

Jurisprudential Perspective on Civic-Political Synergy in Digital Participation in Latvia

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Abstract

This cross-disciplinary study in political science employs analytical and sociological jurisprudence to elucidate the civic-political synergy among actors within Latvia's highly efficient digital civic participation ecosystem. With 78 civic-initiated legislative changes over 13 years – most occurring between electoral cycles – Latvia stands out globally for its efficiency in this area of governance. Despite its international significance in democratic processes and governance innovation, the efficiency of digital civic participation and the roles of its actors remain underexplored. Comparable systems of digital civic participation are widespread, including in Ukraine; however, their measurable and sustained efficiency often presents challenges. The case of legislated collective submissions in Latvia, alongside the digital civic participation ecosystem centred on the ManaBalss.lv (MyVoice) platform since 2011, provides a clear example of mutually beneficial, goal-oriented synergies between diverse democratic actors. Moreover, it underscores the importance of balanced regulation in establishing the legal framework within which these dedicated participants operate. While the ManaBalss.lv platform was initially created to empower civil society vis-à-vis politicians, political parties have gradually reframed their campaigns to leverage this highly successful and respected platform for their own objectives. To prevent misuse of ManaBalss.lv, a publication fee for politicians' initiatives was introduced in 2018, alongside a disclaimer accompanying such initiatives. This case study examines recent examples of party-sponsored civic campaigns on ManaBalss.lv from 2018 to 2023, analysing the motivations of politicians and parties in utilising this tool. The analysis draws on the theory of the network society, integrating concepts such as the normalised digital revolution and policy entrepreneurship. To elucidate the legal foundation underpinning the civic-political synergy under study, the research relies on the concept of institutional facts developed by analytical jurisprudence. Sociological jurisprudence complements this approach by providing a contextual analysis of the actors' engagement within the normative framework of digital civic participation in Latvia. Furthermore, it aids in theorising the potential alignment of legal systems to promote efficient digital civic participation in legislative agenda-setting, contributing to the novelty of this research. The empirical data for this study consists of semi-structured interviews mostly with politicians who have recently used ManaBalss.lv in their campaigns, as well as with those familiar with the platform since its inception in 2011. The research also incorporates data obtained directly from ManaBalss.lv. The analysis reveals a constructive and purposeful synergy between various actors within Latvia's digital participation ecosystem. The study highlights two primary types of actors: the NGO behind ManaBalss.lv and individual politicians or political parties. These actors are conceptualised as policy entrepreneurs, with civic entrepreneurs and political entrepreneurs representing their respective roles. The study concludes that a hallmark of political campaigns within Latvia's established digital participation ecosystem is their sustainability and independence from electoral cycles. These campaigns maintain enduring connections to pressing civic society issues within specific policy areas, thereby bolstering the political capital of the actors involved. The findings underscore the pivotal role of the civic component in fostering an efficient civic-political synergy in digital participation. Additionally, through the combined lens of analytical and sociological jurisprudence, this research elucidates an essential aspect of a coherent legal framework for an effective digital participation ecosystem: synergy among the stakeholders.

Keywords: analytical jurisprudence; sociological jurisprudence; ManaBalss.lv, civic entrepreneurs; political entrepreneurs; collective production.

Юридична перспектива щодо громадсько-політичної синергії в цифровій участі в Латвії

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Анотація

Це міждисциплінарне дослідження в галузі політології використовує аналітичну та соціологічну юриспруденцію для розкриття громадсько-політичного синергізму між акторами в рамках високоефективної цифрової екосистеми громадянської участі Латвії. З 78 громадських ініціатив, що привели до законодавчих змін за 13 років, – більшість з яких відбулася між виборчими циклами, – Латвія виділяється на глобальному рівні своєю ефективністю в цій сфері управління. Незважаючи на міжнародне значення для демократичних процесів та інновацій у сфері управління, ефективність цифрової громадянської участі та ролі її акторів залишаються недостатньо вивченими. Подібні системи цифрової громадянської участі є поширеними, зокрема і в Україні, однак їхня вимірювана та стійка ефективність часто викликає труднощі. Приклад колективних законодавчих ініціатив у Латвії, разом із цифровою екосистемою громадянської участі, побудованою навколо платформи ManaBalss.lv («Мій голос») з 2011 р., є яскравим прикладом взаємовигідного, цілеспрямованого синергізму між різними демократичними акторами. Крім того, цей випадок підкреслює важливість збалансованого регулювання для створення правової бази, в межах якої діють ці віддані учасники. Хоча платформа ManaBalss.lv спочатку була створена для зміцнення позицій громадянського суспільства у відносинах із політиками, політичні партії поступово адаптували свої кампанії, щоб використовувати цю високоефективну та авторитетну платформу у своїх інтересах. Щоб запобігти зловживанню платформою ManaBalss.lv, у 2018 р. було запроваджено плату за публікацію ініціатив політиків, а також застереження, яке супроводжує такі ініціативи. Це дослідження аналізує приклади партійно підтриманих громадянських кампаній на платформі ManaBalss.lv у період з 2018 до 2023 р., досліджуючи мотивації політиків і партій щодо використання цього інструменту. Базуючись на теорії мережевого суспільства, дослідження інтегрує концепти нормалізованої цифрової революції та політичного підприємництва. Для висвітлення правової основи, яка є підґрунтям досліджуваного громадсько-політичного синергізму, дослідження використовує концепцію інституційних фактів, розроблену аналітичною юриспруденцією. Соціологічна юриспруденція доповнює цей підхід, забезпечуючи контекстуальний аналіз залучення акторів у межах нормативної рамки цифрової громадянської участі в Латвії. Крім того, вона допомагає теоретично осмислити можливе узгодження правових систем для сприяння ефективній цифровій громадянській участі у формуванні законодавчого порядку денного, що є інноваційним аспектом цього дослідження. Емпіричні дані для цього дослідження складаються з напівструктурованих інтерв'ю, переважно з політиками, які нещодавно використовували ManaBalss.lv у своїх кампаніях, а також з тими, хто знайомий із платформою з моменту її створення у 2011 р. Дослідження також включає дані, отримані безпосередньо від ManaBalss.lv. Аналіз виявляє конструктивний і цілеспрямований синергізм між різними акторами в цифровій екосистемі участі Латвії. У дослідженні виділено два основних типи акторів: громадську організацію, що стоїть за ManaBalss.lv, та окремих політиків або політичні партії. Ці актори концептуалізуються як політичні підприємці, де громадянські підприємці та політичні підприємці представляють їхні відповідні ролі. У дослідженні сформульовано висновок, що характерною ознакою політичних кампаній у встановленій цифровій екосистемі участі Латвії є їхня стійкість і незалежність від виборчих циклів. Ці кампанії підтримують тривалі зв'язки з актуальними питаннями громадянського суспільства в певних політичних сферах, тим самим зміцнюючи політичний капітал залучених акторів. Результати підкреслюють ключову роль громадянського компоненту у сприянні ефективному громадсько-політичному синергізму в цифровій участі. Крім того, через поєднання аналітичної та соціологічної юриспруденції це дослідження висвітлює важливий аспект узгодженої правової бази для ефективної цифрової екосистеми участі: синергію між заінтересованими сторонами.

Ключові слова: аналітична юриспруденція; соціологічна юриспруденція; ManaBalss.lv, громадянські підприємці; політичні підприємці; колективне виробництво.

