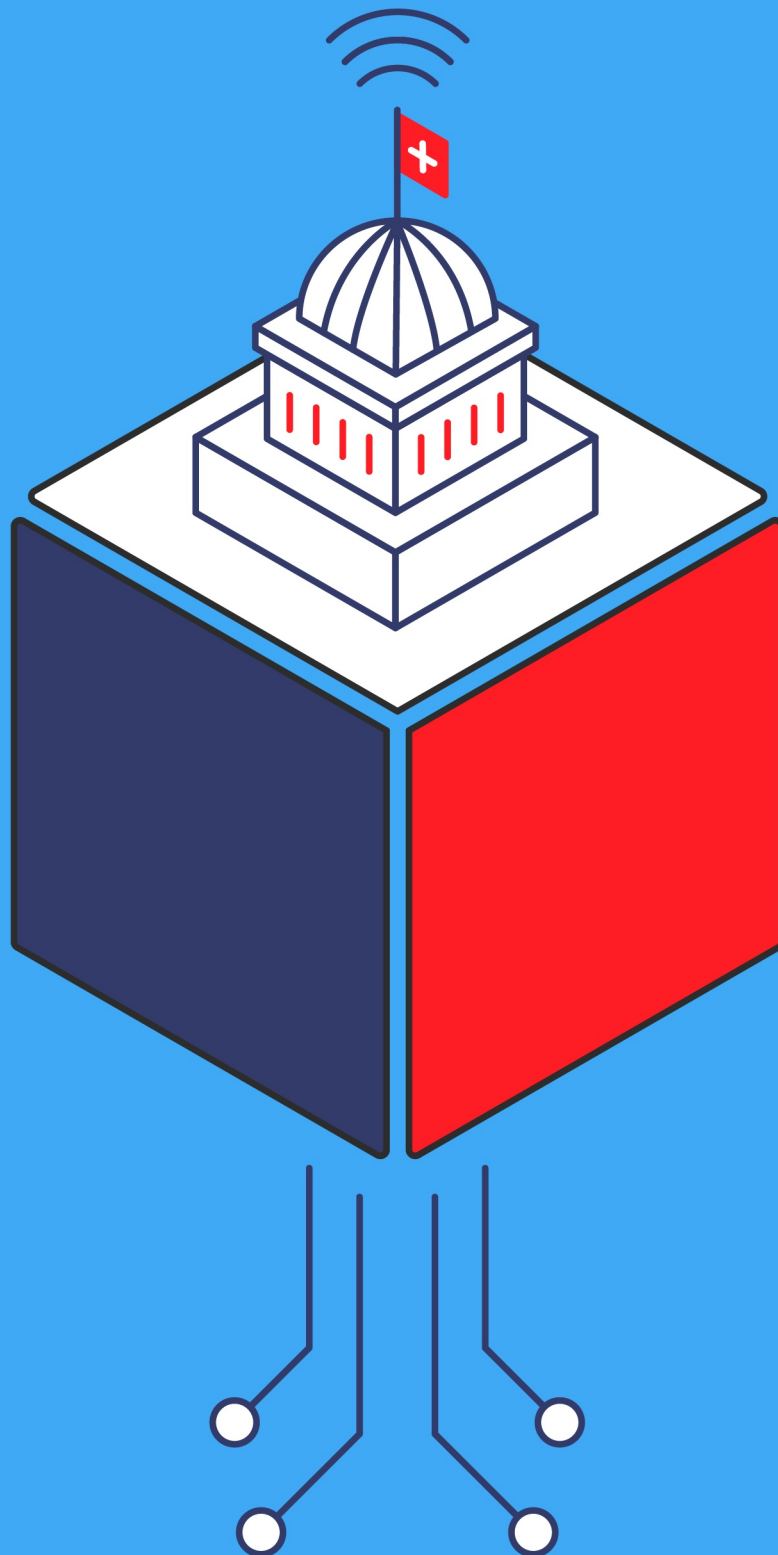


Discussion Paper:
eGovernment



“Res-Publica-Digitalis” – Towards a
resident-centric eGovernment of the future

Imprint

eGovernment Discussion Paper: "Res Publica Digitalis". Towards a resident-centric eGovernment of the future

Publication date: Zurich, 24 August 2023

Translation date: Zurich, 2 November 2023

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Communication support for the publication: Thomas Weidmann, Colin Wallace and Melanie Holenweger

Graphic design: Graphic agency Hyperraum, Tobias Aeschbacher and Vincent Grand

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This document and the working group responsible for it were created between the end of April and the beginning of August 2023 and followed from the definition of thematic priorities at the strategy workshop of digitalswitzerland's Public Affairs Committee on 12 January 2023.

