where factors such as regulations, cultural-cognitive elements of institutions, decision-maker support, and human resources play critical roles. The findings are consistent with Fountain's conclusion that technology, institutions, and organizations must evolve together, as e-government is more than just introducing web-based technologies (Yang, 2003). Institutional factors, particularly regulations, provide a regulatory framework that positively influences each stage of diffusion, contributing to a platform's sustainability. The finding aligns with the literature, which highlights the importance of regulatory frameworks in facilitating the diffusion of DPPs (Falco & Kleinhans, 2018; Fegert, 2023; Kim et al., 2009). However, while regulations are crucial, they are not sufficient on their own to ensure the institutionalization of a platform. Therefore, the findings are supported by existing literature which underscores the importance of a supportive culture and leadership as mandatory for the implementation and institutionalization of e-participation (Fountain, 2001; Radima-Liiv, 2022). Furthermore, the findings suggest that without addressing organizational challenges - such as insufficient, unqualified, and unmotivated staff, DPPs are unlikely to move beyond the adoption or maximum implementation phase. This observation is supported by the literature, which indicates that successful implementation and institutionalization of digital tools require not just regulatory support but also a well-equipped and motivated workforce (Chadwick, 2011; Fegert, 2023). Furthermore, Roger (1983) argues the implementation of innovative solutions is more successful when relevant actors coordinate, share resources, and have joint ownership. Consequently, preventing overlaps and creating synergies. Currently, in Prishtina weak cooperation networks are negatively affecting the diffusion and sustainability of DPPs. The absence of coordinated efforts and collaboration among stakeholders creates duplications or a pile of new platforms which hinder the diffusion and sustainability of platforms.

5.1.2. The influence of institutional and organisational factors in different types of DPPs

Moller & Olafsson (2018) argue that different types of digital tools may face varying levels of resistance or acceptance depending on their functionality and the demands they place on users. The findings confirmed that in Prishtina, platforms designed for interaction and co-production face more resistance from the public administration. This was mainly due to the higher demands they place on public administration in terms of workload and timely feedback. However, consistent with Fountain's (2001) 'enactment technology' the findings show how a specific technology can be shaped by organizational and institutional factors. In our case, GPPC being an interaction platform is currently being used as a consultation platform (one-way communication). Therefore, it encounters less resistance to adoption by the public administration in Prishtina. The findings are consistent with existing literature, which emphasizes that governments predominantly choose one-way communication strategies (Kleinhans et al., 2015).

5.2. Implication for Practice and Policy

The findings of this research have several implications for both practice and policy in the context of enhancing the diffusion of e-participation in Prishtina. In Kosovo's context with ongoing administrative reforms and digital transformation, it is crucial to not consider e-participation solely as the development of some projects/platforms. As Randma-Liiv (2022) rightfully argues e-participation should instead be "regarded as a process of long-term institutional change requiring the ongoing attention and support of politicians and managers" [p.347]. In this regard, the following recommendations can be given:

Strengthening Regulatory Frameworks: There is a need for more comprehensive and clear regulations regarding e-participation and public participation. E-participation should be included as part of digital transformation and reforms of public administration. Having citizens on board from the beginning of this process can increase the acceptance level among citizens for digital transformation. If e-participation is regulated as a strategic orientation of the whole country it will also aid better collaboration and coordination among institutional bodies and external stakeholders such as NGOs.

Cultivating a supportive institutional and organizational culture: Efforts should be made to foster a culture within public administration that values innovation, embraces digital tools, and prioritizes citizen engagement. This is a more complex task as culture is harder to change, it entails a lot of other factors and stakeholders, and it requires more time. However, a shift in the regulations might be a good start to influence a cultural shift towards meaningful e-participation. Furthermore, digital transformation in public administration should be backed up by a well-developed capacity-building

strategy. This could also help shift the perception of technology as a threat to job security while recognizing it as a tool to enhance efficiency and improve job performance.