Introduction

Latvia's digital participation efficiency: a governance innovation, not a freak accident

Online political campaigning that incorporates elements of digital civic participation, or e-participation, involves citizens in shaping legislative agendas but tends to be unstable, occurring in waves. Such campaigns and e-participation efforts experience surges during elections and crises but decline afterward [12]. In this context, e-participation often becomes a political by-product – a temporary tool employed by political entrepreneurs to achieve short-term goals, such as winning elections or consolidating power. As a result, ad hoc e-participation is driven by the cyclical needs of political entrepreneurs and lacks consistency or persistence.

Among the numerous countries with e-participation platforms and corresponding laws and policies designed to involve citizens in proposing new legislation, Latvia stands out globally for the quantitatively measurable efficiency of its e-participation system. Since 2011, with the implementation of the collective submission system, Latvia has achieved 78 national-level legislative changes through e-participation, including the remarkable accomplishment of citizens securing a constitutional amendment via the internet. The civic initiatives platform ManaBalss.lv, driven by civic entrepreneurs, has been instrumental in sustaining the effectiveness of e-participation beyond electoral cycles. Furthermore, it provides long-term value to political entrepreneurs as a tool for building political capital.

To comprehend this phenomenon, three research questions are posed: 1) Why does Latvia's e-participation system in legislation maintain persistent efficacy, in contrast to wave-like patterns observed elsewhere? 2) How does this system contribute to sustainable online political campaigning? 3) Can a jurisprudential analysis of civic-political synergy in digital civic participation in Latvia clarify the broader political science theme of an efficient digital participation ecosystem?

This research hypothesises that the persistent efficacy of Latvia's e-participation system in the legislation is rooted in the presence of civic entrepreneurship at its core. This fosters synergy with political entrepreneurs and addresses their challenges in achieving sustainable online political campaigning. Furthermore, the study posits that analysing this phenomenon through analytical jurisprudence, combined with examining the observed civic-political synergy through sociological jurisprudence, enhances academic understanding of the dynamics underlying digital participation. It also highlights the structural and institutional factors contributing to its efficiency – or lack thereof.

As of November 2024, the aggregate data on the efficiency of ManaBalss.lv over a 13-year period are as follows: out of 137 civic initiatives resulting in final parliamentary decisions, 78 legislative acts and amendments have been implemented at the national level. Notably, only 24 of these were enacted during election years and could, therefore, be subject to conventional campaigning scrutiny. In Latvia, most civic-initiated parliamentary agenda-setting takes place independently of electoral cycles, contradicting the wave-like patterns typically associated with online political campaigning involving some level of civic participation [12].

Additionally, 51 citizens' initiatives are currently at various stages of review and legislation. Since 2011, the platform has been used by over 500,000 individuals who have voted at least once, representing a significant portion of Latvia's population of 1,876 million. The total number of votes cast exceeds three million. Each year, tens of thousands of new users join the platform.

The rarity of measurably effective civic e-participation in legislation has sometimes led international experts to view the success of ManaBalss.lv in Latvia as a "freak accident". However, the NGO Foundation of Public Participation, also known as Organisation MyVoice, which developed and

manages the ManaBalss.lv platform, asserts that its 13 years of consistent effectiveness tell a different story. They argue that the platform represents a stable and sustainable governance innovation [28].

The interviewed politicians and officials, whether or not they explicitly use the term "innovation", describe ManaBalss.lv as an innovative platform that required substantial initial lobbying and extensive behind-the-scenes technical and managerial work. In 2011 and 2012, the focus was on convincing both the public and politicians of the reliability of signatures and the security of data. This was achieved by engaging Latvia's main banks to provide eSignature services [36]. Additionally, the popular local social network Draugiem.lv played a key role as an initial provider of eSignatures, as it required strong user authentication. Simultaneously, a multi-stakeholder legislative lobbying effort was undertaken to amend the Saeima's Rules of Procedure, which led to the introduction of the collective submissions system in February 2012 [29].

The 2012 amendment of Saeima's Rules of Procedure resulted in a governance innovation and fostered an ecosystem of synergy and trust among the actors involved in digital civic participation in Latvia. Notably, the balanced regulation of collective submissions assigns a crucial role to civil society within this system. This institutional framework, which empowers entrepreneurial actors such as civic and political entrepreneurs, is analysed in the closing section under results and discussion, with jurisprudence providing key support for the analysis.

Literature Review

In studying actors of institutional change, including parliamentary agenda-setting, the seminal work of John W. Kingdon [13] remains indispensable. Kingdon introduced the overarching concept of policy entrepreneurs into academic discourse, a term further refined by subsequent researchers to encompass roles specific to different types of actors, such as civic, political, and institutional entrepreneurs. The concept of policy entrepreneurs, developed in the 1980s to explain policy change, retains its relevance in the digital era, which permeates all spheres of life, including democratic institutions, albeit with new challenges.

Manuel Castells highlights these caveats in his conceptual framework of the network society [3], particularly when describing the systemic factors of informational politics that contribute to the troubling reality of citizen participation being relegated to the "back seat" by political parties. This identified threat to democracy underscores the urgency of analysing democratic actors and their synergies.

The earlier concept of policy entrepreneurs in governance innovation and policy change is highly relevant to the analysis of digital participation in Latvia. The case of digital civic participation in Latvia also provides a demonstrably sustainable example of the opposite dynamic – where political parties in a network society and within the context of informational politics collaborate closely with civic actors. To some extent, this collaboration operates even on terms set by the civic actors, while each type of actors gains its specific value from the synergy. For politicians, this translates into sustainable political capital, facilitated precisely by the risky, novel reality of the network society described by Castells.

In the case of Latvia, it takes on a distinctive form. Civic society, within the legislated system of collective submissions, collaborates closely with other stakeholders, including parliamentarians and politicians more broadly. Digital civic participation in Latvia is legislated in an equitable and horizontal manner – contrasting sharply with the globally prevalent top-down model, which is also characteristic of e-petitions in Ukraine.

Analytical and sociological jurisprudence aids in elucidating this rather unique model, which political science might otherwise regard as a mere fact or even dismiss as an anomaly, as noted in the

introduction. Neil MacCormick's [16] concept of law – specifically the regulation of collective submissions in this research – as an institutional fact provides the necessary depth to understand the subject under discussion.

Sociological jurisprudence, as employed in this research, in turn systematises the collected qualitative data – comprising descriptions, evaluations, and observations from interviewed politicians and officials. A jurisprudential perspective enables a concrete analysis of the underlying law – the regulation on collective submissions – as a "mode for social engineering" [24, p. 8] and facilitates an evaluation of whether, and in what way, it is shaped by societal needs and values, as advocated by sociological jurisprudence and described by Brian Z. Tamanaha.

The perspective of sociological jurisprudence in this study is grounded in the seminal conceptualisations of Roscoe Pound [21] who viewed law as a means, not an end, with a focus on the standards or expectations of the public. Furthermore, this study draws on the recent elaborations of Roger Cotterrell. He advocates for a renewed application of sociological jurisprudence to provide a precise and contemporary juristic understanding of the legal value orientations of justice, security, and solidarity, "to help make law fit for purpose" [5, p. 226] – with the aspirations, expectations, and lived experiences of the subjects being the purpose in question.

Materials and Methods

To analyse the context of the ManaBalss.lv platform and its usage by politicians, this study draws on the theoretical framework of network society [2] and monitory democracy [9]. Within this framework, ManaBalss.lv is examined through the lens of the concept of a normalized digital revolution [27], which reconciles the normalization theory of conventional politics [19] with the utopian predictions of an electronic agora during the early days of computer-mediated communication [22]. Additionally, the concepts of civic and political entrepreneurs, derived from the definition of policy entrepreneurs [13], are employed to analyse the key actors involved.

