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YOUNG PEOPLE'S PERCEPTIONS OF THE SMART CITY CONCEPT: AN ANALYSIS OF ATTITUDES AND EXPECTATIONS

Abstract: *The application of European principles and standards of the European Administrative Space mandates the inclusion of citizens in the creation of local policies. Citizens of the European Union have the right to be informed about the work of their local communities to understand what their local leaders are doing to improve the quality of life in these areas. This is closely linked to citizens' right to good governance. The term "smart" implies the use of various information and communication technologies in the development of local communities. The authors begin by defining the term "smart" (what the term entails and how students perceive it). The first part of the paper focuses on defining and terminologically determining the concept of "smart," the central part presents empirical research and its findings, while the concluding section discusses and analyzes the research results. This section also offers specific proposals for enhancing the potential of individuals and the community as a whole, as well as increasing citizen engagement (through the use of digitized administrative services, smart lighting, smart transportation, smart infrastructure, environmental protection, and more). The concept of a smart city/municipality necessitates collaboration between citizens and authorities, encourages a more active lifestyle among citizens, and fosters the development of a "smart" community. The paper analyzes the management of cities/municipalities in the Republic of Croatia. The*

hypothesis is as follows: The role of cities/municipalities in creating smart cities/municipalities is recognized by young people who will participate in administrative processes in the future. The aim of the paper is to examine the opinions of students from the Faculty of Law in Osijek and students from the “Lavoslav Ružička” Polytechnic in Vukovar regarding their level of knowledge about the implementation of the smart cities/municipalities concept. The sample consists of students from these institutions. The research was conducted during the summer semester of the 2023/2024 academic year. The results were analyzed using descriptive statistics, and the authors believe that these findings will provide relevant stakeholders at the local level with insights into young people’s attitudes towards the development of smart city or municipality concepts. Additionally, the research results will show how young people in the Republic of Croatia perceive the implementation of such a concept, its purpose, whether it changes the governance system in local self-government, and their thoughts on potential challenges that could arise at the local level in the future. Furthermore, the study will provide the most appropriate proposals for improving this concept. It is evident that without the development of “smart” solutions, good governance of local communities cannot be achieved. Since we live in a digital age, there is a pressing need for all citizens to be educated about the purpose of developing smart cities/municipalities in order to create communities that are attractive for living to citizens worldwide. This would meet citizens’ needs and improve the efficiency of local-level operations. Local leaders should focus on creating smart solutions for financing projects related to the development of local communities.

Keywords: *right to good governance, smart cities, smart municipalities, local self-government reform, young people.*

1. INTRODUCTION¹

The local self-government reform indicates the application of modern administrative doctrines and the implementation of fundamental values of the doctrines through adequate legal provisions through both theoretical and practical implementation. The right to good governance is a broad term which, for the purposes of this paper, focuses on citizens’ participation in administrative processes through smart administration, smart infrastructure, healthy environment

¹ This paper was financed by the Faculty of Law in Osijek, Josip Juraj Strossmayer University of Osijek through the internal project no. IP-PRAVOS-16 “New trends in the development of public services on a local and regional level”. The paper was presented on the International Scientific Conference “Legal tradition and new legal challenges” in Novi Sad organised by the University of Novi Sad, 17th-19th October 2024.

etc. This paper is a result of the research conducted on two institutions of higher education, the Faculty of Law in Osijek and “Lavoslav Ružička” Polytechnic in Vukovar. The key hypothesis of the paper is: The role of the cities/municipalities in creating smart cities/municipalities is recognised by young people who will participate in administrative processes in the future. The aim of the paper is to examine the opinions of students from the Faculty of Law in Osijek and “Lavoslav Ružička” Polytechnic in Vukovar regarding their level of knowledge about the implementation of the smart cities/municipalities concept. The contribution to administrative science is evident in the theoretical background which includes the analysis of the terms smart cities/municipalities, European standards, the conducted research itself including the key hypothesis of the paper, its explanation and the research results along with the suggestions for improvement of the entire system for implementing smart services in the Republic of Croatia.