Addressing bureaucratic and human resource challenges: Public participation should not be considered as a side job or just an administrative task. This reinforces a weak institutional and organizational culture of meaningful public participation. Furthermore, it is also aggravating bureaucratic and human resources challenges such as heavy workload and an unclear process. Thus, the municipality should create responsible units that develop a strategic orientation of the organization to increase public participation and leverage the potential of e-participation. In this sense, the accommodation of e-participation may involve new roles and distribution of work to accommodate DPPs, leading to higher diffusion degrees of e-participation in Prishtina.

Enhancing Strong Networks: There is a need for joint and coordinated efforts towards e-participation and digital transformation for the process to be sustainable and successful. National-local coordination should be enhanced in this regard as for now this idea of solo dancing is creating a chaotic and unsustainable development of e-participation in Kosovo. NGOs need to be more attentive in this process and not constantly develop new platforms that might hinder the capability of the public administration to keep up. Additionally, stronger promotion, monitoring, and support from NGOs toward e-participation is needed. In general, a joint strategic orientation involving all stakeholders is desperately needed for e-participation to become embedded within the public administration in Kosovo.

5.3. Future Research Directions

While this research provides valuable insights on the diffusion of DPPs in Prishtina, it also opens up several avenues for future research. Further studies could explore the diffusion of DPPs from a citizens' perspective, technological factors, and digital literacy among citizens. This could help public institutions in Kosovo to better understand the situation and develop a strategic orientation on how to increase e-participation and e-democracy levels. Another area with high interest would be comparative studies involving other municipalities or countries in the Western Balkan. This could provide interesting insights on the nature of institutional and organizational influence on the diffusion of DPPs and e-participation in the region.

In conclusion, this research underscores the importance of considering the complex interplay of institutional and organizational factors in understanding the diffusion of DPPs. Additionally, analyzing the three degrees of e-participation diffusion provided a more comprehensive understanding of the entire process beyond solely one degree. The barriers identified in this study can assist the local government in Prishtina, in improving the implementation and institutionalization of DPPs, leading to a more successful e-participation process.

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Appendix 2: Description of case studies

Government Platform for Public Consultations (GPPC) - Interaction platform

This is a national-wide public consultation platform established in February 2017 after the approval of the Regulation for Minimal Standards of Public Consultation. The goal of the platform is threefold: a) it aims to facilitate public consultation processes of government agencies on involving relevant stakeholders in the decision-making processes; b) it fosters communication between public bodies and the public towards a participatory policy and decision-making process; c) it aims to increase the transparency and the accountability of public bodies (Zyra për Qeverisje të Mirë në kuadër të Zyrës së Kryeministrit, 2021). In 2020, the platform expanded to accommodate the local government, as initially included only national public institutions. This study was focused only on the adoption and implementation of this platform by the local government in Prishtina. The Office for Good Governance (OGG) under the Office of the Prime Minister is responsible for the management and monitoring of the platform. Each municipality has an account in the platform for utilization of it.



Image 1: Government Platform for Public Consultation - homepage

Source: Platforma e Konsultimeve Publike

The platform enables two-way communication between the government and citizens. It offers the opportunity to choose the institutions and open consultations you want to participate in. Every institution can open a public consultation on the platform for a specific policy or strategic document. Stakeholders' comments and contributions are not anonymous and can be seen by everyone. On the other hand, the government is required to publish a report specifying what happened with these comments, establishing a feedback loop. The platform has been criticized for its complex process of submitting comments, responding to citizens' feedback, and the lack of accessibility features (Zyra për Qeverisje të Mirë në kuadër të Zyrës së Kryeministrit, 2021). However, the commenting section has been improved allowing citizens to comment directly on the platform now. To increase citizens' participation and keep them updated, you can subscribe to any institution of your interest to receive updates for open consultations. The platform is available in three languages: Albanian, English and Serbian. It has a very simple interface and functionalities. The platform is mainly developed for public consultations where only the government has the opportunity to initiate a consultation process in the

platform. It doesn't offer other features such as surveys, idea creation, voting, discussion forums, mapping, etc. Currently, the platform is deployed only in a web-based technology, which interface is not adopted for a mobile version, nor does it have an application. This affects the accessibility of the platform especially since only 40% of households have a PC, while 90% of citizens have a mobile phone (A5, semi-structured interview, 2024). It offers statistical data for the utilization of the platform from different institutions. Based on these technical features, the platform's goal, and the type of citizen-government relationship it enables this platform falls under an interaction platform as per Falco & Kleinhan's (2018) typology of DPPs.

