

Empowering Citizen Participation with E-government solutions in Cameroon

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Abstract

The general observation made in several Rural municipalities in Central Africa is that they do not have adequate tools to strengthen collaboration with the citizen, and especially to place the citizen at the heart of municipal action. As a result, rural communities find themselves abandoned by municipal executives. The objective of this poster is to investigate the efficient mechanisms for adopting technological tools of E-government to strengthen citizen participation in rural municipalities.

Introduction

In Cameroon, digitization is considered a strategic link for the development of the country's economy. In the Strategy Document for Growth and Employment (DSCE), the Cameroonian authorities recognized this by raising the sector to the same level as tourism, considering it as one of the engines of development with a number of growing jobs created. The authorities even believe that the sector can significantly help improve the country's revenues. However, the digitization of services is one of the major infrastructural difficulties, and more specifically in terms of local infrastructure, a vector for driving economic growth in rural areas. The objectives set by the strategic plan "Digital Cameroon 2020" of MINPOSTEL state that the digitization of services dreamed of a dimension which is accentuated on the transformation of existing sectors of activity, by integrating the use of ICTs, in carrying out activities in these sectors: administration, posts, tourism, commerce, agriculture. Digitization is today a vector of growth, productivity and competitiveness of companies and countries. Its cross-cutting nature impacts all sectors of the economy, it is also at the origin of new innovative sectors and has made others dependent on it.

This research draws up the key points of a study carried out on the analysis of the needs for municipal digital services in rural communities in Cameroon.

Methodology

The adopted mixed research method, a method of both quantitative and qualitative designs in the same research study, evolved in response to the observed limitations of both studies (Caruth 2013). The use of a questionnaire to conduct a survey is an allegorical approach to test the veracity of a model in information systems research because it is especially appropriate for explanatory models where events must be studied according to natural circumstances (Pinsonneault and Kraemer 1993). First, cross-sectional survey will be conducted to collect the data in order to describe the proposed model and secondly, we will use a qualitative study to gain additional comprehension on the findings from our previous quantitative study. Several steps will be followed for the construction of our items and evaluation of each of the constructs in our research model. The measurement elements from prior studies will be adapted to fit the study context.

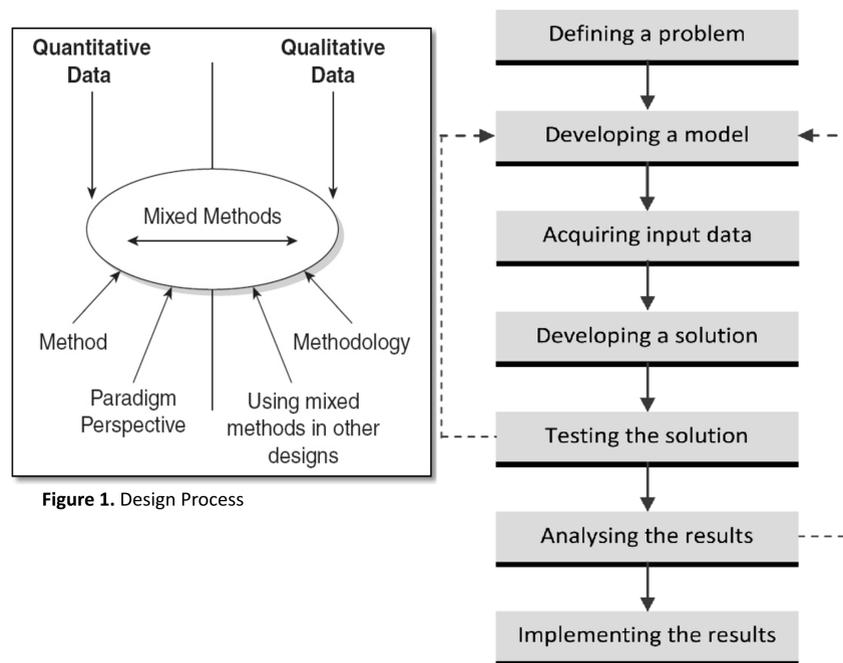


Figure 1. Design Process

Figure 2. Method Description

Results

A total of 100 people participated in the needs analysis workshops in Idenau and Bakingili. In the municipal workshop, 16 participants were present as representatives of the council, municipal staff and the mayor. The eight focus groups counted 84 participants in total, 52 in Idenau and 32 in Bakingili. The focus group participants represent the following groups: youth, teachers (civil servants), Okada / moto taxi drivers, businessmen, village traditional councillors, Telecentre staff, women cooperative, forestry Coop-erative, and farmers.

