SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

Citizen participation in creation of local polices and the possibility to influence the shaping and improving of decisions that have direct impact on quality of life on the local community are essential preconditions for democratic governance at local level. To be able to participate with one's own initiatives and proposals, citizens should be able to freely access information and data as well as to share it with other people.

In the era where innovations and technological development take lead, the research within the framework of the project "Putting people first"[1], the title symbolically directs to the strategic goals of the project, aims at opening a substantive debate on the need for promotion of e-services and the introduction of common standards for open local government and open data as a step towards improving transparency and accountability of the institutions, along with encouraging the initiative of citizens and civil society organizations through modern technologies to give their own contribution to public and community life.

Namely, e-governance provides opportunities for a more responsible government and overcoming bureaucratic barriers in regard to access to information and data. This indicates that it is simply not enough for authorities and institutions to use old methods of communication. They have an obligation to seek innovative approaches and data should and must accustom in a manner accessible and understandable to citizens.

Within their jurisdictions, public sector institutions collect number of data and information. Due to the fact that the functioning of the institutions is financed by the citizens, all data (except personal data or classified information) belong to the people and should be published or has to be "opened" as open data.

In addition to promoting transparency and accountability, open data has an economic potential. With the data that are freely used and re-used, interested citizens, companies and organizations develop new innovative products and services that generate profit[2].

The main subject of this research is the way local authorities realize their communication with the citizens and the way of using modern technologies for improving awareness "vis-à-vis" the needs and interests of the citizens for data and information in certain areas.

The survey seeks to identify areas and specific issues that local government within its competence creates data; as well as data and information where interest is expressed by the citizens and the business community.

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[1] The project is implemented by "Center for Change Management" in partnership with "Centre for Sustainable Development ALKA". Collaborators in the project are the Ministry of Information Society & Administration and the Ministry of Local Government. The project is funded by the European delegation by the Central Financing and Contracting Unit (CFCD) and co-financed by the British Embassy.

[2] Center for Change Management (2012), "Comparative analysis of best practices for open data in the European Union"

The objectives of the research are aimed towards raising awareness about the importance of "releasing" the most possible amount of data and information that the local authorities and institutions holds in the country as one of the basic prerequisites for improving transparency and accountability. This additionally will be a benefit for the economic potential of the country.

What did the research show in the area of legal framework?

Although the research did not show a formally determined legal framework that provides standards for transparency at local level, still the Constitution, the Law on Local Self-Government, the Law on Free Access to Public Information and the Law on Use of Public Sector Data, create normative conditions to ensure the full (with clearly defined exceptions) access to information about the work of local government, in different ways, in order to ensure transparency and accountability in the work and to encourage participation at the local level.

The Law on Local Self-Government is decisive in terms of the duty of local self-governments towards its citizens to provide them with access to basic information about the services they provide, in a manner and under conditions determined by statute. Also, it insists on informing the public about the work of the mayor and council, of council committees and public services.

Generally, in the Statutes of the municipalities there is no information as to when and where information will be exactly announced, which makes information unpredictable. Furthermore, the website of the municipality is not defined as a place where all published information is made public, nor are other alternative solutions stated for citizens who for various reasons are not able to use IT technology.

Certain material laws oblige local self-government units to keep registers and records in different areas. In this way units of local self-government / municipalities have an obligation to provide relevant and useful data of their work that can help in the formulation of local policies in certain areas.

The analysis of the Statutes of the municipalities shows that this legal obligation (publication of data from the public sector in an open, machine arable format) is not detailed in the highest legal act of the municipality. Moreover, access to open data or how to reach them is not on the web pages of the local government units.

Barometer of e-transparency of local self-governments

Urban municipalities and the City of Skopje (those being analyzed) have technically sound websites that are regularly updated and in different ways try to ensure transparency of their work to the citizens. However, the manner of publication is fragmented which indicates that there are no standards that provide unique way of publication of certain sets of information on the websites of all municipalities.

In most cases, through websites, municipalities and the City of Skopje provide partial transparency, minimal accountability, with very limited opportunities for two-way communication and no electronic tools for consultation of citizens. In general, there is no visibility of services provided by units of local self-government, published forms cannot be submitted electronically, nor can the status of the case be monitored.
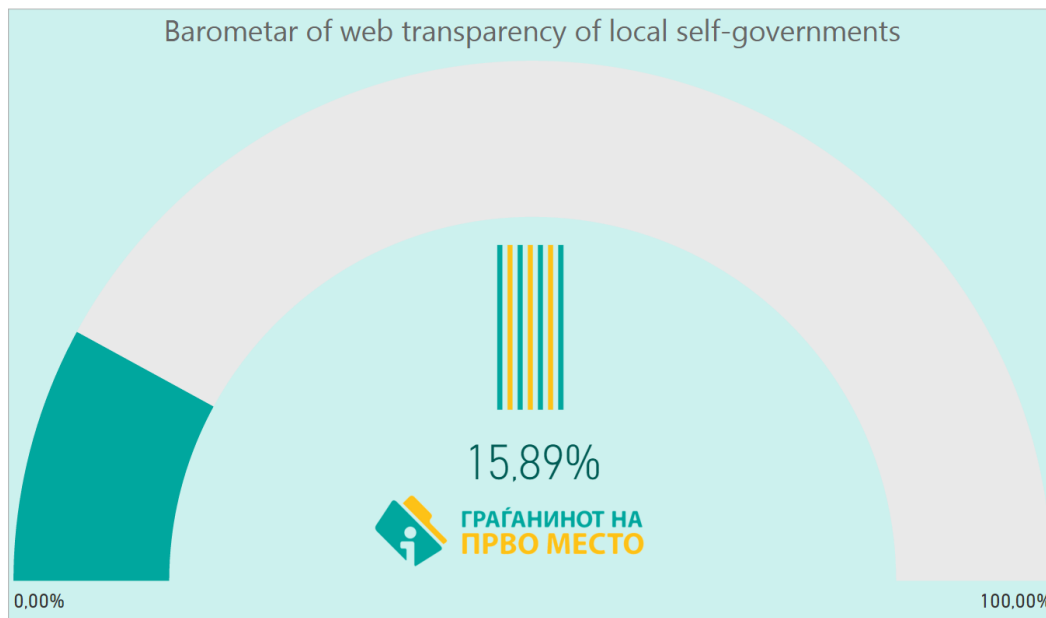
The full web view transparency for each category and the municipality is given in a separate publication.