The following terms are used in this research without further elaboration:

- Digital or e-participation refers to public involvement in the digital democracy environment, where citizens contribute their concerns, needs, interests, and values to shape parliamentary legislation.
- Policy entrepreneurs: Individuals who allocate resources to advocate their proposals or address specific issues, playing a crucial role in attracting attention from influential individuals and linking solutions to problems within the realm of politics.
- Civic entrepreneur: An individual or organization that seizes opportunities to influence policy outcomes in the interests of society.
- Political entrepreneur: An individual politician or political party that takes advantage of opportunities to influence policy outcomes and gain political capital.
- Political capital: Representative or reputational capital, or both, referring to parliamentary rights, legislator attributes, political productivity, and consistent policy positions signalled to the electorate.

In light of the limited research on the impact of e-participation in legislation, this exploratory qualitative study employs an inductive approach, examining data drawn from interviews, the ManaBalss.lv platform, and pertinent theories and concepts.

In analysing the regulation underlying digital civic participation in Latvia, this research follows the methodologies of analytical [4] and sociological [24] jurisprudence. This approach involves, *inter alia*, the principle of capture – employing a suitably broad conceptual framework with well-defined concepts relevant to the phenomenon under study. The cross-disciplinary nature of this study facilitates this breadth.

Moreover, the triangle of juristic values – fairness, effectiveness, and predictability – defined by Gustav Radbruch and promulgated by sociological jurisprudence [5], provides a valuable framework for analysing the cultural purposefulness of the regulation underlying digital civic participation in Latvia, as well as its broader applicability, such as in addressing the participation dilemma posited by Castells. Sociological jurisprudence also offers a helpful analytical vantage point in examining the specific cultural conditions that shape deliberate legislation.

Results and Discussion

Regulate with moderation and unleash the policy entrepreneurship

In Latvia, collective submissions, including their digital form – that is the only mechanism that functions effectively – are regulated with moderation. The relevant legislation, Saeima's Rules of Procedure on the particular aspect, is notable for its impartiality, despite being specifically lobbied in 2011 by e-participation activists.

Digital collective submissions are an available option, with the responsibility for civic participation resting entirely on civic society until the required support threshold is reached (over 0,6 % of the population, counting only Latvian citizens aged 16 and older). Civic society independently manages the technical, managerial, legal, and quality aspects of citizens' initiatives, as well as the funding for the underlying infrastructure and services.

This contrasts sharply with the approach taken in many other countries, where civic e-participation is established and managed top-down by parliaments, governments, or both. A partial exception is Estonia, where e-petitioning also originated with a strong element of civic entrepreneurship through the citizen-driven initiative "Charter 12". This initiative emerged during the political crisis of 2012 and eventually led to the establishment of the e-petitioning platform Rahvaalgatus.ee in 2016 [23].

However, during its formation, civic society transitioned to a "citizen as a user" role, as the platform became publicly managed. In this context, e-governance-savvy Estonians appear to engage minimally with the platform, perceiving it as a default service [12]. Consequently, the initial moment of civic entrepreneurship was lost. As with most publicly run legislative e-participation platforms, assessing the effectiveness of Rahvaalgatus.ee in quantitative terms remains challenging.

Similarly, the emergence of e-petitioning in Ukraine was catalysed by a combination of a political crisis, which created a window of opportunity, and the efforts of civic entrepreneurs advocating for policy change. Following the 2014 Maidan Revolution, a coalition of civil society organisations – led by the Center for Innovations Development at the National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy and the Reanimation Package of Reforms – pushed for amendments to the Law of Ukraine On Citizens' Appeals. These efforts culminated in the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine adopting the amendments in 2015, thereby legitimising e-appeals and e-petitions [11]. As in Estonia, Ukraine's civic society transitioned to a "citizen as a user" role after achieving the legislative change.

The case of Latvian citizens' digital participation, centred on ManaBalss.lv, is notable not only for its robust and quantitatively measurable efficiency but also for its unique model of sustained civic entrepreneurship. Unlike other contexts where civic entrepreneurs play a pivotal role in initiating institutional change, in Latvia, civic society itself maintains a continuous entrepreneurial role within the established system.

ManaBalss.lv has never received public funding. Its initial publicity, driven by respected influencers, its demonstrable impact on legislation and policymaking, and a continuous feedback loop with the community – through news, publications, and newsletters¹ – help to build public trust and reinforce

¹ ManaBalss.lv newsletter twice a month is e-mailed to more than 25'000 subscribers.

the perception that engaging in this demanding form of participation is worthwhile. Notably, ManaBalss.lv is demanding for both initiative submitters and voters.

The voting process for an initiative requires strong authentication via Latvian internet banking or the official eSignature, ensuring adherence to the principle of "one person – one vote" and preventing the involvement of bots or fraudulent votes. Despite the effort and trust required to provide personal data, Latvians willingly complete the authorisation process due to the evident and well-communicated efficiency of the initiatives' system. Additionally, they voluntarily contribute donations to support the maintenance of ManaBalss.lv.

At least 30,000 individuals contribute to ManaBalss.lv annually. The typical optional micro-donation during the voting process ranges from €0.50 to €5. The widespread acceptance of strong authentication and the consistent willingness to respond to micro-donation requests reflect the trust and commitment of voters to the ManaBalss.lv platform and the collective submission system. The sustained effectiveness of Latvian e-participation underscores that its success is neither coincidental nor accidental.

Civic entrepreneurs spearheaded and managed the institutional shift towards e-participation in Latvia, as well as in Estonia and Ukraine, during a critical window of opportunity. This period coincided with economic, social, and political crises, accompanied by growing public mistrust in the Latvian parliament, the Saeima. In 2011, amidst the dissolution of the parliament by the President and a popular anti-oligarchy movement, a coalition of tech entrepreneurs, civic activists, professionals, and aspiring politicians advocated for direct societal involvement in the legislative process through digital participation. These efforts culminated in the introduction of the mechanism of collective submissions into the parliamentary Rules of Procedure.

In Latvia, collective submissions require a minimum of 10,000 signatures from citizens aged 16 or older at the time of filing. The ManaBalss.lv platform, which employs strong authentication via internet banking and the official eSignature, is instrumental in the effectiveness of this mechanism. Its digital format simplifies the process of campaigning for initiatives, while strong authentication significantly reduces the likelihood of signing errors.

The introduction of collective submissions in Latvia exemplifies civic entrepreneurship seizing a window of opportunity to address a recognised issue with a proposed policy solution. Factors such as the political crisis, public demand for greater participation beyond elections, and early endorsement from the President were instrumental in the platform's establishment and subsequent success.

The efficiency of ManaBalss.lv can be attributed to the ecosystem of trust surrounding it, which involves multiple stakeholders, including the NGO Foundation for Public Participation, parliament, government institutions and officials, experts from various fields, media, other NGOs, and the wider civil society. This trust is cultivated through the establishment of quality standards for initiatives promoted on the platform, as well as the deliberative process during their formation and promotion.

Political parties are legitimate societal actors in using ManaBalss.lv, provided they adhere to the platform's quality criteria. These include full disclosure of any political or commercial interests behind initiatives, transparent civic lobbying, and clear disclaimers for initiatives with political or commercial motives, along with the payment of a publication fee.