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About digitalswitzerland

digitalswitzerland is a Switzerland-wide, cross-sector initiative with the goal of transforming Switzerland into a leading digital nation. Together with our network of over 200 members and non-political partners, including more than 1,000 top executives, we are engaged in over 25 projects to inspire, initiate, shape and lead the digital transformation in Switzerland.

Acknowledgement

We would like to thank Irem Kaynarca, Project Manager Monitoring at Digital Administration Switzerland, and Andreas Dummermuth, Director of the Compensation Office / IV Office Schwyz, for the consultation and expert:ing input.

We would also like to thank Guillaume Gabus and Dominique Reber as well as the Public Affairs Committee of digitalswitzerland for their commitment and internal support.

"Res Publica Digitalis"

Towards a resident-centric eGovernment of the future

The eGovernment working group of digitalswitzerland has set itself the goal of adopting a critical and forward-looking perspective on the digitalisation of public services in Switzerland. Particular emphasis is placed on the importance of resident-centric approaches and intercommunal and intercantonal cooperation.

Where does Switzerland stand in eGovernment?

Switzerland is in a crucial transition in the area of eGovernment: the public sector wants to digitise comprehensively - "Digital First" is the motto. This is the right way to go, as new digital infrastructures and the digital "public service" are much needed. Through the "digital-first" approach, it is expected that the public administrations will register a growing need for competences, as well as for the resources to be used. At least today, at the federal level, there is no cost-benefit calculation for this transformation. Switzerland must prevent the "digital-first" strategy from becoming an additional burden for the implementing actors (in most cases the municipalities). To counteract this and to ensure the connectivity of the smallest actors in the Swiss state, the cooperation between municipalities should be promoted more actively. However, this urgent push for digitalisation in the public sector must also be viewed critically in view of the growing government expenditure relative to GDP¹. With the increasing expansion of digitalised public services, new competences and new knowledge are emerging in the public administrations. This raises the question of how we can ensure that the economy and the residents² also benefit from this digitalisation push. How does eGovernment become a success together with residents and the economy? How, in the event of crises and a smaller tax base, do the right eGovernment services remain available in high quality?

eGovernment only succeeds through cooperation

The results of the latest survey by Myni-Gmeind show: When it comes to digitalisation, municipalities increasingly want to operate alone instead of cooperating with others.³ But this entails costs and risks. Small municipalities, and that is the majority, will not have a chance to handle the digital transformation alone. Municipalities and territories will have to join forces in the digital space, while cantons will become a strong driver, i.e. strongly influence the basic infrastructures of the municipalities. Moreover, according to a PwC study, both cantons and municipalities are increasingly falling behind the federal government financially in terms of digitalisation progress.⁴ This therefore implies: The upcoming digitalisation efforts will shake up Switzerland's federal structures. Increased inter-municipal

¹ NZZ: <https://www.nzz.ch/wirtschaft/wird-der-staat-kaputtgespart-nein-er-waechst-und-waechst-ld.1735104?reduced=true>

² The term "residents" means all responsible individuals and their economic and social forms of expression (voters, entrepreneurs, members of associations, etc.).

³ Myni Gmeind: <https://www.mynigmeind.ch/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Myni-Gmeind-2023-06-Befragung-Gemeindevertreter-ori1.pdf>

⁴ Inside IT: <https://www.inside-it.ch/gemeinden-und-kantone-fallen-bei-der-digitalisierung-ab-20230706>

cooperation seems to be an important driver to counteract this phenomenon - but how should such cooperation look like? We propose: Bottom-up instead of top-down, with the inhabitants at the centre.

What if future eGovernment projects were developed in constant dialogue with residents and the business community, to identify novel and forward-looking digitalisation projects, and realising them through cross-communal, cross-cantonal and cross-regional cooperation? If, thanks to "federal interoperability"⁵ emerging "digitalisation spaces" were to establish themselves as a new level of networking between municipalities, cantons and the federal government? What if we were to see Switzerland in a new perspective, new, supra-regional digital services were to emerge and previously unknown potentials of cooperation and synergy were to be realised?