Which data citizens need the most?

The survey was designed to map data and information that need to be published by local authorities. It will provide uniformed, predictable and efficient use of public data locally, according to the interest and needs of the citizens and the business community. The survey was conducted on a sample of 1330 respondents in 8 major urban municipalities.

Nota bene: Further in the text is information and data that citizens consider to be of highest priority.
All citizen needs can be found in the full report

Finance

In the area of finance, the majority of respondents believe the following data is mostly needed and ranked it as highly relevant and important:
- Proposed budget of municipalities;
- Adopted budget of municipalities;
- Annual account of municipalities;
- Propsed and adopted civil budget with clear understanding where citizen money goes;

- Report on the announced and completed public procurements.

Council

Regarding the work of the Council of the local self-government, citizens thought the most needed data was:
- Municipality Statute;
- Agendas, minutes and decisions of the Council;
- List of adopted planning documents;
- Information on the members of the Council.

Services

A number of the respondents considers important the data related to all services that local self-government provide, including
- list of services;
- services application forms;
- detailed instruction on the service provision.

Local economic development

In the area of local economic development, the most important priority the respondents gave to the list of information on:
- trade companies with micro capacity on the municipality territory,
- industrial zones in local municipalities
- tourism and catering services of small-scale.

Social protection

In the area of social protection, the data of greatest importance is related to:
- the number of users of social welfare;
- social care institutions for different categories of citizens;
- information for specific social categories - homeless and street beggars;
- the amount of funds that were spent to social care by the local self-government.

Education

The research has shown that information is necessary for the:
- number of elementary schools and high schools in the municipality,
- number of free places in the schools and entry requirements;
- number of students according to populated area;
- faculties in the municipality;
- school ranking according to the success at municipality level.

Environment

Most important information for the citizens in this area is the pollution substances in the municipality:

- polluting emission on the territory of the municipality;
- polluters on the territory of the municipality;
- waste producing rate;
- environmental cadastre.

Sanitation

In the area of public services and utilities, the respondents think that there should be published data about:

- the landfill in the municipality area;
- markets in that area;
- carriers and motor vehicles registered for transporting passengers.

Urbanism

According to the collected data, most important information to the citizens is:

- proposals of urbanistic plans on the territory of the municipality (GUP and DUP) and adopted urbanistic plans;
- annual reports for building permissions;
- residential buildings and building managers.

Sport

- 93% of the respondents consider the data about the sport objects in the municipality to be important.

Kindergartens and nursing homes

- kindergartens in the municipality (public and private) are most important to the respondents;
- public enterprises, established by the municipality, that have enabled access for people with disabilities;
- dally and full care for elderly people.

RECCOMENDATIONS

- There is a urgent need for joint approach though adopting standards for (e) transparency and (e) accountability of the local self-governments, that will increase the citizen's trust in institutions; will empower the effectiveness of local policies on the issues that are equally important and have impact to all, and will promote good governance and democracy values, where as the primary postulate will be "putting people first" and the local self-governments will have the responsibility to be proactive in publishing data and information.

- Unified, predictable and regular informing of citizens in providing information and data that is in their interest should be achieved by defining **transparency standards on local level** that will disseminate from the Law of Local Self-Government, as by-law. Therefore, it is necessary to approach changing the legislation. Other possibility is creating document (Code / Protocol) that will oblige municipalities to integrate those standards in their Statute. The by-law or the Code / Protocol should contain list of information/data (set of information/data) that will be necessarily published on the municipal web-page and the mode of their publishing (place, format and dynamics of publishing and updating).

- The **municipal Statute** should ensure that the municipal work and service delivery will be provided through the web-pages, and other possibilities should be used as an alternative.

- **Reorganizing contents on web locations** to provide easy approach for different types of users following the rule click-3 that suggests that all information on the web site should be found by the user with maximum three clicks.
  Home pages should be simpler with aim to increase visual transparency and efficiency in finding the information that users are searching for. Web pages should be further developed so could people with disabilities can access them.

- **Standardization of data sets** (format, structure and semantics of data) is important for open data policy in the local self-government units, so harmonization of data sets can be reached by different municipalities. If open data are published with same structure and defined format by every municipality, the users will have more simple way of combining and using the data of all municipalities.

- **Publishing of data in open format** that local self-governments already collect according to the relevant legislative, especially data important for securing accountability in their work. Depending on the possibilities, it is useful to visualize the data (pies, charts) with an aim to provide easy and fast way of receiving information.

- Emphasis should be made to publishing more **information and data sets** that are in interest to the **civil sector and business community**.