Digital Transformation of Public Administration in Post-Soviet Countries: Lessons From Estonia and Georgia for Armenia

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Цифровая трансформация государственного управления в постсоветских странах: опыт Эстонии и Грузии и возможности его применения в Армении

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Аннотация В статье исследуется развитие электронного правительства в постсоветских странах на основе сравнительного анализа Эстонии, Грузии и Армении. Цель исследования заключается в изучении того, как цифровые технологии, системы обмена данными, электронная идентификация и сервис-ориентированные институциональные реформы трансформируют государственное управление и меняют отношения между государством и гражданами. В работе анализируются три модели цифровой трансформации: децентрализованная архитектура Эстонии, основанная на X-Road, e-ID и принципе «единократного предоставления данных» (once-only); грузинский подход «скачка» (leapfrogging), опирающийся на Дома юстиции и реестры, защищённые с помощью блокчейна; а также поэтапный путь Армении при поддержке международных организаций.
Анализ показывает, что Эстония и Грузия превратили цифровизацию в стратегию комплексной трансформации государства, сократив бюрократию и коррупционные риски, тогда как Армения находится на промежуточном этапе: достигнут прогресс в развитии цифровой инфраструктуры и электронного участия, однако сохраняются проблемы фрагментарности стандартов, управления данными и низкой вовлечённости граждан.

В статье подчёркивается, что успешное электронное правительство требует не только технологического прогресса, но и политической воли, последовательности управления, кибербезопасности, цифровой грамотности и общественного доверия. Результаты свидетельствуют о том, что эффективность цифровизации зависит от способности государственного управления сочетать технологические инновации с институциональной координацией и политикой, ориентированной на граждан. Несмотря на различия в масштабах, ресурсах и исторических траекториях, все три страны демонстрируют, как цифровое управление может стать стратегическим инструментом укрепления государственного потенциала и общественного доверия.
Ключевые слова и выражения: электронное правительство, цифровая трансформация, государственное управление, постсоветские страны, Эстония, Грузия, Армения, электронное участие, противодействие коррупции, цифровая идентификация

Հետխորհրդային երկրներում հանրային կառավարման թվային փոխակերպումը. Էստոնիայի և Վրաստանի փորձը եվ դրա կիրառման հնարավորությունները Հայաստանում