2. EUROPEAN STANDARDS AND TERMINOLOGICAL DETERMINATION OF THE TERM “SMART CITIES/MUNICIPALITIES”

One of the fundamental European standards is the principle of participation which entails the inclusion of a larger number of interested parties in all the phases, from the initial formation of the decision to its implementation. This way, the citizens’ trust in the institutions of public administration is ensured.² The citizens have been losing trust in the institutions of public administration for a longer period of time which can be justified by the fact that the principle of openness and transparency has become less evident in the citizens’ and public administration relationship.

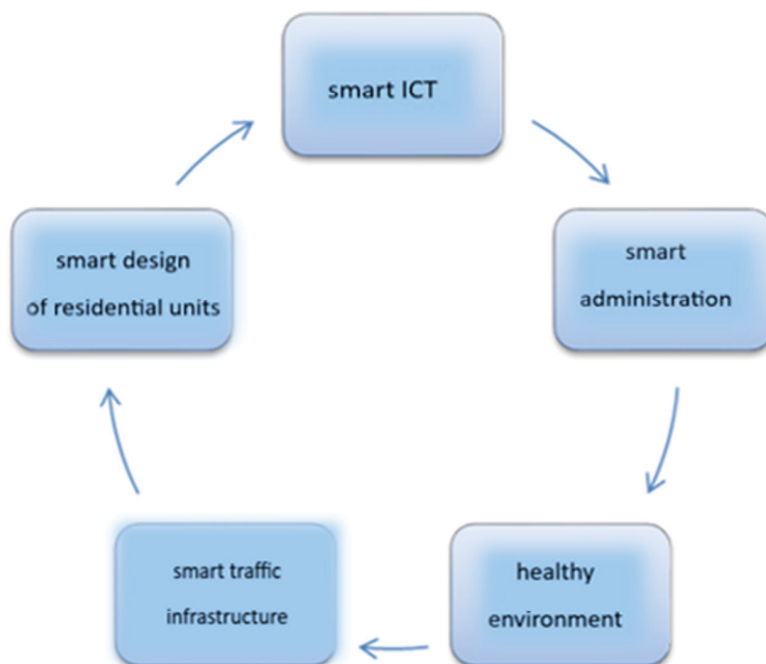
A smart city is, according to Cicea et al., a phenomenon which has on a global scale rapidly spread. It is highlighted that nowadays smart cities are to be found on every continent and are mostly characterised by smarter, urban spaces as well as by the technology for regulating transportation, environmental pollution and poverty issues.³ The authors are to agree with Cicea et al. (see Picture 1.), but also with Dobrić Jambrović who emphasizes that digital products and services are to be designed, manufactured and treated in a way that reduces their impact on the environment and society.⁴

² Ivan Koprić et. al., *Europski upravni prostor*, Institut za javnu upravu, Zagreb 2012, 141.

³ Claudiu Cicea et al., „Smart cities using smart choices for energy“, *Theoretical and Empirical Researches in Urban Management*, Research Center in Public Administration and Public Services Vol. 14, 4/2019, 24.

⁴ Dana Dobrić Jambrović, „Neka obilježja urbane suradnje: sudjelovanje građana u upravljanju pametnim gradovima“, *Zbornik radova Razvoj javne uprave* (eds. Željko Sudarić et.al.), Šibenik 2024, 922.

Picture 1. What are the “smart” units of local self-government?



Source: the authors

Picture 1. clearly shows how the authors perceive the topic of “smart” cities and municipalities in the Republic of Croatia. According to the authors’ opinions “smart” enables citizens the right to a healthy environment with the support of authorities that will allow faster and less complicated implementation of smart information-communication technology, smart traffic infrastructure, smart administration and high-quality lifestyle through smart design of residential units.

