

CITIZENS' INSIGHTS ON DIGITAL GOVERNANCE IMPACT IN TIRANA DISTRICT, ALBANIA

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Abstract: The digitalization of public services in Albania has been a transformative leap that has significantly improved the interaction between the government and its citizens. In an era marked by rapid technological advancements, the Albanian government has taken substantial strides toward modernization and widespread technological utilization in its services by establishing an online platform. This study aims to explore the impact of this digital transformation on public services in Albania, focusing on citizens' perspectives. Through a structured questionnaire administered to 385 respondents in developed cities within the Tirana District (including Rrogozhina, Kavaja, Vora, Kamza, and Tirana) from May 2023 to August 2023, this research assesses citizens' utilization and perceptions of digital public services. The goal is to determine inclusivity, equality, information adequacy, service availability, and the advantages and challenges encountered during this modernization process. Findings suggest that digitalization has notably streamlined administrative processes, providing citizens with faster and more straightforward experiences. Data analysis reveals that 95% of participants were registered on the e-Albania platform and owned smartphones. However, 82% of respondents sought assistance from acquaintances rather than directly accessing services via the e-Albania Portal. For a more comprehensive digital transformation, sustained investments in technological infrastructure and information security by Albanian authorities are crucial. Equally critical is educating and training citizens in digital skills and the benefits of online services, ensuring a broader and more successful adoption of these services. These efforts will contribute to a more inclusive, efficient, and citizen-centric digital landscape in Albania.

Keywords: digital governance, public services, insights, perspectives, Tirana district.

1. INTRODUCTION

This study explores the digital governance in the Tirana District, Albania, where 95% of all public services are available online through the e-Albania platform. Digital governance or e-Government is the provision of services by government institutions through information and communication technology to citizens, businesses, and other categories. It is seen as a way to improve governance, reduce costs, and increase access and efficiency (Heeks, 1999). However, it also poses challenges and implications for the society and the administration. Tirana, as the capital and largest city of Albania, offers a rich and diverse context for examining the impacts of digital governance on the daily lives of its residents. The study aims to evaluate the current situation of digital governance in the Tirana District, and to identify and amplify the voices of citizens in rural and urban municipalities. The study uses questionnaires, interviews, and analysis to capture the experiences and perceptions of individuals navigating the digital aspects of governance. The study hopes to contribute valuable insights that can inform policy decisions, foster improvements, and shape the future of digital governance initiatives in Tirana and Albania. The study also discusses the new possibilities and challenges for the digitization of public services related to data extraction, learning to use equipment, technologies, and service automation (Matheus, Janssen, & Maheshwari, 2018).

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Electronic governance (e-governance) is the use and application of IT by the administration, and governance through IT. It is influenced by two global revolutions: the information revolution and the governance revolution. Electronic services are a way to provide government information to citizens anytime. E-governance covers various areas, such as e-democracy, e-management, e-commerce, e-justice, e-education, e-health, etc. According to a United Nations Report, 71% of countries offer digital services, and this number is expected to grow. Albania is also part of this trend.

In Albania, the innovation of administration and public services has been a priority in the last 16 years (2005-2021), with policies, strategies, laws, and institutions to support it. The first step was the Strategic Objective Grant Agreement (2006) between Albania and the USA, to fight corruption, within the Millennium Challenge Initial Assessment Program (MCCA1). This led to reforms and modernizations of tax, procurement, and business