Ղարյան Նարինե Վ.
բ.գ.թ., Հանրային կառավարման ամբիոնի ասիստենտ, Միջազգային հարաբերությունների ֆակուլտետ, Երևանի պետական համալսարան (Երևան, ՀՀ)
Կոտոլկյան Կարինե Կ.
«Հանրային քաղաքականություն և կառավարում» բակալավրի կրթական ծրագրի 3-րդ կուրսի ուսանող, Երևանի պետական համալսարան (Երևան, ՀՀ)
Հովսեփյան Արսեն Գ.
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Թորոսյան Միհր Հ.
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Ամփոփագիր. Հոդվածում քննարկվում է էլեկտրոնային կառավարման զարգացումը հետխորհրդային երկրներում՝ Էստոնիայի, Վրաստանի և Հայաստանի համեմատական վերլուծության հիման վրա: Հետազոտության նպատակն է բացահայտել, թե ինչպես են թվային տեխնոլոգիաները, տվյալների փոխանակման համակարգերը, էլեկտրոնային նույնականացումը և սպասարկմանն ուղղված ինստիտուցիոնալ բարեփոխումները վերափոխում պետական կառավարումը և փոխում պետություն–քաղաքացի հարաբերությունները: Աշխատանքում վերլուծվում են թվային վերափոխման երեք մոդելներ՝ Էստոնիայի ապակենտրոնացված ճարտարապետությունը, որը հիմնված է X-Road-ի, e-ID-ի և «մեկ անգամ» (once-only) սկզբունքի վրա. վրացական «թռիչքային» (leapfrogging) մոտեցումը, որը հենվում է Արդարադատության տների և բլոկչեյնով պաշտպանված ռեեստրների վրա. և Հայաստանի աստիճանական, միջազգային աջակցությամբ ընթացող ուղին:
Վերլուծությունը ցույց է տալիս, որ Էստոնիան և Վրաստանը թվայնացումը դարձրել են պետության համապարփակ վերափոխման ռազմավարություն՝ նվազեցնելով բյուրոկրատիան և կոռուպցիոն ռիսկերը, մինչդեռ Հայաստանը գտնվում է միջանկյալ փուլում. արձանագրվել է առաջընթաց թվային ենթակառուցվածքների, փոխգործունակության և էլեկտրոնային մասնակցության ոլորտներում, սակայն պահպանվում են ստանդարտների մասնատվածության, տվյալների կառավարման և քաղաքացիների ցածր ներգրավվածության խնդիրները:
Հոդվածում ընդգծվում է, որ հաջողված էլեկտրոնային կառավարումը պահանջում է ոչ միայն տեխնոլոգիական առաջընթաց, այլև քաղաքական կամք, կառավարման հետևողականություն, կիբերանվտանգություն, թվային գրագիտություն և հանրային վստահություն: Արդյունքներր վկայում են, որ թվայնացման արդյունավետությունը կախված է պետական կառավարման՝ տեխնոլոգիական նորարարությունը ինստիտուցիոնալ համակարգման և քաղաքացիակենտրոն քաղաքականության հետ համադրելու կարողությունից: Չնայած մասշտաբի, ռեսուրսների և պատմական ուղիների տարբերություններին՝ երեք երկրներն էլ ցույց են տալիս, թե ինչպես կարող է թվային կառավարումը դառնալ պետական կարողությունների և հանրային վստահության ամրապնդման ռազմավարական գործիք:
Հանգուցաբառեր և բառակապակցություններ՝ էլեկտրոնային կառավարություն, թվային վերափոխում, պետական կառավարում, հետխորհրդային երկրներ, Էստոնիա, Վրաստան, Հայաստան,էլեկտրոնային մասնակցություն, հակակոռուպցիոն քաղաքականություն, թվային նույնականացում

In the 21st century, the unprecedented development of information technologies has fundamentally changed the paradigm of public administration. Electronic governance (E-governance) is no longer a matter of mere technical sophistication, but a means of forming a new quality of social contract between the state and the citizen. For post-Soviet countries, which have

inherited cumbersome, bureaucratized and often corrupt administrative systems, digitalization has become a key tool for modernization and democratic transformation.

Estonia's digital transformation is one of the most significant and successful experiments in modern public administration, the experience of which, by the way, has become a benchmark for other countries to study today. After regaining independence in 1991, the country faced the need not only to restore sovereignty, but also to create a competitive state apparatus in conditions of an acute shortage of material resources, outdated infrastructure and institutional vacuum. In this context, the choice in favor of information technologies was not a random or exclusively technocratic decision: it was a deeply conscious result of political will aimed at overcoming the legacy of an inefficient and non-transparent bureaucracy. Estonia became a global testing ground for the introduction of a concept in which the state is viewed not as a punitive or controlling body, but as a high-tech service platform operating on the principles of openness and accountability. This transition required not only the acquisition of equipment, but also a radical transformation of legal norms, administrative procedures and, most importantly, the social contract between the citizen and the government.

The fundamental success of the Estonian model is based on three conceptual pillars: a decentralized data exchange architecture (X-Road), a universal digital identification system (e-ID), and the legislative enshrining of the "once-only" principle of data provision. The X-Road system, launched in the early 2000s, effectively solved one of the main structural problems of public administration - information fragmentation. Instead of creating a huge, expensive and vulnerable centralized database, Estonia chose the path of creating a protected data exchange layer that connects independent registers of different departments. This allowed maintaining the administrative autonomy of ministries, while ensuring instant access to the necessary information for the provision of public services. The description of this complex architecture and its role in increasing the operational efficiency of management is presented in detail in academic studies, which emphasize that technological success would be impossible without a clear integration of innovations into the social and legal structure of the state [**5**, pp. 73-82].