The Digital Platform for Public Participation - Co-production platform

The platform was initiated by the OSCE Mission in Kosovo, following a civil society's goal to enhance public participation. The aim was to create participatory mechanisms that would positively influence decision-making processes in Kosovo (OSCE Mission in Kosovo, 2016). At the same time, the local government at the time aimed to digitalize the public participation process, seeking to reach a broader, non-partisan audience. An external IT company developed the platform, which was launched in 2016. The municipality of Prishtina was responsible for managing and implementing it. OSCE handled maintenance, training of public officials, and promotion of the platform. Beyond this, the OSCE had no further role, leaving full responsibility to Prishtina.

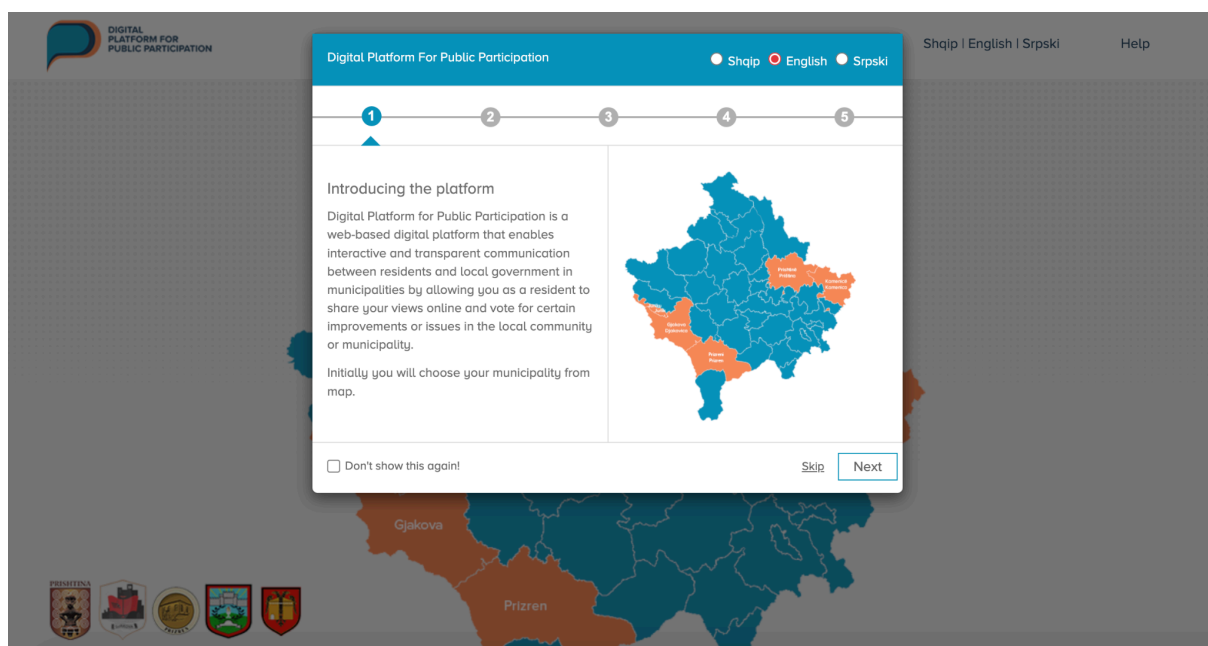


Image 2: Digital Platform for Public Participation - Homepage

Source: Platforma Digjitalë per Pjesemarrje te Publikut

This is a more advanced platform including various technological features that allow citizens to propose ideas, vote on projects, map issues, discuss topics, and request solutions or improvements for their neighborhoods. Everyone can navigate the platform, but to interact in it such as voting, and commenting you need to log in. This means that citizens can not give their input anonymously. It also enables the municipality to post projects, initiate discussions, and consult citizens on different matters, fostering co-production. It includes interactive maps that display entries by neighborhood, showing activity levels and municipal work areas. The platform has a user-friendly interface and it is available in three languages: Albanian, Serbian, and English. The platform demonstrates strong interoperability,