Havat, on the other hand, claims the term “smart city” is ambiguous since the exact content, features and nature of the smart cities differ from country to country. According to him, the narrow definition classifies smart cities as the ones using information technology and are marked by shared information and communication technology (ICT), common infrastructure for communication through optic fibre for efficient systems of public distribution, gathering data through sensors such as smart automatic counters as well as supervision and management from the command centre, open administration: overcoming the gap between citizens and administration, multi-service kiosks, energy-efficient technologies like light-emitting diodes (LED), smart street lighting and micro-webs, time optimisation: multi-level garages create additional income, GPS equipped vehicles, zero emission,

lowered utility bills, green roofs for a clean and green environment and similar.⁵ In his presentation, Havat highlights that smart cities attract large populations seeking higher life standards and employment possibilities since they offer a variety of advantages regarding social and economic benefits. However, due to increased dependence on data-gathering sensors, automation technologies, information and communication technologies (ICT), analytical software applications etc. any disturbance or a calamity, as Havat points out, can disrupt an entire string of services and jeopardize the eco-system of the smart city. Climatic influences, such as storms, floods and droughts have financial consequences and cause great disturbances in business operations and cities' finances. In order for cities to truly be intelligent, the influences of climatic changes need to be taken into account.⁶

The authors agree with Kresin, who claims that technology can and will undisputedly have an increasingly significant role in resolving urban issues, while applications are becoming more powerful, smaller and affordable. The same application will provide new insight, enhance the traffic flow, air quality, energy management and waste disposal resulting in healthier living conditions, lower expenses and increasing efficiency. Kresin highlights it will become perfectly clear that intense citizen participation is the key ingredient of radical and sustainable innovations, that citizens can contribute to new insights and that they will be prepared to engage in implementing solutions only if their ideas and voices have been taken into consideration during the development phase. Due to this, as he continues, the second-generation cities choose the bottom-up approach by strengthening connections and by accepting and encouraging the resulting creative dynamics which ensures that the newly created infrastructures promote openness, transparency and reciprocity by contributing innovations available to a wider population.⁷

The question of politics harmonisation and multi-level governance is becoming increasingly significant in debates and practices regarding urban politics, as stated by Gorka. Moreover, he claims it is necessary to overcome several obstacles in order to guarantee the success of this process, including the political disputes between different levels of governance, national regulations assigning responsibility for implementation of sustainable development and its supervision exclusively to national governments, lack of competence in local administrations and the gap between the institutions of public politics and private sector.⁸

Gorka points out that smart cities are territories where not only innovative technologies are actively being introduced, but also used for more efficient re-

⁵ Hayat Parvez, *Smart cities, India Quarterly*, Sage Publications, Ltd. Vol. 72, 2/2016, 178.

⁶ Ibid, 186.

⁷ Frank Kresin, „Smart cities value their smart citizens“, *Urban Europe* (eds. V. Mamadouh, A. V. Wageningen), Amsterdam University Press 2016, 185.

⁸ Marek Gorka, „The Idea of Smart City in the Perspective of the Development of the Capitals of the Visegrad Group Countries,“ *Nowa Polityka Wschodnia* 2024, 1/2024, 109.

source management, energy and cost decrease with minimized damage of living conditions.⁹ Digitalization of municipal spaces results in a series of challenges. According to him, there are two main obstacles for achieving full transformation of municipal structures. The first one is the lack of financial and other resources necessary for digitalization implementation, while the other obstacle refers to the level of citizen involvement in handling local issues, in general and by using smart technologies.¹⁰

According to Milanković, transparent and innovative public administration enables easier implementation of smart projects in urban environments and attracts investors and educated staff. In addition, she states that more and more Croatian cities recognize the importance of investing in smart technologies that are continually becoming the reality in which we actively participate and since the concept of *McDonaldization* overflows on modern urban centres, it is to be expected the cities of the future to function primarily imitating the largest and the most popular fast-food chain on the globe.¹¹ One could agree with the stated, bearing in mind that implementation of smart projects ought to be the aim of the entire public administration system (see Picture 2.).

With the appearance of the Internet, smart phones and smart devices, technology has helped humanity to achieve results that had earlier only been imagined, by connecting people, even virtually, says Tintarescu. In addition, the same author claims that the smart city illustrates a futuristic approach whose aim to solve current urban issues caused by overpopulation and pollution, by applying innovative technologies, which once implemented, can positively alter our lives in the future. Smart cities represent a global effort to create more efficient and more sustainable communities adapted to new needs of people. The author continues by claiming that along with other measures for environment protection and preservation of existing resources, they hold the key to prosperous evolution and a better life while the use of technology in a legally regulated space in addition to respecting human freedoms and without unjustified privacy evasion, can represent the new future reality.¹²

Digital inclusion is a key component for development of efficient framework for governing smart cities, according to Brooks and Schrubbe. They say that the data and platforms have to be well maintained, secured and understandable to local population whose data will be built into these systems, citizens should be

⁹ A. A. Larichev, O. A. Kozhevnikov, K. I. Korsun, Legal regulation of smart city technologies in solving local issues in urban areas, *Law: Journal of the Higher School of Economics*, 2023(3), 56-77.