"How often do you use the Internet?"

Answers of focus group participants

Place	group	"never"	"sometimes"	"regularly"
Bibémi	Youth	7 (43,8%)	5 (31,3%)	4 (25%)
Mayo-Oulo	Farmers	12 (85,7%)	1 (7,1%)	1 (7,1%)
Mayo-Oulo	Students	12 (85,7%)	1 (7,1%)	1 (7,1%)
Mayo-Oulo	Teachers	6 (33,3%)	6 (33,3%)	6 (33,3%)
Mayo-Oulo	Merchants	6 (66,7%)	3 (33,3%)	0 (0%)
	SUM	43 (60,6%)	16 (22,5%)	12 (16,9%)
	Bibémi only	7 (43,8%)	5 (31,3%)	4 (25%)
	Mayo-Oulo only	36 (65,5%)	11 (20%)	8 (14,5%)

Table 1. Low Level of Digitalization

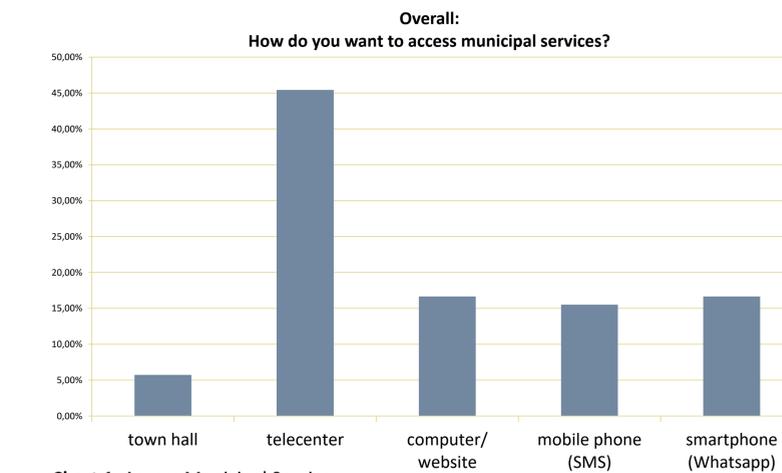


Chart 1. Access Municipal Services

Discussion

The overall use of Internet in the intervention municipalities is not very widespread. This varies slightly, for example digital literacy seems higher in urban or suburban areas (compared to rural areas) as well as in the South West (compared to the North region). Close to 50% of all participants (n=155) of the focus groups claim that they never use the internet. Only little more than 20% state that they are regular users of the internet.

Interestingly, what is being prioritized in terms of digitizable services heavily depends on whom you ask. For example, municipal staff often thinks first of internal processes (such as archiving or electronic personnel files) and the provision of more strongly regulated services such as the provision of civil status documents. On the other hand, most citizens rather think of services that might help them in their everyday life. Among others, this concerns the delivery of information by the municipality (such as the aforementioned municipal website), but also affects policy areas such as health and sanitation, education, infrastructure, public safety or e-payments for a variety of municipal services.

Conclusions

The acceptance of the digitization of municipal digital services is a guarantee of the success of the implementation of local electronic government in Cameroon. The favorable conditions are met: exponential penetration of the smartphone in rural areas, ease of use of web 2.0 technologies in municipalities and within disadvantaged communities, willingness of local elected officials to tie in with new technologies to deconstruct bureaucratic processes and integrate ease in rendering local public service.

The next steps of our research will consist in scaling up our research, on several municipalities of the country in order to be able to corroborate the results found, and to carry out a generalization applicable on several samples, according to different contexts, and different issues.

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- AMBERO Consulting GmbH, www.ambero.de
- MINPOSTEL = MINISTRY OF POSTS AND TELECOMMUNICATIONS