There is more to a resident-centric eGovernment than just the digitalisation of public authority tasks. It needs both transformation and political networking (new "digitalisation spaces"), which should allow municipalities to have an autonomous digital economy vis-à-vis their residents. If questions such as the secondary use of data and data security are also addressed and tackled, a new level of networking will emerge that brings together the municipalities, cantons and the federal government with the inhabitants; a "Res Publica Digitalis" emerges.

Res Publica Digitalis: Structure

In a "Res Publica Digitalis", residents should realise their potential, gain more control and join forces through new cooperation possibilities. This networking should also go hand in hand with ensuring privacy, technical security and digital sovereignty for residents. As the lowest level of government and the smallest political actors, the municipalities in particular should serve as a vehicle for the interests of residents and receive new impetus for digitalisation. The support of the cantons is appreciated, as they have an important role as role models and coordinators and many municipalities very much welcome certain requirements from the canton.⁶ The Confederation, meanwhile, performs its traditional tasks such as steering, securing livelihoods, rule of law, legal certainty for future investments, as well as orchestration between the cantons and municipalities.

Resident-centricity: bottom-up approaches

The core of a Res Publica Digitalis, however, is resident-centricity. It brings forward those digitalisation projects that the population really wants and needs. Today, however, many municipalities are struggling with decreasing participation. Many residents lack the

⁵ Federal interoperability" should make it possible to maintain Switzerland's federal structures, but at the same time simplify cooperation between these federal bodies.

⁶ This is based on results of the Myni Gmeind 2023 survey:

<https://www.mynigmeind.ch/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Myni-Gmeind-2023-06-Befragung-Gemeindevertreter-ori1.pdf>

motivation to participate and only get involved in those processes that directly affect them. Res Publica Digitalis aims to establish new models⁷ for residents that make it more attractive again to actively participate and help shape things.

Bottom-up instruments such as resident surveys, forums or platforms and focus groups are intended to focus primarily on the potential benefits as well as the needs and concerns regarding such services for individual residents in order to design eGovernment services in a resident-centric manner.

By involving users in the development of eGovernment services at an early stage, it is not only possible to find out what the population wants, which digital services they find useful and which offers would simplify communication with the authorities, but also how much time is needed for a particular process with the public administration, where efficiency gains are possible and what the efficiency gains could look like in analogue (now) and digital (future) form. In addition, one also gains insights into what should not be digitalised. And last but not least, out-of-the-box questions are also informative: if there was anything needed in eGovernment services that does not yet exist, what would it be?

Through the active participation of the residents, new possibilities for cooperation are to be created that have not existed before: region-wide digitalisation clusters, public-private-people partnerships, inter-communal and inter-cantonal corporations, and many more. When the population is involved in the improvement process, the trust between residents and authorities increases.⁸

Resident-centricity: Proactive Government

In contrast to the classic forms of resident participation is the visionary concept of "Proactive Government". This scenario envisages that in the future, eGov services would be integrated into education or "service-public" ecosystems, combined with e-commerce, or integrated into marketplaces and platforms. This model reverses the relationship between citizen and government and puts the public administration under the obligation to proactively approach the inhabitants.

It would be conceivable, for example, that when a university registers students, there would be an option for the university to register the future students with the municipality. A similar solution could be integrated into the purchase of a GA. The SBB could communicate directly with the municipality of residence of the buyer and request confirmation of residence. At the interface between the private sector and the authorities, the following example would be conceivable: A citizen orders new kitchen machines for a restaurant in the online gastronomy shop and automatically "buys" the acceptance and approval of the cantonal food inspector. The eGov service becomes a product here. This dynamic would increase

⁷ For example, sociocratic structures are one way of giving processes a participatory and non-hierarchical form. According to Duden, a sociocracy is a "form of organisation (social, economic, state) based on collective self-government".

⁸ Deloitte:

<https://www2.deloitte.com/ch/de/pages/public-sector/articles/schweizer-misstrauen-e-government-services-wegen-datenschutz-und-datensicherheit.html>

cost transparency, for example for aspiring small entrepreneurs, and drive the dynamisation of public administrations by making them think in a more customer- and product-oriented way.