The fee for political or commercial publications on ManaBalss.lv ensures that micro-donors supporting the platform do not inadvertently fund political parties or business advocacy. It also helps maintain a balance between the involvement of political parties, their members, and the wider community in proposing initiatives. The fee varies depending on the size of the party or business, ranging from €2,000 to €4,900 plus VAT. For initiatives without political or commercial interests, ManaBalss.lv offers the service free of charge to both signatories and initiative authors.

Over the years, political parties and companies have utilised the paid service of ManaBalss.lv on several occasions. Examples include initiatives concerning issues such as the inheritance rights of

second-pillar pensions, a progressive tax system, timely notifications on tax changes, transparency in state and municipal expenditures, reduced VAT on groceries, and a nationwide ban on gambling halls². These and other paid initiatives are subject to the same quality criteria, which includes a requirement for strong social relevance.

This approach helps maintain a balance between the potential political influence of ordinary citizens and more resourceful actors. On one hand, it prevents the platform from being exploited as a mouthpiece for powerful groups, such as aspiring political opposition or commercial advocacy. On the other hand, it ensures democratic access for the promotion of legitimate and relevant legislative ideas by anyone, while transparency policies, including disclaimers, foster mutual trust.

It is worth noting that even government coalition parties occasionally use ManaBalss.lv as an alternative means of promoting their policy agenda, as discussed in this study. This practice highlights the recognised effectiveness of collective submissions and underscores the importance of constructive civic lobbying within the system.

Political parties, particularly those in the government coalition, could easily opt for the conventional “shortcut” of initiating new legislation by submitting a draft with the support of five parliamentarians³. However, the value of demonstrable civic support in political debates, the procedural framework of collective submissions, and the predictable media attention are among the reasons why a political party might choose to pay for the services of ManaBalss.lv, publish an initiative, and risk not garnering substantial public support for the legislative proposal.

The voluntary and consistent commitment of the ManaBalss.lv team to upholding high standards of public engagement and purposeful, efficient participation has played a key role in fostering an ecosystem of trust around the collective submissions mechanism. One key element of this ecosystem is the consultation system, where authors of submitted initiatives that have not yet been published receive input and advice from leading experts in the relevant fields.

This consultation system partially aligns with the theory of collective production of innovative ideas by crowds [18], as the network of ManaBalss.lv *pro bono* experts simultaneously critiques and reframes both the problems and proposed solutions presented in the initiatives. The revised problem and solution formulations are then suggested to the initiative authors, who, following consultation, make a decision, with the final choice regarding publication for public voting or decline resting with the ManaBalss.lv team.

Declined initiatives often present legitimate problem statements but propose solutions that are not legally or practically feasible. Some of these issues involve “wicked problems” that cannot be resolved solely through legislative changes. As a result, ManaBalss.lv and its expert consultation system only partially align with the theory of collective production of innovative ideas by crowds. The system does not specifically address wicked problems, and it is not truly a “crowd” but rather a network of willing experts who engage in critiquing, reframing, and expanding both the problems and solutions proposed by the initiatives.

Although ManaBalss.lv generally encourages authors to propose concrete and implementable legislative solutions to identified problems, the platform occasionally publishes initiatives addressing systemically complex issues and dilemmas, after consultation with the relevant experts. For example, initiatives related to the development and implementation of effective methods of resocialisation for minors and the establishment of a support system and services for young children⁴.

² Information in Latvian; see <https://manabalss.lv/i/1248>, <https://manabalss.lv/i/169>, <https://manabalss.lv/i/1333>, <https://manabalss.lv/i/1613>, <https://manabalss.lv/i/1747> and <https://manabalss.lv/i/1364> accordingly.

³ Saeima's Rules of Procedure (Saeimas kārtības rullis), clause 79. (1) (4). Retrieved from <https://ej.uz/fsm5>.

⁴ The initiatives in Latvian; accordingly – <https://manabalss.lv/i/2739>, <https://manabalss.lv/i/2574>.

ManaBalss.lv embodies the deliberative principle, which fosters the collective production of innovative ideas. It also addresses the dilemma of thick versus thin participation often encountered in civic digital engagement. Thick participation involves purposeful and inclusive exchanges of ideas, information, perspectives, and values, where individuals work towards decisions or judgments based on factual evidence, data, personal values, emotions, and other relevant factors. This approach ensures accessibility while encouraging thoughtful engagement [20]. In contrast, thin participation primarily activates individuals rather than groups and is characterised by more simplistic forms of engagement, such as "liking" or "disliking".

Although crowd engagement on ManaBalss.lv primarily occurs during the voting phase and may appear similar to "lik"-type engagement, it is not considered thin participation. Voters are required to carefully consider the deliberated problem statement and the proposed legislative solution, as well as undergo a strong authorization process to cast their vote. The numerous voluntary micro-donations made during the voting process further support the view that ManaBalss.lv voters' behaviour aligns with thick participation. Some individuals even choose to make regular monthly or quarterly automatic payments to the platform, demonstrating their ongoing engagement.

Moreover, the legislative deliberation of proposed changes in initiatives continues within the Saeima. This process often uncovers deeper systemic amendments required to achieve the desired solutions. For example, during the parliamentary deliberation of the collective submission titled "To reimburse psychotherapy prescribed by the doctor", a shortfall in the projected number of new psychotherapy specialists was identified, highlighting the need for further action. Similarly, the collective submission "State-funded reconstruction surgeries for breast cancer patients" revealed deficiencies in existing support systems and suboptimal communication between doctors, state officials, and patients. As the proposed changes are implemented, these issues are gradually being addressed.

Politicians find it difficult to reject collective submissions, as the legislated mechanism triggers specific deliberative and legislative processes, often facilitating the establishment of otherwise unattainable legislative agendas [37]. This observation, corroborated by other interviewed politicians, highlights the potential of policy entrepreneurs facilitated through ManaBalss.lv. The ability to set the agenda is a key characteristic of policy entrepreneurs [13].

A recent example, also relevant to Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, is the collective submission titled "For a United Society Without the Latvian Russian Union", which calls for the prohibition of a political party with clear pro-Kremlin leanings. Prior to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, it would have been unimaginable to publish such an initiative on ManaBalss.lv. However, with the significant escalation of the Kremlin's genocidal aggression, the situation has dramatically changed. The proposal qualified, was published, garnered public support, was discussed in the Saeima, and received considerable further deliberation⁵.

The interviewed politicians regard certain challenging policy-making agendas, such as abolishing real estate tax for single properties, imposing stringent regulations on gambling establishments, and implementing fundamental changes to the state-funded pension scheme, as practically impossible to introduce except through ManaBalss.lv. These cases are covered further in this study.

New means versus old ways: digital participation and monitory democracy

The initial expectations in the early 1990s revolved around the empowering potential of communication technologies, envisioning a citizen-designed and citizen-controlled worldwide

⁵ For deeper elaboration on the topic, see the article "Civic Entrepreneurs and "Ratio Legis" During Russia's War in Ukraine: a Case Study of Digital Petitions in Latvia and Ukraine" in 2024 Issue 1(25) of this journal.

communications network evolving into an electronic agora (Rheingold 1993). However, there was a simultaneous warning not to mistake the tool for the task and to maintain control over technologies.

A decade later, research by Margolis and Resnick [19] revealed that digital politics had not brought substantial political change, leading to the proposal of normalization theory. It concluded that the internet, on its own, was unlikely to trigger significant political transformation and emphasized the need to temper utopian expectations, recognizing the normalization of technology within socio-political realities.