¹⁰ Ibid, 73-74.

¹¹ Ines Milanković, „Smart City Product of Modern Public Administration“, *Conference Proceedings International Conference Development of Public Administration (Zbornik Radova Razvoj Javne Uprave)* (eds. Ivan Belaj et. al.), Vukovar 2020, 194.

¹² Florentina Tintarescu, Consideratii si evolutii privind conceptul smart city. *Curierul Judiciar*, 9/2021, 517.

able to understand the practices of smart cities on a conceptual level, but also on a practical level of skills. However, it is true what the same authors claim, not all people have the opportunity and ability to equally access and use open data platforms and new technologies of the smart cities. Therefore, it is necessary to design a programme allowing equal citizens' participation.¹³

Picture 2. Parts of public administration that should become “smart”



Source: the authors

Picture 2. indicates that the idea of “smart” development mostly refers to units of local self-government (the central part of the pyramid chart). In addition, when talking about the analysis of the implementation of smart technologies on the local, municipal or city level, all three levels or parts of the public administration should be taken into consideration, starting with the state administration, continuing with the local and regional level and finally addressing the public services. Every citizen uses some of the existing public services, they spend most of their time as users of the educational system during which they use the services of the healthcare system, social services and all the levels of the educational system. The framework of the development of smart cities/municipalities is to be found in the implementation of smart administrative doctrines, public management and good governance. How is it possible to govern cities/municipalities in the Republic of Croatia in a good/smart manner? By analysing domestic and foreign literature it is to be concluded that all authors agree on one thing – that smart entails all the levels of public administration.

¹³ B. A. Brooks, Alexis Schrubbe, The need for digitally inclusive smart city governance framework, *UMKC Law Review*, 85(4), 2017, 950.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research about the opinions of students from the Faculty of Law in Osijek and students from the “Lavoslav Ružička” Polytechnic in Vukovar was conducted during the summer semester of the academic year 2023/2024. A total of 126 students from both institutions participated in the research. The hypothesis of the paper is as follows: The role of cities/municipalities in creating smart cities/municipalities is recognized by young people who will participate in administrative processes in the future. For the purposes of writing the paper, a questionnaire containing 11 questions was formed: the first question referred to the participant's gender (male, female, I do not wish to declare), the second question was about which institution the participants attend – the Faculty of Law in Osijek or the “Lavoslav Ružička” Polytechnic in Vukovar. The third question addressed the type of the unit of local self-government the participants residentially belong to (city/municipality). The fourth statement was: I am familiar with the concept of smart cities/municipalities (I am not at all familiar with it, I am partially familiar with it, I am fully familiar with it), whereas the fifth statement was: to me the term “smart” refers to: using digital technologies – smart administration (in education, health-care and similar), smart lighting, smart transportation, smart parking, smart environment protection, smart infrastructure on a local level and smart utility services. The sixth question was an open-ended question where the participants offered their own suggestions when asked about the things they would propose to their city/municipality regarding the use of “smart” technologies. The seventh question addressed the participants' opinions on the extent to which they think local communities invest in the development of a smart community (they do not invest at all, they invest enough, they invest significantly). The eighth question investigated the services the participants had previously used in their city/municipality while in the ninth question they were asked about the services they had previously used in another city/municipality. In the tenth and the eleventh question the participants were asked to compare the benefits and drawbacks of using smart services and the possibility of reducing future employments due to their implementation.