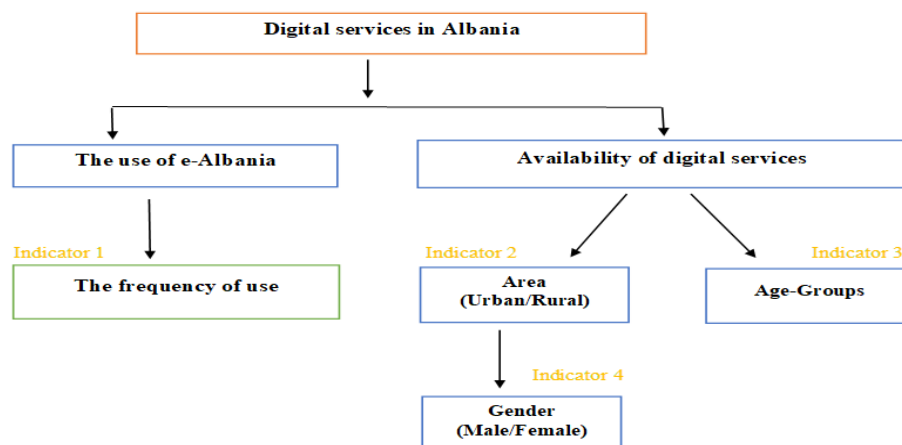
registration using IT and legislation. The National Agency for the Information Society (NAIC) and the National Registration Center (NRC), now the National Business Center (NBC), were established. The NRC enabled business registration through a single counter or “one-stop shop.” Another key development was the Electronic Procurement System, which automated and simplified the procurement process. The current focus of digitization is the Agency for the Delivery of Integrated Services – (ADISA), which aims to improve and facilitate the life of citizens by offering multiple services in one place. Donors and international organizations, such as the UNDP, the World Bank, and the EU, have helped to make this policy more effective and tangible. The project “Support for Innovation against Corruption: Building a Citizen-Centric Service Delivery Model in Albania” was designed to support the Albanian government’s decision to radically change the way that public services are provided in Albania, by improving them, fighting corruption, promoting customer (citizen) care, and increasing access and efficiency. The COVID-19 pandemic and the lockdown situation showed the importance of online public services in Albania. Albania’s progress in digitalization and innovation in public administration was awarded by the Regional School of Public Administration (RSPA) in 2020, in two categories: digital government and online learning and social innovation. The main platform for online services is “e-Albania,” which is managed by the National Information Service Agency (NISA). It offers more than 1,200 types of services for citizens and businesses, and covers 95% of all public services as of March 2021. However, the extension of online services requires a stable and accessible internet infrastructure, which is a challenge in Albania. According to the Electronic and Postal Communications Authority (AKEP, 2020), the internet penetration rate is about 60% of Albanian families, and 15.6% of the territory. There are significant gaps between urban and rural areas, and between different regions of the country. Tirana has the highest internet penetration rate (37%), while Dibra has the lowest (12%). Low internet penetration affects the social and economic development of the country, especially when services are increasingly digital. These developments and problems are the main motivation for this study, which aims to fill the research gap on e-governance in Albania.

3. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The main purpose of this study is to conduct an in-depth assessment of the impact of digitization of services, focusing on the perception of citizens and service providers. The main research questions of the study involves focusing on key aspects of digital governance and its effects on citizens, specifically:

- How familiar are citizens in Tirana District, Albania, with the digital governance initiatives and tools offered by local authorities?
- What are the main advantages and disadvantages of digital governance for citizens in Tirana District, according to their own perceptions and experiences?
- How do demographic factors such as age, education, and occupation affect citizens’ involvement and satisfaction with digital governance in Tirana District?
- What are the most important areas of public service delivery that have been improved by digital governance, and what are the suggestions for further improvement from the citizens’ perspective?

Figure 1: Conceptual framework of the study.

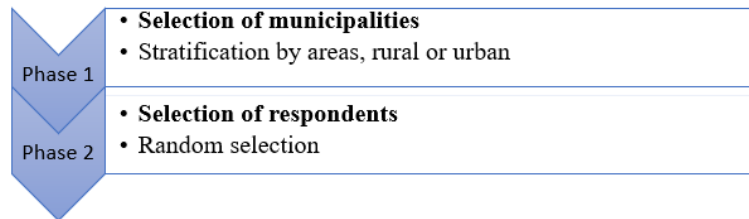


Source: Author

In this study, are conducted 385 direct interviews with individuals between the aged 18 and 65 in the district of Tirana using the CAPI technique. The quantitative study was built on the basis of a structured questionnaire consisting of 4 sections, which include relevant questions on the profile of the respondents, the use of information technology, the use and access to the e-Albania platform, etc. The sampling consists of 5 municipalities (Kamëz, Kavajë, Rrogozhinë, Tirana, and Vorë Municipality) in the district of Tirana, on which the sampling is divided into rural and urban areas through the criterion of population density. Therefore, the division between rural and urban municipalities is made based on the criteria used by INSTAT (2011) in the last Census, in which an urban municipality is defined as an urban area with a population of 10,000 inhabitants or more and a rural municipality as a remaining area that does not reach this population. Based on this definition, the municipalities of Tirana and Kamëz can be considered urban municipalities, while the municipalities of Kavajë, Rrogozhinë, and Vorë can be considered rural municipalities.

The selection of the respondents will be random. Below is the sampling scheme:

Figure 2: Sampling scheme.