Such an approach minimizes the duplication of functions and almost completely eliminates the role of the citizen as an intermediary between different state bodies, which radically reduces corruption risks.

The "once-only" principle has become revolutionary for the theory of administrative law and public management. According to this rule, if a state institution has already received data from a citizen (for example, residential address, qualification or marital status), then no other state institution has the right to request this information twice. This not only saves millions of working hours of public servants and billions of euros in budgetary funds, but also fundamentally changes the perception of the state by the citizen. The state turns into an "invisible" partner that takes on the daily tasks of checking compliance with standards, allowing a person to focus on effective activity. This demonstrates the transition from the "bureaucratic control" model to the "supporting ecosystem" model. The Estonian identification card (ID-card), equipped with a chip and cryptographic signature, has become the universal key to this ecosystem, providing a level of trust comparable to a personal physical presence. This made it possible to move even sensitive areas such as notarial transactions, business registration, and participation in elections to the digital domain.

The issue of civic participation and the development of e-democracy occupies a special place in the analysis of the Estonian phenomenon. The introduction of the Internet voting (i-Voting) system made Estonia a unique example of how technologies can directly affect the legitimacy of electoral processes and institutions. Despite ongoing discussions about cybersecurity, the Estonian system has proven its viability for more than a decade, ensuring high participation and convenience for citizens abroad or with high mobility. However, political scientists and experts note that digital democracy is not limited to the voting procedure alone. It includes interactive platforms for joint lawmaking, mechanisms for public consultations, and tools for transparent monitoring of public spending in real time. The effectiveness of these platforms directly depends on the level of social trust. As noted in the in-depth strategic reviews of the development of the digital sector, the long-term success of digitalization is determined not only by the quality of the software code, but also by a consistent policy of educating the population, overcoming the digital divide, and guaranteed access to broadband infrastructure for every resident [**3**, p. 88].

Without a high level of digital literacy among the population, any technological innovation risks becoming a tool of control by a narrow elite, which fundamentally contradicts the ideals of an open society that Estonia successfully implements.

The issue of cybersecurity in the Estonian context is not seen as a technical issue for IT departments, but as a matter of national sovereignty and the existential resilience of the state. Estonia was one of the first to introduce distributed ledger technology (KSI blockchain) to ensure 100% data integrity in state registries. This guarantees that no information in the databases, be it medical history, property rights records or tax payments, can be changed unnoticed by either external actors or system administrators within the departments. It is important to understand that digital transparency in Estonia operates on the mirror principle: a citizen has the right and technical ability to see in the personal data log-file exactly which civil servant has viewed his or her personal data and on what basis. This creates an unprecedented system of mutual accountability and effectively prevents abuse of power, which is a key element of the concept of "good governance".

The economic impact of e-government implementation in Estonia has surprised analysts: according to various estimates, process optimization saves the state up to 2% of GDP annually, which is equivalent to the cost of national defense. However, the qualitative socio-cultural shift is much more important. The launch of the "e-Residency" program allowed Estonia to go beyond its geographical and demographic borders, offering global entrepreneurs access to the European business environment and reliable digital services. This turned the small Baltic state into a powerful global brand that attracts talent and investment from all over the world [**4**].

In the process of political and economic modernization of post-Soviet states, the introduction of e-government is often seen as a key factor in overcoming systemic corruption and increasing the efficiency of the state apparatus. In this context, the experience of Georgia is a unique phenomenon, where digitalization was not just a technological improvement, but a pillar of statehood reconstruction. In the early 2000s, the country was facing a large-scale institutional crisis, which required non-standard solutions to move citizen-state relations to a new quality platform.

The formation of the Georgian e-government model was based on the radical concept of "the state as a service chain". Unlike many European countries, which introduced digital systems in an evolutionary way, Georgia adopted the method of rapid transformation. This implied the reduction of bureaucratic chains and the centralization of the provision of state services. The synthesis of the physical and digital domains played a crucial role in the establishment of the system, which found its embodiment in the concept of "Public Service Halls". This infrastructure revolutionized the public perception of state bodies, replacing the closed cabinet system with an open, transparent and technologically equipped environment.