as each municipal department is notified of citizen inputs relevant to their department. It has a good interface, although it is only web-based, which again poses an accessibility challenge for citizens in Kosovo. The platform's technological capabilities and the type of citizen-government relationship it enables position it as a co-production platform. Many ideas proposed through the platform were incorporated into the municipality's plans for specific neighbourhoods. The platform is not currently being used by the municipality of Prishtina.

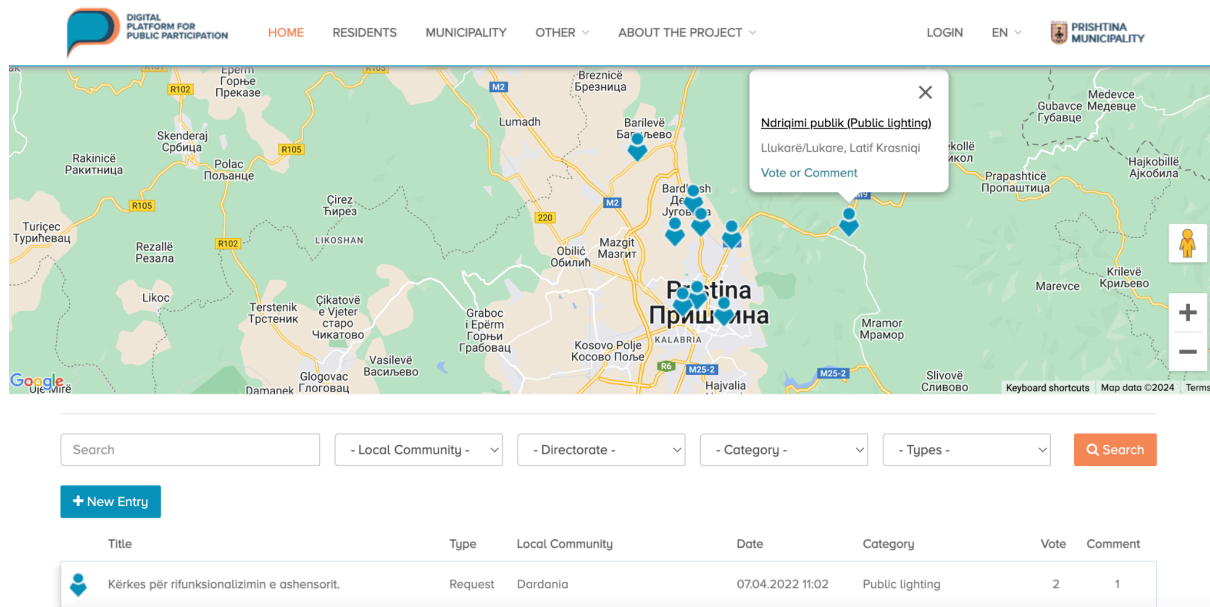


Image 3: Inquiries page - Municipality of Prishtina
Source: Platforma Digjitale per Pjesemarrjen e Publikut

Ndreqe - interaction/reporting platform

Ndreqe is a platform that is based on mySociety's FixMyStreet. It was developed by Democracy Plus (D+) in partnership with the National Democratic Institute (NDI). The platform was developed to involve citizens in resolving public service issues in their municipalities. Since municipalities often lack sufficient staff to monitor public services continuously, the platform allows citizens to report issues directly, helping improve services more quickly. It also provides citizens with an easy tool to report problems in their communities. The municipal services that can be reported are sewage, public lighting, road signs, garbage, and other public services offered by the municipality. Contrary to the other two platforms, Ndreqe allows citizens to report issues anonymously. Citizens' reports are displayed on an interactive map, enabling the local government to address the issues effectively. Furthermore, it provides reports on the number of inquiries per municipality, highlighting which issues have been resolved and which are still pending.