Source: Author

The distribution of the sampling was done according to the number of inhabitants in each of the municipalities. Additionally, the division into urban and rural areas helped to ensure an accurate representation of both in the sampling. According to the Census (INSTAT, 2011), the population in the municipalities included in the district of Tirana is as follows:

Table 1: The population of the cities included in the study. Source: Author

The municipality	Population	% of the population to the total	No. of the interviews
Kamëz	85,342	8%	32
Kavajë	96,202	9%	36
Rrogozhinë	65,562	6%	24
Tiranë	749,365	73%	279
Vorë	35,361	3%	14
The total	1,031,832	100%	385

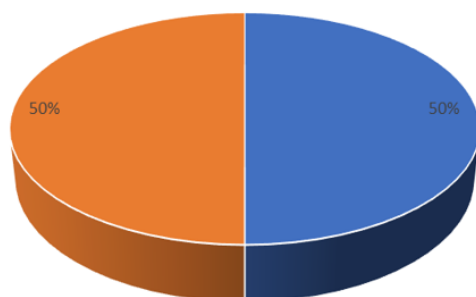
Source: Author

To calculate the number of interviews, the standard error formula was used. In the study, an error of 5% will be applied to the total population, therefore 385 individuals need to be interviewed. The programming of the questionnaires was done by applying the Lime Survey platform. This platform enables the generation of the database in SPSS format, making data analysis simpler.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

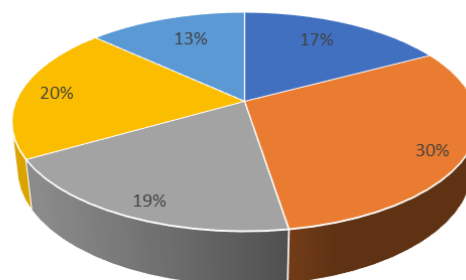
Based on the survey conducted with citizens, the percentage of men and women is equal, with 50% for each group. This demonstrates (Figure 3) an even distribution between the two gender groups in this survey. The age group of 26-36 years old has one of the highest percentages, accounting for 30% of the participants. This can be interpreted as a higher level of interest and participation from this age group in the study. The age group over 57 comprises 13% of the total. Although this percentage is lower, it still represents significant participation and indicates the interest of individuals in the over 57 age group in the studied topic, (Figure 4). The analysis of the data revealed that the group of participants without education is very small, comprising only 1% of the total participants. This suggests that there is a minimal number of participants who have not completed the initial level of education. In terms of secondary, higher, and post-graduate education, there is an equal percentage among the participants, specifically 26%. Referring to the analysis of the survey data, (Figure 6) it results that the largest number of participants in the study

live in urban areas, comprising 81% of the total. This indicates a significant dominance of residence concentration among participants in urban areas.



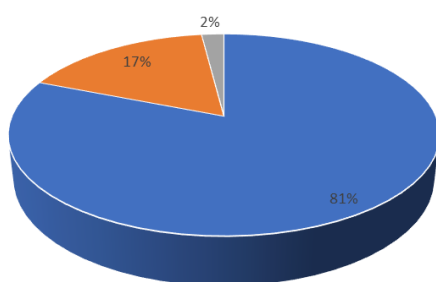
Male Female

Figure 3: Gender distribution



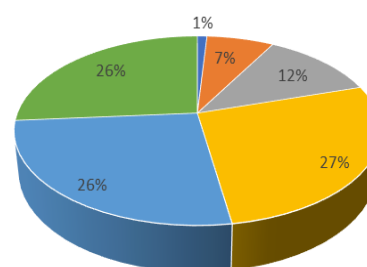
18-25 years old 26-36 years old 37-46 years old
47-56 years old over 57 years old

Figure 4: Age distribution



Urban (Town) Peri-urban (the suburbs/ small town) Rural (village, farm, community)

Figure 5: Education level of the respondents



No education Primary education Secondary education (general or professional)
University education (Bachelor) Postgraduate education (Master, PhD)

Figure 6: Residence of the respondents

Source: Author

In Table No.2 illustrated below, out of a total of 385 interviewees, only 362 of them owned a smartphone, while 22 of them reported having a simple mobile device. This is an important indicator for the study because participants who do not own a smartphone cannot access online services from the e-Albania portal.

Table 2: Owning an electronic device.

Is your mobile phone smartphone?	N	%
Do not own a mobile phone	1	0%
Yes	362	94%
No	22	6%
Total	385	100%
Do you personally own a PC/Laptop/Tablet?	N	%
Yes	230	60%
No	155	40%
Total	385	100%

Source: Author

In the section of the survey on Internet access, Table No.3 shows that 93% of the participants usually have access to the Internet, while a very small percentage (1%) do not have access to the Internet. This may be the result of the widespread accessibility of the Internet in most countries and communities, and this small group of participants who do not use this device is determined by various personal, economic, or cultural reasons.