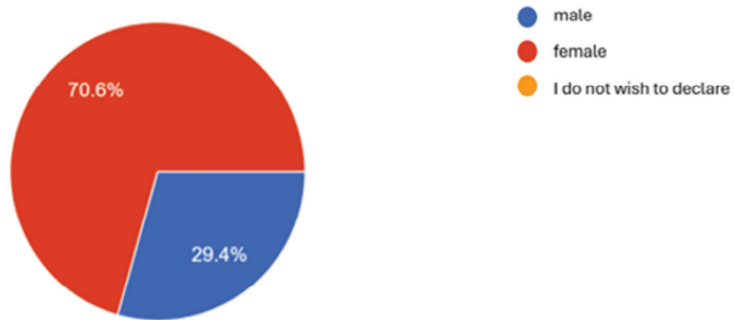
4. RESEARCH RESULTS

The following paragraph illustrates and explains the obtained research results. The authors show the research results graphically in addition to further explaining them.

Chart 1. Participants according to gender

1. Gender:

126 responses

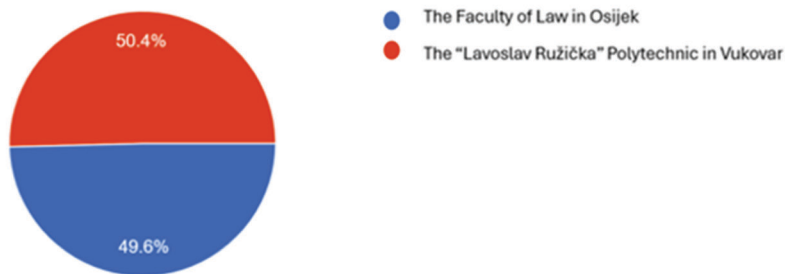


The chart illustrates that 70,6% female and 29,4% male participants took part in the empirical research.

Chart 2. Participants according to the institution they attend

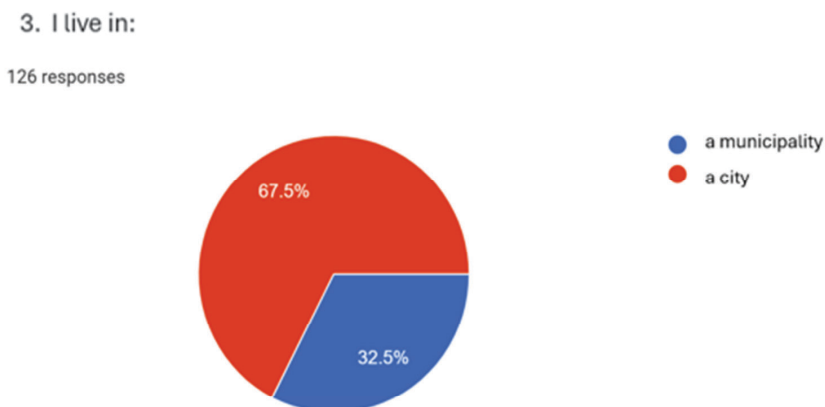
2. I attend:

125 responses



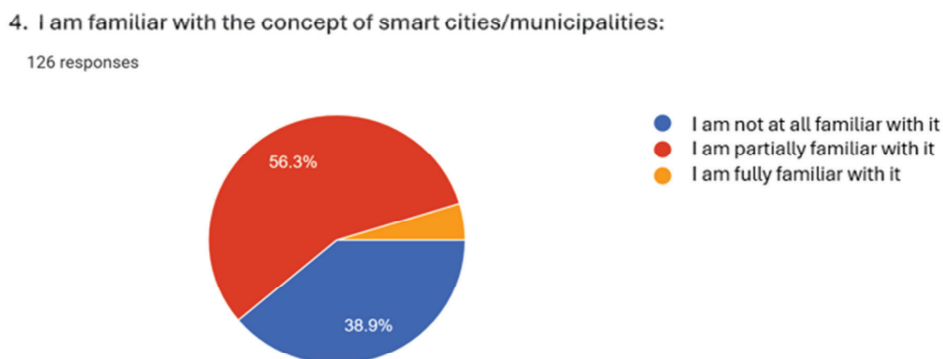
An approximately equal number of participants from both institutions completed the questionnaire. 50,4% research participants attend the Faculty of Law in Osijek, whereas 49,6% come from the "Lavoslav Ružička" Polytechnic in Vukovar.

Chart 3. Participants according to their residence



Since the topic of the research was analysing students' opinions about smart cities/municipalities, it was of outmost importance to find out whether the participants come from a municipality or a city. 67,5% of the participants live in a city while 32,5% reside in a municipality.