Another decade later, Wright [27] introduced the concept of the normalized digital revolution, amending the normalization theory. This concept criticized Margolis and Resnick's narrow definition of revolution and highlighted the potential for revolutionary changes that deviate from a libertarian ideal. The punctuated evolution concept, derived from economic regulation theory [7], was also proposed to analyse the cumulative and incremental changes in deliberative processes during times of crisis [8]. Wright further built upon this concept, suggesting that a normalized (digital) revolution involves significant changes to the functioning of established political institutions without overthrowing them.

The concept of a normalized digital revolution balances the analysis of governance innovation and avoids both the dichotomy between agency and structure and extremes of utopian expectations and "politics as usual". It recognizes that elected representatives maintain their power while new technologies enhance the establishment of a more robust representative democracy. The ManaBalss.lv innovation in digital participation is precisely perceived as a normalized revolution by civic entrepreneurs in MyVoice, Latvian politicians, and state officials, as it revolutionizes and innovates the functioning of current institutions and practices without replacing them.

Politicians view the system of collective submissions and ManaBalss.lv as innovative and disruptive, while still integrated and enhancing their political roles. It is fundamentally different from comparative European examples, making it a democratic practice worth exporting through development cooperation instruments [35]. In international government forums, the story of ManaBalss.lv and effective digital participation in Latvia stands out amidst discussions on the challenges of digitalization [34]. A former UN official in Georgia even taught her staff to pronounce "Mana Balss" in Latvian [38] to emphasize its significance.

Analysing ManaBalss.lv as a local case within the framework of punctuated evolution and normalized revolution helps embed Latvia's digital participation system and perceive it as part of a novel global social, economic, and political reality. This novel reality is the network society that emerged around 2000 [2], characterized by networks in all key dimensions of social organization and practice. The digitally networked legislative agenda setting through ManaBalss.lv, with its multi-stakeholder ecosystem of trust, exemplifies this phenomenon.

The operations of ManaBalss.lv strongly demonstrate the characteristics of network society. For instance, the principle that technology does not determine society but embodies it is evident in the institutional changes achieved through the efforts of Latvian civic entrepreneurs. The underlying technology of ManaBalss.lv and the legislation on collective submissions alone did not determine public and political behaviour, but together they embody the will of a functional society. Likewise, the dialectical principle that society does not determine technological innovation but uses it applies. The open-source solution behind ManaBalss.lv is available to the world, yet Latvian civic society has turned it into a disruptive and enhancing governance innovation.

Network society is not merely an entertaining playground. Throughout his comprehensive study, Castells emphasizes the power shifts in a society where information generation, processing, and transmission are fundamental sources of power for the involved stakeholders [2, p. 21].

While being clearly on the side of revolution rather than politics as usual, Castells envisions concrete paths of democratic reconstruction in the disruptions-rich network society. One such path involves enhanced citizen participation and consultation to re-create and strengthen the local state in the face of the unavoidable network state reality. As a network state, a national state must balance and advance its power within the shared network, which inevitably involves some loss of individual sovereignty. At the same time, the state is equally responsible for representing the weighted interests of its constituency in the network state, mediating and managing the dual relationship between domination and legitimation [3].

Network society serves as the analytical framework and context in which the balance of power between the state and civic society takes place. It is both a democratic and existential task for a state to recognize and respect the disruptive power of citizens ('demos') in order to unleash its innovative potential and avoid potential destructiveness while maintaining a balance of power ('kratos') in a democratic society.

Even though network society and the need for power balancing are global phenomena, Castells notes that the most influential trends legitimizing democracy occur at the local level. At this level, the principal mistake and risk of triggering the doomsday machine of undemocratic destructiveness lies in politics as usual and closed one-way political communication systems that exclude citizen participation.

The observed closedness serves a purpose, albeit with potential consequences. Politicians, particularly candidates, are compelled to manage the messages within their networks, enabling them to avoid being held accountable for positions or statements that could be detrimental or disconnected from the preferences of the electorate. Consequently, "as long as political parties and organized campaigns control the political procedure, electronic citizen participation will take a back seat in informational politics, as it refers to formal elections and decision-making" [3, p. 416].

In the context of the necessary power balancing in network society, it is crucial to clarify that political procedure with citizen digital participation in the back seat is not a joy ride but a democracy doomsday machine with a dilemma at its wheel. This dilemma stems from the politicians' need to address the preferences of the electorate in order to maintain at least stable political capital, while citizens demand constant checks and balances on these preferences, resulting in fluctuating political capital [15]. Politicians adhere to the gold standard of their political capital, whereas citizens demand a constant fine-tuning of both the mandate and values – a somewhat fiat currency of political capital.

This dilemma involves reputational and representative capital, corresponding to the agential-structural dichotomy addressed by the concept of normalized revolution. It is crucial to emphasize the promise within the concept of normalized revolution that wholesale changes to the function of established political institutions do not necessarily imply their overthrow. The key question is how to achieve disruptive political innovation rather than undemocratic destructiveness.

As mentioned earlier, MyVoice and the ManaBalss.lv platform, along with stakeholders, have successfully achieved such innovation. The theoretical framework of network society is helpful in understanding the broader context and general social, economic, technological, and political principles that enable this innovation. To focus on the agency and entrepreneurial aspect of policymaking, which is essential for leveraging the beneficial network society context and the windows of opportunity within it, this study adopts the theoretical framework of monitory democracy.

In monitory democracy, the fundamental framework of democracy undergoes transformative changes while retaining key features such as elections, multi-party competition, and citizen expression of approval or disapproval of legislation. This gradual evolution aligns with the concept of punctuated evolution, where incremental changes accumulate and periodically lead to revolutionary

transformations [8]. Consequently, due to the evolutionary nature of transformation, the concept of democracy itself evolves. The revolutionary character of ManaBalss.lv is explicitly expressed by a politician comparing it to the National Front, a movement instrumental in the fall of the Soviet Union and the regaining of Latvia's sovereignty [37].

In monitory democracy, power is subject to continuous checks and balances, ensuring that no one can rule without the consent of the governed or their representatives [9]. This aligns with the observed demand from the electorate for engagement in the constant fine-tuning of the policymaking agenda.

Gradually emerging and developing, monitory democracy represents a way of life and a governance approach, encompassing both civic culture and institutions that embody it. Keane notes that since 1945, monitory democracy has introduced approximately a hundred different types of power-monitoring devices that were previously non-existent in the world of democracy. These devices include extraparliamentary institutions such as citizens' juries, citizens' assemblies, think tanks, expert reports, and participatory budgeting. The citizens' initiatives platform, with its demonstrable and sustainable capacity for parliamentary agenda setting, fits well within the framework of monitory democracy.

These mechanisms, categorized by Keane as watchdogs, guide dogs, and barking dogs, are revolutionising the political dynamics of democracies. They deviate from traditional representative democracy, where elected parliamentary representatives affiliated with political parties are seen as the primary advocates for citizens' needs. Entrepreneurial agency is crucial, as both Keane and Castells highlight the non-inevitability of monitory democracy and the transformations in network society. Policy entrepreneurs play a vital role in advocating for economic and political choices, and they may also form innovative synergies, as shown in this research.