From a technological perspective, Georgia has become a regional laboratory, where decentralized databases and blockchain technologies were first used in public administration. In particular, the digitization of the real estate registration and cadastral system has raised the country's ranking on international platforms, placing Georgia among the leaders in the ease of doing business. This wave of digitization has led to the fact that public services have become not only accessible but also predictable, which in turn has reduced the influence of the human factor and subjectivity in the decision-making process.

However, the success of Georgian e-government was determined not only by software solutions, but also by broad public support. The rapid adoption of new systems by citizens and the growth of trust in state institutions proved that digital reforms have achieved their main goal: social transformation. The path taken by Georgia is today considered an exemplary model of efficiency, where political will and innovative thinking came together to create a system that is competitive in the global digital domain and serves as a benchmark for other countries with transition economies.

The process of forming Georgia's e-government system is closely linked to the country's political transformations and anti-corruption fight, which began in 2003 [**13**].

During that period, the state system was on the verge of complete collapse, which forced the new authorities to adopt a strategy of radical restructuring of the state apparatus. The starting point of the process was 2004-2005, when the priority became the reduction of the human factor and the discretion of officials. It was for this purpose that the Civil Registry Agency was created, which began the fundamental digitization and regulation of population, property and business databases.

The next important stage in the development of the system occurred in 2010, when the state realized that fragmented digitalization was no longer enough and a unified coordinating body was needed. For this purpose, the Data Exchange Agency (DEA) was established within the Ministry of Justice, which took on the responsibility of developing the digital agenda and setting technical standards. Through the efforts of this body, Georgia localized the well-known Estonian X-Road model, creating the "Tbilisi" data exchange platform, which allowed different state departments to

securely exchange information for the first time and create an interoperable environment [**12**].

This entire technological foundation became visible and tangible to citizens in 2011, when the first "Houses of Justice" opened [**7**].

This was a unique model of government service delivery, where digital backends allowed hundreds of services to be delivered in a single physical space, from passport issuance to business registration, in minutes. The logical continuation of this development was in 2016, when Georgia became one of the first countries in the world to implement blockchain technology in land registry management, thereby guaranteeing absolute data integrity.

This entire process is characterized as Leapfrogging. Georgia did not attempt to gradually improve outdated bureaucratic systems or improve paper archives. Instead, the country took a "leapfrogging" approach, bypassing intermediate stages of development and immediately implementing the latest technological solutions available in the world at that time. This allowed it to move from a corrupt and slow system to an advanced digital governance in a very short time [**2**].

The introduction of Georgia's e-government system was not just a technological upgrade, but a radical transformation of all spheres of public and state life. The impact was so profound that it changed the philosophy of citizen-state relations, turning the state apparatus into a service provider and the citizen into a subject dictating the quality of that service.

Digitalization in the economic sphere has brought unprecedented improvements to the business environment. Electronic registries operating on the principle of a "single window" have allowed Georgia to become one of the world's leading countries in the speed of business registration. This has directly affected the flow of foreign investment, as the state has become a predictable and transparent partner for investors. Digitalization of the tax and customs sectors has reduced the costs and time of businessmen, ensuring an increase in tax revenues without increasing the tax burden.

The most important change for citizens was the saving of time and dignity. Before the reforms, obtaining any information was associated with queues, bureaucratic hassles, and humiliating treatment. Digitalization also opened up new opportunities in the social sphere. Through e-health and social assistance systems, the state is now able to provide targeted assistance to those in need, reducing the likelihood of errors and abuse. In addition, mobile applications became available to the population, allowing them to pay fines, utility bills, or apply for government services right from home, saving hours and resources [**6**].

However, this process also faced challenges, especially among the older generation, who had low digital literacy. The government addressed this through "digital and physical convergence": those who could not use the websites received the same digital service in physical centers with the help of consultants.

Ultimately, Georgia proved that even with limited resources, but with clear political will, it is possible to create a system where technology serves people, not the other way around.