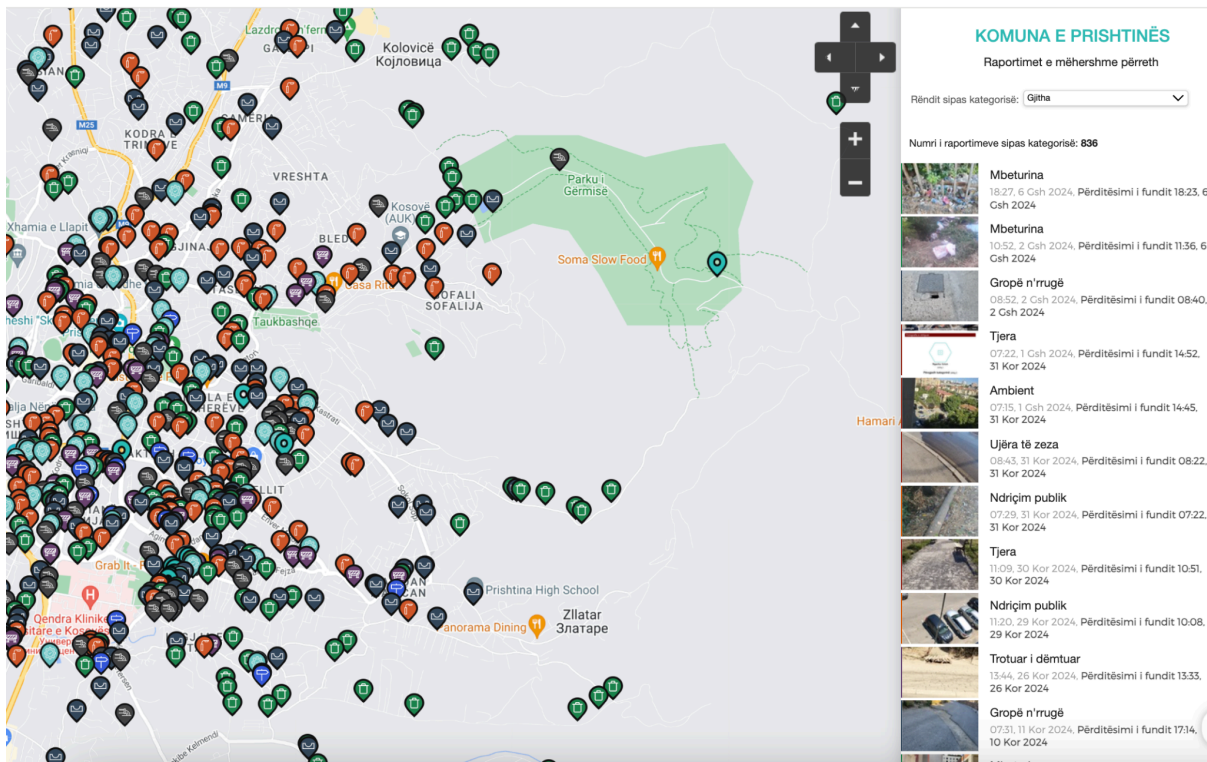


Image 4. Citizens' reports are displayed in an interactive map - Municipality of Prishtina
Source: Ndreqe

Democracy Plus owns and manages the platform and it has established partnerships with nearly every municipality in Kosovo. Each municipality has an account on the platform, allowing them to log in, communicate with citizens and address reported issues. The platform also sends notification to responsible public officials within the municipality for any citizen's report on the platform. In contrast to two other platforms, this is the only platform that has developed a mobile app increasing its sustainability and accessibility among Kosovo citizens. However, the platform is offered only in the Albanian language which then presents accessibility and inclusivity challenges for all citizens. It is quite user-friendly as it allows you to directly report an issue without having to navigate in the platform to find where to report. Furthermore, it provides video guides on how to use it and a comprehensive FAQ section. The platform remains active, with inquiries continuing through 2024.