Chart 4. Participants according to their knowledge of the concept of smart cities/municipalities

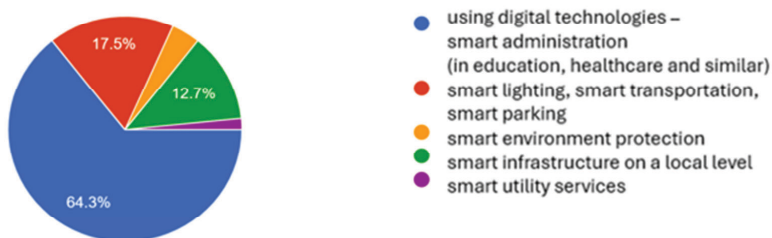


Considering that all the participants are young people, it is a worrying fact that 40% of them are not at all familiar with the concept of smart cities/municipalities. 56,3% are partially familiar with the concept of smart cities/municipalities.

Chart 5. Participants according to their interpretation of the term “smart”

5. To me the term “smart” primarily refers to:

126 responses

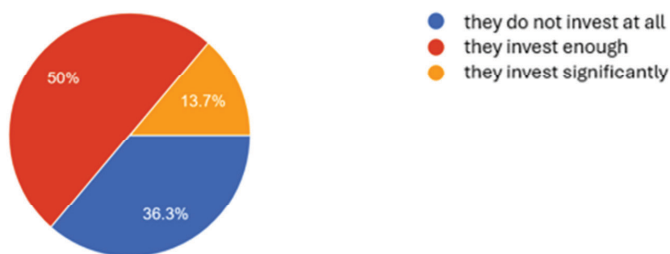


The participants were asked about what the term “smart” means to them. 64,3% said that the term “smart” refers to using digital technologies and smart administration, especially in public services, such as education, healthcare etc.

Question number 6 was: What would you suggest to your city/municipality that involves the use of “smart”. Some of the answers were: more smart benches, smart parking, smart lighting, smart utilities, smart infrastructure, smart environment preservation etc.

Chart 7. The attitude of the participants about the extent to which their unit of local self-government invests in the development of a smart community.

7. To which extent do you think your unit of local self-government invests in the development of a smart community?



It is interesting to observe what the participants had to say about the extent to which their local community invests in the development of a smart community. 50% consider that the local community invests enough, 36,3% that they do not invest at all and 16,7% that they invest significantly.

Chart 8. Participants' opinions about the use of "smart" services in their city/municipality

8. Which of the listed services do you use in your city/municipality?

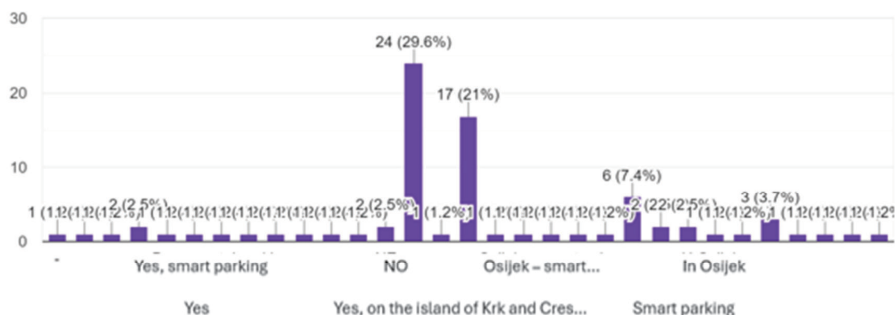
118 responses



Providing administrative services is an important part of the scope of the units of local self-government. The research results show that the participants are largely familiar with the available administrative services which they also frequently use, even though the aim is to increase the percentage of their users. 45,8% of the participants use smart administration in their city/municipality, 26,3% use smart parking and smart transportation while 11,9% use smart utility services.

Chart 9. Participants about using smart services in another city/municipality.

9. Have you ever used any of the smart services in another city/municipality and which were they?



When asked about the use of smart services in another city/municipality, the participants answered affirmative adding they mostly used smart parking and smart benches. The respondents answered affirmatively regarding the use of smart parking/benches in the city of Osijek and on certain islands, Krk/Cres. The assumption about the use of smart services on the islands stems from their use during holidays.