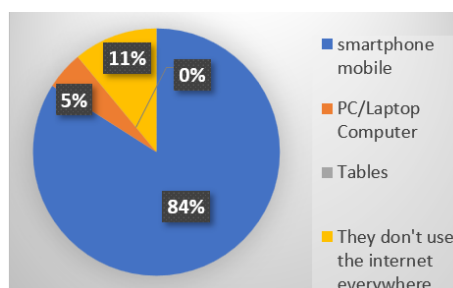
Table 3.

Do you usually have access to the internet?	N	%
Yes	357	93%
No	5	1%
I don't have a mobile phone or smartphone	23	6%
Total	385	100%

Additionally, in Figure 7 below, it is shown that 84% of the participants in the study access the Internet through smartphones. This further corroborates the prevalence of mobile phone use in everyday life.

Figure 7: The device used most often to access the internet.

Source: Author



According to the data analysis about the registration on the e-Albania Platform, 95% of the study participants are registered on the e-Albania platform. This indicates a high adherence of citizens to the digitized platform of public services.

Table 4.

	N	%
Are you registered on the e-Albania platform (by yourself or with the help of someone else)?		
Yes	364	95%
No	21	5%
Total	385	100%

Table 5 shows the data, indicating that 54% of the respondents received and personally accessed services from the online platform. This highlights the widespread use and access to online services by citizens.

Table 5. Source: Author

Have you used e-Albania during the last 6/12 months to access the services you needed (by yourself or with the help of someone else)?	They haven't received service and not have accessed e-albania	101	26%
	Yes, personally	209	54%
	Yes, with the help of someone else	69	18%
	No	6	2%

Fig.8 shows an imbalance in the application of online services from e-Albania by the participants. 28% have not applied any, 22% are neutral, and 19% find it somewhat simple. This shows that digital services are not accessible to all. Fig.9 shows a different mix of perceptions of online service users. 26% are neutral and 30% are dissatisfied. This suggests that online services need to be improved in quality and delivery.

Figure 8: Assessment of the process of receiving services. Source: Author

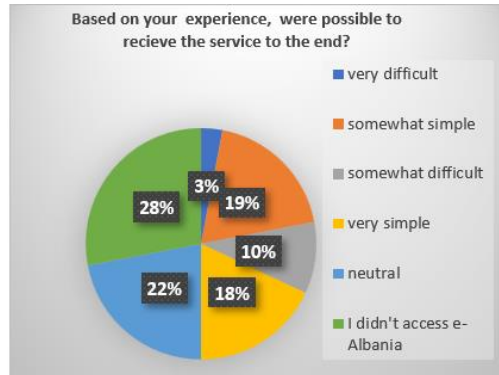
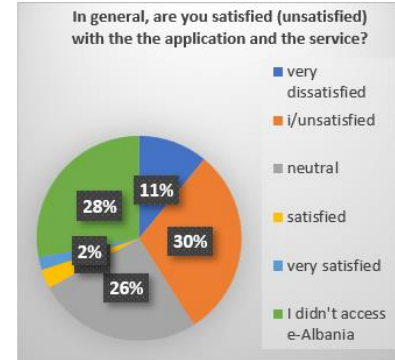


Figure 9: Assessment of the satisfaction of receiving services. Source: Author



5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study explores the impact of digital services on the lives of citizens in Tirana District, Albania. It analyzes citizens' perspectives and draws several conclusions. Firstly, the study shows the positive impacts of digital governance, such as convenience, transparency, and efficiency. The first hypothesis of the study is not verified, as digital services have improved the receipt of services by citizens. Secondly, the study reveals differences in digital service provision between urban and rural areas, and between younger and older age groups. These reflect the gaps in technological infrastructure and skills. Thirdly, the study highlights the challenges of digital governance, such as digital literacy, data security, and inclusivity. These need to be addressed to ensure universal access to the benefits of digital governance. Fourthly, the study indicates that digital services are still not widely used by citizens, as 28% have not used any, and only 19% find them somewhat simple. Many users need help from relatives or friends. Finally, the study envisions the future of digital governance in Tirana District as a continuous path, requiring anticipation, adaptation, and commitment. The study provides a roadmap for a more inclusive, responsive, and citizen-centric digital governance landscape in Tirana and beyond.

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