Appendix 3: Interview guide

Establishment of contact: Hello and welcome to this interview. First of all, I would like to thank you for your time and willingness to participate in this interview as part of my master's thesis. As I have informed you via email, I am currently conducting these types of interviews as part of my fieldwork for my master's thesis.

More details about my research: My research focuses on institutional and organizational factors that may affect the ability of the public administration in Pristina to adopt Digital Platforms for Public Participation. Through this interview, how certain institutional and organizational factors within the public administration in Prishtina affect how widely different Digital Participatory Platforms (DPPs) are used.

Duration and structure: The interview will be *conducted online*, as I am currently in the Netherlands. The duration will be 1h, with 4 main open questions mostly regarding the implementation of e-participation and digital platforms for public participation used by the municipality of Prishtina. If during the interview you don't feel comfortable to answer any particular questions, we will move on to other questions. Feel free to ask for further explanations during any part of the interview. However, please keep in mind that there are no good or bad answers, I am mostly interested to hear your perspective and experience.

Respondent Consent: The data will be used solely for study purposes. To protect your privacy, the interview will be anonymised and your personal data will remain confidential. Before starting the interview, I would like to voice-record the interview for transcription purposes. Do I have your permission to record this interview?

| Questions | Interviewee | Prompts | Interviewee |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Based on your own experience, can you tell me how a process of e-participation is implemented in Prishtina? | Public officials & Experts | Which aspects went in the right direction? | Public Officials |
| | | Which challenges were encountered? | |
| | | Who has been responsible for the implementation of e-participation in Prishtina? | |
| | | Which platforms are usually used for e-participation? | |
| How would you describe the current guidelines or protocols for the adoption of such digital platforms for the enhancement of public participation in Prishtina? | Public officials & Experts | How was the e-participation included in the municipality's plan for public consultation? | Public Officials |
| | | How does the municipality track and report the use of the Online Platform for Public Consultation by public officials? | |
| Can you tell me how the X platform works? Can you share an example on how the municipality used the platform? | Public officials & Experts who were involved in the development and management of Digital Platform and Ndreqe | Which aspects went in the right direction? | Public officials & Experts who were involved in the development and management of Digital Platform and |
| | | Which challenges were encountered? | |
| | | Who has been responsible for its implementation? | |

| | | | |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------|
| | | Can you tell me how citizens' comments you receive from these platforms are handled by the municipality? How is the process after you get a request/inquiry from citizens? | Ndreqe |
| In your opinion what factors influence the successful implementation and adoption of the X Platform? | Public officials & Experts | Can you tell me about any financial challenges or benefits associated with the implementation of X platform/DPPs in general? | Public officials & Experts |
| | | What about the technical benefits or challenges associated with the adoption/implementation of X platform/DPPs in general? | |
| | | How are these technical issues addressed? Can you provide a specific example where a technical issue was resolved? | |
| | | What about human resources, can you tell me more about this challenge? (If they mention human resource challenges) | |
| | | How would you describe the role of leadership/decision-makers toward the adoption of these platforms? | |

Table 7: Interview Questions

Appendix 4: List of respondents

| Respondent | Title | Level |
|------------|----------------------------------------------------|---------------------|
| A1 | Civic Tech Expert | International NGO |
| A2 | Public Participation Expert | Local NGO |
| A3 | Public Information Coordinator | Local Government |
| A4 | E-governance expert and high-level public official | Local Government |
| A5 | Digital Transformation Expert | International NGO |
| A6 | E-governance Expert | National Government |
| A7 | Public Participation and Democratisation Expert | International NGO |
| A8 | IT public official | Local Government |
| A9 | Public Participation Expert | Local NGO |

| | | |
|-----|------------------------------------------------------|---------------------|
| A10 | Public Official / Transparency department | National Government |
| A11 | Public Official/ Electronic consultations department | National Government |
| A12 | E-Participation Expert | Local NGO |