Authorities, in cooperation with other institutions, thus take on a proactive role by providing all forms, permits, etc. in one "package". These should be able to be processed centrally online. In this way, residents can avoid having to go from office to office. In addition, there would be an incentive for better communication between offices as well as between authorities and private institutions, and time-consuming processes and duplication would be avoided. All in all, the solution can create proximity to residents, simplify processes and make them more efficient, and possibly also create economic incentives, especially in small businesses.

For this resident-centric approach, there are of course also some questions here, ranging from legal (data protection, secondary use of data) to economic (which services for whom?) to technical components (how are the corresponding data spaces created?). Here, too, the resident would have to be picked up on his or her biggest pain points - cyber security and data protection. Increased staff training and awareness of security risks and compliance with data protection laws would be minimum criteria.⁹

Scenarios for community cooperation of the future

As we can see, the Res Publica Digitalis consists of the digital networking level, which is based on resident-centric and inter-communal cooperation. What could such networking look like? What forms of networking are there?

Three examples will illustrate the concept.

I. Regional clusters

Regional clusters are useful in the coordination of services in the tourism sector, for example in the form of a digitalisation area that includes several Alpine regions. Such a model already exists with "Berner Oberland West - digital together". The three tourism regions of Gstaad Saanenland Tourismus, Tourismus Adelboden-Lenk-Kandersteg and Lenk-Simmmental Tourismus have joined forces in order to build up and share digital know-how across organisations and ultimately establish customer-centric digital solutions.¹⁰

⁹ Deloitte: <https://www2.deloitte.com/ch/de/pages/public-sector/articles/schweizer-misstrauen-e-government-services-wegen-datenschutz-und-datensicherheit.html>

¹⁰ HTR: <https://www.htr.ch/story/tourismus/qemeinsam-digital-tourismus-gstaad-saanenland-adelboden-lenk-kandersteg-simmmental-33302.html>

Regional clusters are conceivable not only for the pooling of services, but also for the pooling of infrastructures: A "digitalisation Space Northwestern Switzerland" (SO, BL, BS, JU, AG) could be created in which the entire basic IT infrastructure is rolled out across regions and cantons. Instead of municipality autonomy, there would be a digital "super municipality" as a central office with micro-municipality hubs. The tasks would be centralised; physical contact would remain decentralised.



Maps 1-3: Wikimedia Commons¹¹

¹¹ All maps used in the following are taken from Wikimedia Commons (https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Karte_Kantone_der_Schweiz_2007.png) and have been edited under the following licence: *attribution-sharealike 3.0 unported (cc by-sa 3.0)*

II. *Supraregional bridges*

Here, actors are networked across cantonal and regional borders. So-called supraregional connecting lines are created between geographically disparate regions. In this way, municipalities could join forces that are located in different language regions but have the same specific needs: for example, digital registration of cross-border commuters. Despite the geographical distance, the expertise of the authorities in Bellinzona and Basel is the same; and the needs of cross-border commuters will also be similar. A first approach in this direction is the intercantal platform iGovPortal.ch, which aims to simplify networking between citizens and the public administration by offering a range of services via a single secure counter in a uniform and secure environment.¹²



¹² iGov: <https://www.igovportal.ch/de/index.html>

III. "Centre-Periphery-Spiders"

This refers to the merging of services related to the movement of goods, services or people from smaller surrounding municipalities to an urban centre (e.g. the city of Lucerne in the Lake Lucerne Region). Here, for example, services such as a merging of parking card systems or a link for a Lucerne parking card when purchasing a commercial vehicle in Küssnacht SZ would be conceivable. Such "spiders" take into account the economic attraction of metropolitan regions, but at the same time enable the surrounding communities to strengthen their locational attractiveness through good networking with the centre.



Steps towards Res Publica Digitalis - Where can we already start today?

Every day in Switzerland, the foundations are laid for the digital networking of public administrations. Countless projects and initiatives worthy of support are advancing the citizen-centred digitalisation of public services.

I. Promote participation of residents in public services

In order to strengthen the participation of residents in the area of public services, a digital wholesale model could be set up, for example, which would enable state-affiliated companies and public service operators such as the Post to form public-private-people partnerships with residents to create new needs and their solutions via eGovernment services. A model for this would be the Smart Citizen

study by the Business Engineering Institute of the HSG.¹³ Such projects should be strengthened and, if possible, supported with funding, such as the funds provided in the EMBAG for digital lighthouse projects.