Help us to help you: citizen-led e-participation and political entrepreneurs

Entrepreneurship is the pursuit of value, which can encompass various types of values beyond monetary ones. In the context of civic entrepreneurship, there is a blurred boundary between entrepreneurship in the civic and public sectors, as both share the goal of pursuing social good [14]. However, for analytical clarity, it is important to distinguish between different types of actors within the broader framework of policy entrepreneurship. While their motivations and roles may sometimes overlap, distinct actors involved in policy entrepreneurship include civic entrepreneurs, political entrepreneurs, public entrepreneurs, and profession entrepreneurs. ManaBalss.lv has worked with each of these actors. Although further research is recommended, this study does not delve into the specific dynamics of profession and public entrepreneurs.

Political parties venture into the realm of civic initiatives when persuaded by individual politicians. Since the introduction of the fee threshold on ManaBalss.lv for political parties and commercial organizations in 2018, there have been 37 individual contracts with members of political parties regarding the publication of initiatives. These contracts stipulate that the initiated proposals are authors' individual initiatives and will not be used in the parties' campaigns. Additionally, there were three initiatives by politicians published prior to the fee threshold implementation.

After 2018, six initiatives by politicians are published for a fee, accompanied by corresponding disclaimers. This research focuses on three of those initiatives, along with a previous one by a civic entrepreneur that was eventually promoted by the "New Conservative Party" during its tenure in the governing coalition from 2018 to 2022.

Policy entrepreneurs are characterized by their activities of framing a problem, developing solutions, building support coalitions, and seeking opportunities and attention [1]. Analysis of Interviews 1–4

and ManaBalss.lv data confirms that parties in the analysed cases utilised civic initiatives as political entrepreneurs.

In framing a problem, political entrepreneurs identify an existing condition that violates important values, reframe it as a problem, and propose a solution [1; 10]. The analysed cases involve condition-problem pairs with corresponding proposed solutions, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Condition-problem pairs with solutions

No.	Initiative ⁶	Condition	Problem	Solution
1	The prohibition of gambling halls throughout the territory of Latvia	Freedom of commerce; high tax income	Broken individual lives and financial calamities of households due to addiction	Allow gambling only in four- and five-star hotels under additional regulation ⁷
2	Transparency of the use of state and municipal funds	Commercial secrecy of the procurement tenders	Opaque public expenditure; overpriced estimates of public expenditure	Disclosure of the winning bids for the public tenders
3	Voluntary participation in the 2 nd level of the pension system and a 6% reduction in taxes	Well-established state funded pension scheme	Diminished pension savings capital due to market fluctuations and high banking commissions; missed opportunity of lowering labour taxes	Voluntary contribution to the 2 nd level of the pension scheme and lowering mandatory social insurance of labour by 6%
4	Removal of real estate tax for the only property	Established and easy to administrate tax income source for municipalities	Intolerable tax burden on population due to the real estate speculations; violation of constitutional right to the property	Removal of real estate tax for the only property up to a certain property size

⁶ Texts in Latvian; accordingly – <https://manabalss.lv/i/1364>, <https://manabalss.lv/i/1613>, <https://manabalss.lv/i/2742>, <https://manabalss.lv/i/976>.

⁷ Like, no alcohol to the gamblers, no smoking, checking of the Register of resigned individuals before admission to the premises.

In the analysed activities of problem framing and other change-making endeavours, a clear synergy is evident between political entrepreneurs and ManaBalss.lv as civic entrepreneurs. Faced with the entrenched power of the gambling industry, ManaBalss.lv is viewed as the logical choice and the power brokering tool without alternative in an otherwise seemingly hopeless situation [30]⁸. In this context, problem framing serves not only as an explanatory influence but also as a means of accumulating power through provable popular support for specific changes and garnering media attention. The legislative procedure associated with collective submissions becomes the avenue through which this power is exercised.

In the process of problem framing and advocating for specific solutions, civic initiatives within the collective submissions framework are preferred over regular legislative proposals, as the latter inherently involve compromises from the outset. This approach allows for a more purposeful cross-party coalition building, focused on achieving a clear change rather than settling for a suboptimal "business as usual" outcome.

The recognition and respect for societal mobilisation through ManaBalss.lv played a crucial role in garnering support for the ideas. As one interviewee stated, without this platform, their idea would have remained marginalized and no change would have occurred. The ability to demonstrate provable civic mobilisation was convincing for initially reluctant parliamentarians from other parties to join in, either seeking a share in expected reputational capital or, at the very least, avoiding the loss of representative capital. The interviewee attributed the biased stance of political competitors on the issue of gambling regulation as a reason for their failure to be re-elected in 2022, resulting in a loss of representative capital.

Political entrepreneurs found similar motivation in utilising ManaBalss.lv for effective problem framing, power brokering, and coalition building, as seen in the case of the initiative regarding the disclosure of winning bids for public tenders. By mobilising a community and applying pressure through ManaBalss.lv, the initiative became a powerful tool to demonstrate the widespread need for a concrete change. Closed-door negotiations and party factions engaging in bargaining based on their own interests were avoided. The initiative successfully accumulated a coalition of up to 14 additional votes from other parties in the parliament, alongside the 16 votes the party already had, without traditional bargaining.

These cases illustrate the synergy between political and civic entrepreneurship within an established governing coalition party, despite being a minority partner. Alternative power accumulation beyond existing representative capital was necessary to effectively address key problems, as exemplified by the real estate tax and gambling issues. The limitations of the coalition format were recognised, leading to the adoption of the civic lobbying approach.

A similar motivation was observed in the case of an aspiring political party advocating for voluntary contributions to the state-funded pension scheme. ManaBalss.lv serves as the platform for their cause, given the absence of viable alternatives due to unrealistic referendum threshold and the prohibition on raising budget-related issues in referendums. Addressing the pension scheme with its deep vested interests, requires an approach that goes beyond traditional political channels.

Launching a civic initiative allows the aspiring party to attract attention from incumbent politicians and society at large. Their campaign is designed for the long term, and its aspirations correspond to

⁸ "No alternative" in "a quite hopeless situation" description is especially strong by this interviewee as a former high-ranking anti-corruption officer.

the sustained efficiency of civic initiatives on ManaBalss.lv, even without concurrent political campaigning during elections.

These examples demonstrate how political and civic entrepreneurship work together to tackle complex issues and mobilise support. ManaBalss.lv serves as a platform for long-term initiatives, enabling actors to overcome political dilemmas and bring about meaningful change.

The aspiring political party utilises the civic initiative not only for external impact but also for internal capacity building, including networking, mobilisation around a specific cause, and crystallising its ideology. Consequently, this actor is more willing to invest in civic lobbying compared to another, more established party, even though their public financing is comparable.⁹

For this actor, the initiative serves as a potential tool for coalition-building rather than an immediate one. Other power brokers "have clarified our positions, but only for their own understanding. If we come into a position of power, then – come again, and we will already be familiar. And together we can fight and change something. But for now, there is no point in meeting for us" [33].

The more established party, which was not re-elected in 2022 and has reduced public financing, is now more cautious about investing in initiatives. The party leader calculates that, in the current situation, they are less comfortable paying 4,900 euros plus VAT for an initiative. Still, with the right idea and timing for going public with it, the party is willing to use ManaBalss.lv again.

Other interviewees who strongly affirm that the ManaBalss.lv platform facilitates sustainable political campaigning corroborate this. "It is your success story – you are not tied to elections. People see that if you want to change something in the country, then this is one of the understandable and effective mechanisms available" [32].

The analysed campaigns are somewhat tempered, more collegial vis-à-vis society, which the party only partially targets with the campaign as an audience. The leading characteristic here is synergy with the civic society, beginning with publication and other support services by ManaBalss.lv. Avoidance of clichés, high quality content of the message, focus on practically implementable policy goal and a long-term attitude characterizes these campaigns.