Table 8: List of respondents

Appendix 5: Codebook

| Category/Theme | Code |
|-------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|
| Regulative institutional elements | Presence/absence of internal regulations on e-participation |
| | Presence/absence of national regulations on e-participation |
| Cultural-Cognitive institutional elements | Misunderstanding of e-participation |
| | No Serious Commitment Towards Public Participation |
| | Lack of Political Will |
| | Very Political Focus |
| | Mindset of Public Officials |
| | Fear of Increased Workload |
| | Fear of Replacement by Technology |
| | Fear or Transparency |
| Bureaucracy | Lack of Strategic Orientation |
| | Lack of Clear Guidelines |
| | Presence/absence of a responsible unit |
| | Local monitoring mechanisms |
| | National monitoring mechanisms role |
| | Lack of Feedback/ Reporting |
| | Low wages |
| Decision-makers role | Decision-makers support |
| | Challenges with new leadership/Change of governments |
| | Lack of Prioritization |
| Human Resources | Heavy Workload |
| | Lack of Staff |
| | Lack of Knowledge/Skills |
| | Lack of Training |
| | Incorrect Contract Terms |
| Financial Resources | Procurement System Dependence |
| | Financial Challenges |
| | Affordable Costs |
| Networks | No Financial Burden/Costs |
| | Local Government - NGO relations |
| | Intergovernmental relations |

Table 9: Codebook

Appendix 6: List of documents analysed

| No | Name | Type | Author | Retrieved from | Level | Variable |
|----|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|-------------|
| 1 | Administrative Instruction (Mapl) No. 04/2023 For Open Administration In Municipalities | Administrative instruction/regulation | Ministry of Local Government Administration | Official Gazette of the Republic of Kosovo | National | Regulations |
| 2 | Administrative Instruction (Mlga) No. 06/2018 On Minimum Standards Of Public Consultation In Municipalities | Administrative instruction/regulation | Ministry of Local Government Administration | Official Gazette of the Republic of Kosovo | National | Regulations |
| 3 | Regulation (Grk) No. 06/2018 On Project Management In The Field Of Information And Communication Technology | Regulation | Government of the Republic of Kosovo | Official Gazette of the Republic of Kosovo | National | Regulations |
| 4 | Action Plan for Transparency in the Capital Prishtina 2023-2026 | Strategic document | Municipality of Prishtina | Official website of Municipality of Prishtina | Local | Regulations |
| 5 | Statute of the Municipality of Prishtina | Statute | Municipality of Prishtina | Official website of Municipality of Prishtina | Local | Regulations |
| 6 | Report On The Assessment Of Transparency In The Municipality January-December 2023 | Report | Ministry of Local Government Administration | Official website of the Ministry of Local Government Administration | National | Regulations |
| 7 | Report on the fulfilment of the obligations of the municipalities from the European Agenda for the period January - December 2023 | Report | Ministry of Local Government Administration | Official website of the Ministry of Local Government Administration: | National/Local | Regulations |
| 8 | Digital Agenda of Kosovo 2030 | Strategic document | Ministry of Economy | Official website of Ministry of Economy | National | Regulations |
| 9 | Kosovo Strategy for Electronic Government 2023-2027 | Strategic document | Ministry of Internal Affairs | Official website of the Ministry of Internal Affairs | National | Regulations |
| 10 | Law No. 03/l-040 For Local Self-Government | Law | Assembly of the Republic of Kosovo | Official Gazette of the Republic of Kosovo | National | Regulations |

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| 11 | Public Consultation Monitoring Report in Municipalities for the year 2023 | Report | Kosovo Local Government Institute (KLG I) | Official website of KLG I | Local/NGO | Regulations |
| 12 | Plan of Documents for Public Consultations | Guide | Municipality of Prishtina | Official Request for Access in Public Documents | Local | Regulations |
| 13 | Strategy For Local Self-government 2016 - 2026 | Strategic document | Ministry of Local Government Administration | Official website of the Ministry of Local Government Administration | National/ Local | Regulations |
| 14 | Municipal Performance Grant Rules For Fiscal Year 2023 Based On Performance Evaluation For Fiscal Year 2021 | Regulation | Ministry of Local Government Administration | Official website of the Ministry of Local Government Administration | National/ Local | Regulations |

Table 10: List of documents analyzed