In Armenia, e-government reforms have been initiated mainly through the support provided by international organizations, such as the UN, the EU, and the World Bank [**9**]. Since 2004, World Bank assistance for public administration reform has begun [**14**]

The first initiatives to introduce electronic services began in 2008, when the e-gov.am system was launched. For the first time, digital state services were combined into a single state platform. gov.am includes 20 online services: letters to the government, familiarization with the government agenda, decisions, Prime Minister's decisions, submission of license applications, execution of state payments, real estate-related services, familiarization with draft legal acts, electronic inquiries, registration of organizations, submission of judicial information, interactive budget submission, submission of legal acts, services provided by the Intellectual Property Agency, provision of electronic visa and electronic signature, submission of the register and lists [**8**].

Currently, there are an incomparably large number of state websites: president.am (official website of the RA President's Office, parliament.am (official website of the National Assembly), concourt.am (Constitutional Court), prosecutor.am (Prosecutor's Office), anra.am (Nuclear Safety Committee), psrc.am, (Public Services Regulatory Commission), elections.am (CEC), ombuds.am, (Human Rights Ombudsman's Office), hlib.am Health and Labor Inspectorate), e-citizen.am (portal of services provided to citizens), etc.

Cooperation and data interoperability between various bodies and departments is ensured through the Government Interoperability Platform ekeng.am. It was launched in 2011. In 2015, the requirements for the security and interoperability of electronic systems used for the creation of a state information system, the provision of electronic services by state and local self-government bodies, and the implementation of other functions were established. The technical maintenance and

coordination of the Government Interoperability Platform is carried out by EKENG CJSC [**14**].

The "Armenia Digitalization Strategy" for 2020-2025 has been developed. The main directions of the strategy are public administration, economy, and society. One of the goals of the strategy is to transition to efficient, fast, transparent, and data-driven public administration.

The Strategy lists the following institutions for digitization: the Ministry of BTA of the Republic of Armenia, the Digitization Council, the structure implementing technical functions under the Ministry, the Institute of Advisors, the Cybersecurity Center, the Consultative Platform under the Ministry, the Data Center. The Ministry develops policy, draft legislative reforms, standards and requirements. The Digitization Council discusses and harmonizes strategic priorities, directions, project documents. The structure implementing technical functions under the Ministry serves the unified platform of the state service, monitors digital projects, compliance with requirements and standards, and tests digital solutions. The Institute of Advisors consists of one advisor to the head of each body, who is responsible for digitalization in the given body. The appointment of the person responsible for digitalization is carried out by the body in cooperation with the Ministry, based on the necessary knowledge base for coordinating the digitalization process. The Cybersecurity Center develops cybersecurity standards, checks the compliance of state platforms with these standards, provides expert advice, and monitors the level of cybersecurity. The consultative platform under the ministry creates working groups on general strategic and individual digitalization projects, involving representatives of the IT community. The Data Center ensures the deployment and maintenance of state digitalization solutions [**1**].

User-centered design is gradually evolving through digitalization and innovative programs based on “life events,” but broad engagement and mechanisms for reducing administrative burdens are still limited. The Information Systems Agency of Armenia (ISAA) is implementing 12 pilot projects to redesign services using the life event integration methodology. These efforts mark a shift toward a customer-centered approach [**9**].

There is a clear separation between the Ministry of High-Technological Industry and the Information Systems Agency of Armenia in the e-Government legislation. The data management framework has a certain level of development, but previously obtained data is not fully digitized, and the legal framework lacks a common definition of base registers, which complicates the use of data from these registers as evidence [**8**].

The X-Road platform, aimed at cooperation between various institutions, is currently under development. An inventory of IT assets is also underway.

Different departments are at different stages of digital development, and digitalization has been implemented with different principles and priorities. Digital development initiatives have not provided for common standards and principles for all digital platforms. According to the “Digitalization Strategy of Armenia,” this is due to the lack of a supervisory and coordinating body or department. There is also a lack of a unified approach to data storage and management.

Electronic public service delivery systems are characterized by a low level of user-friendliness. The needs of people with disabilities have not been taken into account. Services are generally not adapted to mobile phones, the use of ID cards creates the need for a special device that reads signatures. There is also a problem of low public awareness.