Chart 10. Participants' opinions about the benefits and drawbacks of using smart services

10. Do you think the advantages of using smart services outweigh the disadvantages?

125 responses



91,2% of the participants consider there are more benefits than drawbacks regarding the use of smart services, whereas 8,8% disagree claiming that drawbacks outweigh the benefits.

Chart 11. Participants' opinions about the decrease of the necessity for the current number of civil servants due to smart services

11. I think the smart services are going to decrease the necessity for the current number of civil servants.

126 responses



41,3% of the total number of participants neither agree nor disagree with the statement that smart services will decrease the need for the current number of civil servants including the need for new employments. 25,4% agree, whereas 22,2% disagree with the claim.

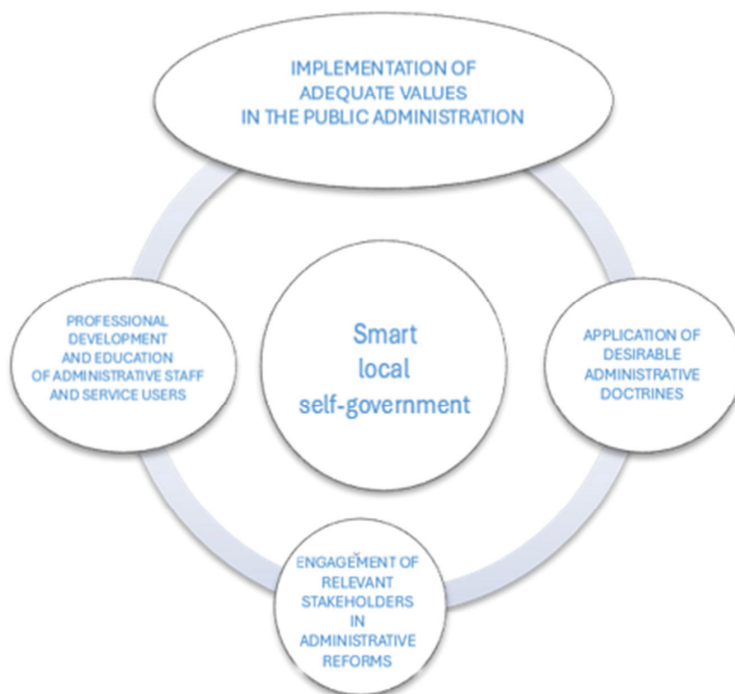
5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Participants provided positive answers to most of the questions from the questionnaire. What is significant to observe from the participants' answers is the fact that 57% of the participants are familiar with the concept of smart cities/municipalities. Almost 65% consider that the term smart refers to using digital technologies and administration. A large percentage of participants thinks that the development of smart technologies is insufficient (over 36%). More than 90% consider that the benefits of using smart services outweigh the drawbacks, which is a large and significant percentage. However, it is understandable they are concerned about the future of employing civil servants – more than 25% think that smart services will decrease the necessity for the current number of civil servants.

The development of smart technology will consequently increase the number of services for citizens to use on daily basis. This will inevitably improve not only their lifestyle and life quality, but also the lifestyle and life quality of the future generations who will be forced to face the challenges of applying information-communication technologies. The key question is: Can smart services replace people? Should the development of smart cities stop employments of young, well-qualified and expert staff? Are all the offered services really “smart” and to which extent? Some of these questions have been answered through the questionnaire. It remains to be seen how the older population will face the challenges placed in front of them, whether they can follow the technological progress and who are the key decision-makers of the solutions that would be beneficial to all the residents of a particular city/municipality (both younger and older).

The obtained results confirm the previously set hypothesis: the role of the cities/municipalities in creating smart cities/municipalities has been recognised by the younger generations. It would be interesting to investigate the answers to the same or comparable questions offered by the participants belonging to different age groups to make the sample of the participants more representable and to compare the obtained results. It is obvious that the changes in the system of managing the local self-government are occurring with the emphasis on enticing collaborative relationship between the citizens and local authorities. The future measures for improving the management of the local self-government should underlyingly rely on the implementation of “smart” services, smart technologies that would rise the quality of the entire system and make it more available to those who it was meant for in the first place, the citizens themselves. The authors offer certain suggestions for improvement of the local self-government system (see Picture 3.). The local leaders should be made aware of the fact that realisation of the unique collaborative relationship between themselves and the citizens is “the only real way” to ensuring a better, nicer and more quality lifestyle.