II. *Learning from and expanding existing eGovernment ecosystems*

There are numerous projects that have created new levels of networking in the sense of inter-municipal or inter-cantonal cooperation. In the canton of Aargau, the Fit4Digital innovation programme has already made important progress in cooperation among municipalities and between municipalities and the canton. Through the work of the Public Innovators, the bottom-up, inhabitant-centred approach has already been used for various projects throughout the canton of Aargau. The technical requirements developed by the Public Innovators have already served to bring more than 30 municipal services into the cantonal customer-centred Smart Service Portal. Some of these communal services have been implemented end-to-end - i.e. in such a way that orders from residents are transferred directly to the commune's specialised application and can thus be easily processed by communal employees. This also leads to an improvement and modernisation of the working methods and an increase in the attractiveness of the workplaces. Such platforms and projects should be promoted and further developed.¹⁴

AHVeasy¹⁵ is a project of IGS GmbH, which is supported by compensation funds of 16 cantons and Liechtenstein. AHVeasy aims to provide employers liable for contributions with a digital way to process social insurance contribution payments, family allowances, income replacement benefits, maternity and paternity allowances, etc. The platform offers a user interface to efficiently submit applications, track all invoices and, for example, employee mutations. With AHVeasy, users can access information and support quickly and easily. The possibility for public actors to set up cooperation networks on their own is extremely beneficial for the creation of digitalisation spaces. Such models have a role model character.

III. *Supporting community and resident dialogue*

Associations and initiatives such as digitalswitzerland, which are already in intensive dialogue with the population (Digital Days, etc.), can become even more active in order to better understand the needs of the population for concrete digital services, which include the public service, and to translate them into concrete projects.

Conclusion: Res Publica Digitalis - more than the sum of its parts

If the potential and the opportunity to promote inter-municipal cooperation through innovative, resident-centric approaches is not used, we increase the risk of overburdening the municipalities. The digitalisation push in public administration will continue - municipalities that find it difficult to shoulder these projects due to their financial situation

¹³ BEI St.Gallen: <https://www.bei-sg.ch/smartcitizen?lang=en>

¹⁴ Fit4Digital: <https://www.f4d.ch/public-innovators>

¹⁵ AHVeasy: <https://www.ahveasy.ch/>

would, in the worst case, have to demand higher taxes or even accept fewer or poorer services in order to remain connectable at all.

Without resident-centric instruments, the digitalisation push for the population means a one-sided shift of digital knowledge towards the public sector and individual large companies. Possible consequences could be a progressive disinterest in local processes, a growing gap between digitally-minded people and digital sceptics, and a growing gap between more digitally advanced and rich communities and poorer communities. The alternative is top-down digitalisation - which is neither desired nor conceivable in a federal state. Last but not least, many potentials and ideas in the population would remain untapped.

In order to realise these potentials and to create the Res Publica Digitalis, leadership and control of supra-regional harmonised services are needed. Although the impetus comes from the inhabitants, it makes sense for this digitalisation push to be accompanied by a coordinating steering body, such as the Digital Administration Switzerland (DVS).¹⁶ The DMS is responsible for the strategic management and coordination of the digitalisation activities of the Confederation, cantons and municipalities.¹⁷ Associations such as digitalswitzerland can also make a valuable contribution as accompanying, forward-looking and impulse-giving organisations that involve the economy in the process.

The complexity of a system such as the digital world with its countless actors and possibilities is difficult to control and predict. Therefore, whether in eGovernment or in other areas, the best approach is always to accompany transformation processes through a coordinating body and to create the necessary foundations of emergent¹⁸ systems that have a positive impact on society.

¹⁶ Digital Administration Switzerland: <https://www.digitale-verwaltung-schweiz.ch/>

¹⁷The cooperation organisation has been operational since 1 January 2022. Its goals and tasks are derived from the "Public Law Framework Agreement on Digital Administration Switzerland" adopted by the Confederation and the cantons. See: <https://www.fedlex.admin.ch/eli/faa/2021/3030/de>

¹⁸ Emergence, a process originating in systems theory, describes the interaction of individual actors in a dynamic that produces as a result more than the sum of the individual parts. See also: <https://www.spektrum.de/lexikon/psychologie/emergenz/4021>