Despite the existence of certain limited tools for state-citizen dialogue, citizen participation in public policy development is more than low.

Most existing digital platforms are designed for short-term use, without the possibility of updating. In a number of cases, the management of the system and databases has been left to the organization developing the platform, as the necessary capabilities were not available in the relevant body or department. There is also a lack of clarity in the field of intellectual property and ownership rights of digital platforms. It is more difficult for the government to ensure the continuous use and improvement of the platform. In such cases, the department cannot develop the digital solution with the help of other organizations [**10**].

The data available in the ekeng.am database is transferred to state and local government bodies free of charge, but it is necessary to submit an application, after which an agreement is signed between EKENG CJSC and the applicant. In the case of investment funds and legal entities, the conditions are stricter. It should be noted that even data transfer between different state and local government bodies may take so long that the need for the transfer of the relevant data disappears.

According to the assessment carried out by the SIGMA project, a joint effort between the EU and the OECD, there have been some achievements in the digitalization of public administration in Armenia, but Armenia has not yet achieved comprehensive e-public service delivery, and a

complete list of services provided electronically has not been compiled. Reducing administrative burdens is not a standard requirement for sectoral regulation. The ISAA methodology for assessing the economic and social impacts of digitalization has not yet been implemented in all ministries.

Standards are set for digital services, but quality commitments and performance monitoring are lacking. The online platform provides standardized descriptions of services, but citizens cannot know what quality and accessibility they can expect. The common methodology for assessing user satisfaction that has been introduced may not include the opinions of groups that use digital services less. Objective performance indicators and representative social surveys are limited and not applied to the full range of public services. Automatic updates and notifications have not yet been introduced.

The SIGMA assessment is based on five indicators, among which there are noticeable differences. These indicators and their scores are as follows: legislative criteria - 28%, organization and guidelines - 68%, institutional structure - 82%, implementation practices - 43%, focus on results - 84%.

According to the UN assessment, Armenia ranked 48th out of 193 countries in terms of e-governance in 2024, and 64th in 2022. The e-participation indicators are more promising: 27th in 2024 compared to 64th in 2022 [**11**].

Conclusions: The experience of Estonia and Georgia shows that e-government succeeds when it is viewed not as a separate technological project, but as a strategy for the comprehensive transformation of public administration. In both countries, digitalization has served the purpose of overcoming institutional crises, reducing bureaucracy, and restoring trust in the state. The key to Estonia's success has been the introduction of data interoperability, digital identification, and the "once-only" principle, which has freed citizens from the role of intermediaries between government agencies. This has not only increased the efficiency of services, but has also radically reduced corruption risks and administrative burdens. The Georgian model proved that even with limited resources, it is possible to achieve "leapfrog development" in a short time by immediately introducing modern digital solutions. The creation of the Houses of Justice changed citizens' attitudes towards the state system, making it more open, fast, and service-oriented.

The experience of both countries shows that the effectiveness of digitalization depends not only on technological solutions, but also on political will, governance consistency, and building public trust. Without these components, even the most modern systems cannot provide real results. Cybersecurity has also become an important component of national security in modern e-government systems: data protection, the use of block-chain, and controllable digital systems increase trust in state institutions and prevent abuse of power.

Some progress has been made in the field of e-government in Armenia, including the creation of the e-gov.am platform, the launch of the EKENG system, the development of a digitalization strategy, and the expansion of international cooperation. However, these processes have not yet become comprehensive and systematic, as a result of which various state bodies operate under conditions of disproportionate digital development. The main problems are the lack of common standards, an imperfect data management system, technical incompatibility of platforms, and low citizen involvement in public policy development. These circumstances limit the real impact of digitalization and prevent the development of a full-fledged electronic public services system. Nevertheless, international assessments show that Armenia has significant development potential. The growth of e-participation indicators and the formation of strategic institutions for digitalization indicate that, with appropriate political will, coordinated management, and technological investments, it is possible to create a more efficient, transparent, and citizen-oriented state system.

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