High-quality standards applied to the initiatives by political parties are appreciated. Not turning ManaBalss.lv "into a garbage bin full of absurd proposals" [30] maintains its relevance and demanding, focused attitude towards its users. Campaigning on ManaBalss.lv and even just voting on it takes effort, but it is appreciated. With previous experience in both municipal and parliamentary politics, a politician sees the platform and campaigning on it as crucial for advancing his and his party's ideas and gaining partial support.

Political campaigning on ManaBalss.lv aligns with the e-government analysis by Darrell M. West, who identifies four stages of e-government, ranging from a billboard stage to interactive democracy with comprehensive public outreach and accountability-enhancing features. Genuine innovation and transformative change occur in the latter stage.

While the functions and tasks of governments differ substantially from political parties, the stages and models of technological change in digitization also vary accordingly. However, the analytical framework developed by West provides a helpful tool for evaluating the stage of digitalization for individual parties and political systems in a country (see Table 2).

⁹ Both parties get around 185'000 euro public financing a year. Information in Latvian – <https://ej.uz/vmez>.

Table 2. Stages and models of technological change in political campaigning

Source: Author compilation; West 2005; Castells 2010b

Billboards	Portals with some integrated communication	Interactive democracy
Generalised political rhetoric and tight communication control for looking good; citizen participation – in a back seat; short term campaigns	Generalised political rhetoric and tight communication control for looking good; some feedback, like, protocols of the meetings; one-way citizen participation, like, application for a membership, making donation, purchasing branded advertisement goods; short term and 'ad hoc' campaigns	Party and politicians deliberate on and campaign for policy change together with civic society; full accountability: multi-sided communication, measurable policy-making success or failure shared with society; long term and focused campaigning for specific policies
Incremental Change		
Secular Change		
Transformational Change		

In Latvia, the political parties analysed using ManaBalss.lv for campaigning are operating within the stage of interactive democracy. In comparison to the earlier stages of billboard and portal, where civic participation is limited or tokenistic, the model of interactive democracy goes beyond mere appearances. The values pursued by politicians in their campaigns on ManaBalss.lv are concrete and measurable, rather than generalized.

The focus on measurability exposes politicians to the risk of failure, but it also strengthens their connection with the electorate. They share the responsibility for both incremental policy changes and profound transformations. It fosters a pragmatic synergy of "help us to help you".

This shift in discourse changes the dynamics of demand and supply, as discussed in the previous chapter. In an economic parallel, the inclusion of civic fine-tuning in interactive democracy does not undermine political capital, but rather expands the base of stakeholders or even shareholders. This approach mitigates the risks of blame-game tactics, enhances accountability, and tempers populist rhetoric. As one interviewee described, participating in an initiative through ManaBalss.lv and influencing the process creates a sense of being a shareholder in the decision-making [32].

Another interviewee, from a party just recently characterised as clearly populist, acknowledges that campaigning through a civic initiative has transformed their short-term approach and rhetoric. Rather than focusing solely on criticizing and highlighting problems, they now emphasize offering solutions. This shift allows them not only criticise with attention-grabbing rhetoric, but also genuinely focus on proposing solutions [33].

This study does not impose concepts on the interviewed actors or attempt to fit their stories into theoretical frameworks. During the conversations, the interviewees were introduced to the concepts of policy, civic, and political entrepreneurship at appropriate moments. Two of them identified themselves as civic entrepreneurs in the cases of the initiatives they were involved in. One of them acted as a civic entrepreneur in parallel with a party-promoted initiative. All the interviewees agreed

that their parties, in relation to the addressed initiatives, acted as political entrepreneurs. Furthermore, all the political interviewees with active or past civic digital initiatives described them as sustainable both as political campaigns and as a system of civic participation in general.

All the interviewed politicians with active or past civic digital initiatives prefer civic-led digital participation over government- or parliament-led alternatives. The entrepreneurial nature of the civic sector, where everything not explicitly prohibited is allowed according to Latvian civil law, provides an advantage. Platforms like MyVoice, as one interviewee noted, prioritize addressing situations based on their essence rather than relying on clichés [31].

Another reason for the preference of civic-led digital participation is the comparative trustworthiness of NGOs compared to governmental and municipal institutions. Society's trust in governmental and municipal institutions tends to be lower, while NGOs that have proven themselves as operating professionally and objectively enjoy greater public confidence. Therefore, a platform originating from the NGO sector, such as ManaBalss.lv, has a greater chance of success than a similar platform created by a government structure [30].

Based on his experience in power, a political party leader expressed doubts about the full independence of a state-run platform. He raised concerns about potential interference from personnel policies and various other policies that could hinder its independence. In contrast, ManaBalss.lv operates with an entrepreneurial, goal-focused motivation [32].

An interviewee from an aspiring political party, when considering a platform between an NGO- and state-run option, would choose the one that is already more widely used and has achieved tangible results. In Latvia, digital services that are early adopters tend to be more enduring and popular. Realistically, the interviewee does not see the possibility or necessity of a state-run alternative. Additionally, an NGO like MyVoice has more flexibility to say "no" to aspiring authors with content of lower quality. Thus, civic-led digital participation is associated with quality, purposefulness, provisional efficiency, and prestige [33].

Rules as institutions in e-participation: a jurisprudential perspective

A concise yet essential jurisprudential perspective on the Saeima's Rules of Procedure concerning collective submissions, alongside the lived experiences of the interviewed stakeholders, contributes to the conceptual coherence of an otherwise broad and dispersed array of normative statements, personal descriptions, insights, and evaluations. Firstly, analytical jurisprudence clarifies the object of the analysis itself.

The generic discipline of this study – political science, particularly institutional theory – provides a researcher with the tools to understand how institutions, in the broadest sense, influence policy-making and governance. However, as the research focuses on legal institutions, including the legal framework of Latvian legislation on collective submissions, analytical jurisprudence becomes indispensable.

The analysis of a law as an institutional fact requires attention to the actions, words, and even thoughts of the actors involved [17] in order to assess the sociological significance of the legislation under study [16]. Thus, the analytical jurisprudential perspective consolidates a wide range of factors under the framework of a single institutional legal fact. For cross-disciplinary research, this jurisprudential approach proves analytically valuable by enabling the comprehension of diverse phenomena and observations – such as collective submissions and their dynamics and synergies – under the unifying concept of an institutional fact.

Furthermore, a sociological jurisprudential perspective is a logical first choice for cross-disciplinary research when analysing the relationships and synergies among actors within a given legal order.

Even if a particular legal order – in this case, the system of collective submissions and its associated dynamics – does not necessitate general approbation or commitment to it [16], the interviewed politicians unanimously affirm the value of the system established since 2012, albeit from different perspectives.

As this system prominently highlights the central role of civic entrepreneurs in digital participation, it is particularly important from a sociological jurisprudence perspective to examine the exact wording – *expressis verbis* – used by a sample of interviewees. This is especially relevant when they respond to the vignette question of whether they would prefer a digital participation platform run by an NGO over one operated by the state, parliament, or another official entity.

Regarding efficiency and trust: "We know how much trust society places in state and municipal entities. Unfortunately, this trust is lower compared to organisations in the non-governmental sector, particularly when these organisations have demonstrated over time their ability to operate professionally and objectively, thereby earning public confidence. This is why a platform developed by an NGO has a greater chance of success than a similar platform created by a state institution" [30].