Picture 3. Suggestions for improvement of the “smart” local self-government



Source: the authors

As shown in the schematic overview, the authors highlight several proposals for improving smart local governance: the implementation of appropriate values in public administration such as democratic, political, social, and environmental values; the application of suitable administrative doctrines, especially the doctrine of good governance in the field of local self-government; the inclusion of relevant actors in the administrative reform process, including citizens themselves and representatives from various levels of government; and professionalism and continuous training of administrative staff. Taking these proposals into account would lead to the development of the concept of smart cities/municipalities, thereby improving the quality of life for all citizens.

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Перцепције младих о концепту паметног града: анализа ставова и очекивања

Сажетак: Примена европских начела и стандарда Европској ујравној простора подразумева укључивање грађана у креирање локалних политика. Грађани Европске уније имају право да буду укључени у рад своје локалне заједнице како би знали шта њихови локални челници чине за побољшање квалитета живота на њим подручјима. Наведено је уско повезано с остваривањем права грађана на добру управу. Термин “паметно” подразумева примену различитих информацијско-комуникацијских технологија у развоју локалне заједнице. Аутори у раду полазе од дефинисања термина “паметно” (шта подразумевамо под њим појмом, како студенти доживљавају термин “паметно”). Стога се први део рада бави дефинисањем, термилошким одређењем појма “паметно”, централни део рада доноси емпијско истраживање и резултате истраживања док се закључни део рада односи на расправу, анализу резултата истраживања. У њом делу износе се одређени предлози за побољшање потенцијала појединаца чланица заједнице те повећање активности свих грађана (уштем коришћења дигитализованих административних услуга, паметне расвете, паметног превоза, паметне инфраструктуре, заштите природе и околине и др.). Концепт паметног града/општине налаже сарадњу између грађана и власти, подстица грађане на активнији начин живота те ствара потребу за развојем “паметне” заједнице. Рад се бави анализом управљања градовима/општинама на подручју Републике Хрватске. Хипотеза рада гласи: Улога градова/општина у креирању паметних градова/општина препозната је од стране младих који ће у будућности учествовати у управним процесима. Циљ рада је да се испитају мишљења студената Правног факултета у Осиеку те студената Велеучилишта “Лавослав Ружичка” у Вуковару колики је ниво њиховог знања о примени

изв. концепција паметних градова/општина (smart city/smart municipality). Узорак испитаника чине студенти наведених институција. Испитивање је provedено у лансираном семинару академске 2023./2024. године. Резултати испитивања обрађени су дескриптивном статистиком, а мишљење је аутора како ће исти послужити свим релевантним актерима на локалном нивоу да добију увид у ставове младих о развоју концепција паметног града односно паметне општине. Такође, резултати испитивања показују на који начин млади у Републици Хрватској размишљају о примени оваквог концепција, која је његова сврха, мења ли се на тај начин састав управљања у локалној самоуправи, као и какве изазове очекују на локалном нивоу и који би били најважнији предлози за унапређење оваквог концепција. Чињеница је да без развоја “паметног” нема ни доброг управљања локалном заједницом. С обзиром на то да живимо у дигиталном добу, постоји велика потреба да се сви грађани едукују, схвате сврху развоја “паметних” градова/општина, како би на тај начин створили заједницу која ће бити примамљива за животно грађанима широм света. На тај начин задовољиле би се потребе грађана и унапредила ефикасност рада на локалном нивоу. У фокусу локалних лидера треба да буде креирање паметних решења за финансирање пројеката у области развоја локалних заједница.

Кључне речи: право на добру управу, паметни градови, паметне општине, реформа локалне самоуправе, млади људи.

Датум пријема рада: 10. 3. 2025.

Датум достављања коначне верзије рада: 30. 4. 2025.

Датум прихватања рада: 5. 5. 2025.