Regarding efficiency: "ManaBalss steps into every situation where it is needed, aiming to resolve it not based on clichés but in essence. This is my answer to the question of why such activities should not be carried out by the public sector but rather by the non-governmental sector. It is not merely about existing and processing but about achieving the goal" [31].

Regarding political neutrality: "Certainly NGO-run. Having been part of the power system, I don't believe in its complete independence. I am unsure what safeguards would need to be implemented to ensure true independence, for instance, if it were operating under the Saeima. There are personnel policies and various other considerations" [32].

Regarding quality control and consultation services: "If the state were to decide which initiatives to publish and which not to, how could it make such decisions? In the case of the state, there would need to be a right to appeal. That would be extremely complicated and would raise concerns about censorship. NGOs, in this regard, have more freedom—they can justify their decisions and state that something is not appropriate. For the state, this would be much more difficult" [33].

Another interviewee recalls the beginnings of ManaBalss.lv in 2011, when the NGO MyVoice and other civic actors initially framed the problem, proposed a legislative and technical solution, lobbied for it, and then implemented both the technical and managerial aspects, ultimately achieving the legislative change. The interviewed former politician emphasises the stark contrast between the costs, readiness to adapt, and proactivity in implementing the IT solution and associated services by the MyVoice team, compared to an official e-participation system developed at the time [37].

Although the observed civic entrepreneurship and its comparable efficiency are in a very different context from the one Roscoe Pound addresses in his seminal work on sociological jurisprudence over 100 years ago [21], they align precisely with the original legal reasoning. Pound speaks of a tendency towards critical re-evaluation in an era of reform through legislation. As described earlier, this re-evaluation – and, in the case addressed in this research, not just a reform but a governance innovation through legislation in Latvia – occurred with civic actors maintaining their pivotal role in the e-participation ecosystem. In Estonia, "Charter 12" and the Reanimation Package of Reforms in Ukraine represented a shift back to the "citizen as a user" status during their corresponding reforms.

Studying the efficiency of these and other comparable e-participation systems, as well as the synergies among the actors they create, is recommended for further research. In Latvia, however, it is evident that the civic and political actors addressed – particularly those from minority parties and parties not represented in parliament – recognise the central role of civic entrepreneurs in e-participation and

affirm Pound's fundamental assessment that "laymen know full well that they may make laws" [21, p. 12].

Whether it is the challenges of social justice in Pound's time a century ago or the power dynamics of today's network society, as conceptualised by Castells, the principle of sociological jurisprudence remains relevant. For the well-being of the law itself, a conscious regard for societal needs and values is indispensable in shaping contemporary legislation that aligns with the prevailing sense of justice within society and enhances public respect for the law [24]. Thus, from the perspective of sociological jurisprudence, civic entrepreneurs in a multi-stakeholder e-participation ecosystem are indeed pivotal in achieving its efficiency and reinforcing synergies among the actors.

In this regard, a jurisprudential perspective on the dynamics underlying e-participation in Latvia clearly enhances academic understanding by focusing on the fundamental principles, rules, and order in their precise, jurisprudential sense. At the same time, an institutional legal fact – such as the e-participation ecosystem based on collective submissions in this case – serves as both a comprehensive concept and an encompassing analysandum, aiming to capture the full spectrum of institutional, actor-specific, and personal insights into what the norms of the order are for the committed participants [17].

Conclusions

Sustainable civic e-participation in legislation, characterised by its consistent efficiency in facilitating real and multiple legislative changes, defines the Latvian system of collective submissions centred around the NGO-run platform ManaBalss.lv. This is a result of the institutional identity of the platform's creators and maintainers, who are civic entrepreneurs committed to ensuring continuous and effective civic participation in legislative and political decision-making processes.

Furthermore, a jurisprudential perspective on this particular system and legal order in Latvia as an institutional legal fact establishes the centrality of policy entrepreneurs, and specifically civic entrepreneurs, within it. As the assessment comes specifically from political actors as a class of committed participants, it not only validates the initial hypothesis from the political science perspective regarding the centrality of civic entrepreneurs but also enriches the study with a jurisprudential evaluation of the well-being of the addressed law. The established legal order clearly reinforces this well-being and holds significance for jurisprudential and political considerations in e-participation ecosystems within democratic network societies elsewhere.

The study concludes that political campaigns driven by civic initiatives on ManaBalss.lv are distinguished by their sustainability, as they are not tied to electoral cycles, and civic participation plays a crucial role in these campaigns. ManaBalss.lv, with its focus on civic entrepreneurship, requires an entrepreneurial approach from its users, particularly benefiting civic society. Therefore, the fundamental requirement for politicians to use the platform as political entrepreneurs is genuine public participation in their political campaigns. Additionally, the fee threshold for initiative publication prevents politicians from exploiting societal resources and establishes them as collegial stakeholders.

With genuine public participation and civic society as stakeholders, these campaigns fall within the interactive democracy stage of political campaigning. This stage is significantly different from previous stages, such as digital billboards and portals, which primarily involve one-way political advertising and limited participation.

Alongside genuine public participation, political campaigning in interactive democracy addresses several dilemmas. One such dilemma is the need for political parties to control messages within their communication networks to maintain a positive image, while the uncontrollable intercommunication

among the electorate in the network society poses a challenge. As a feature of monitory democracy, political campaigning in interactive democracy involves sharing both the risks of failure or suboptimal outcomes and the eventual gains and recognition of achieved policy changes among stakeholders. In such a collaborative environment, there is no need for blame games or boasting, nor for fear-driven communication control or clichéd rhetoric.

Similarly, the political logic of converting reputational capital into representative power, often requiring compromises, presents a dilemma in response to the popular demand for constant checks and balances on policies. It is a dilemma of the gold standard and fiat currency of political capital. When a civic digital initiative and its associated political campaign transition into a collective submission with a precise policy demand, there is limited room for manoeuvring and horse-trading, with the associated risk of losing reputational capital.

In addition, solid and specified popular support for the policy cause, along with the political unease of opposing it, fosters cross-party coalition building. It provides an opportunity for political competitors to join forces and share in the provisional gain of reputational capital. For political entrepreneurs leading these campaigns, it helps to gain or expand representative capital and mitigates the trial-and-error process of selecting interest groups and constituents to serve.

Regardless of whether the focus is solely on political capital or includes the dual motivation of civic entrepreneurship, initiating a civic digital initiative has the potential to substantially alter the dynamics of problem framing and power brokering for policy changes. This overarching benefit, along with the minimisation of political dilemmas in the network society, motivates political entrepreneurs to utilise ManaBalss.lv for political campaigning, thereby confirming the first two hypotheses of this research. The confirmation of the third hypothesis is evident in the earlier application of jurisprudential analysis in this study.

This study examines samples of political entrepreneurship from coalition minority partners and aspiring political actors. Further research is needed to analyse the existing and potential synergies between civil society and well-established parties, as well as coalition majority partners, through the ManaBalss.lv digital participation mechanism. A hypothesis for future research could be that acquiring substantial representative capital upon attaining power hinders both political entrepreneurship and the motivation for e-participation in political campaigning via ManaBalss.lv.

Whether the hypothesis is proven or not, further research is needed to explore the dynamics of domination and legitimation in a network society, as well as the existing and potential role of interactive democracy in addressing the conceptual dilemmas and wicked policy problems of contemporary democracies, including enhancing the well-being of the law. A hypothesis for such research could be the necessary centrality of policy entrepreneurs in fostering anticipatory innovation at both domestic and international levels.

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