

# **Innovating Public Service in Kazakhstan: Improving citizen orientation in the delivery of public services**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This paper analyzes a client-orientation in the delivery of the public services in Kazakhstan and barriers toward its implementation. Client orientation in the public service is considered as one of the innovative approaches to improve the quality of the provision of the public service. The client-orientation is considered as one of the innovative approaches for improving quality in the provision of the public service. This research article aims at identifying the principal reasons and conditions that hinder ensuring effective public service in Kazakhstan. Improvement and modernization of public service has been one of the key areas in the country's reforms. It also discusses the promise and current state of disruptive technologies applications to improve the public service delivery in Kazakhstan. Document analysis is employed as a primary research method. The article draws practical recommendations that can be used to improve the mechanisms for the provision of public services as well as contribute to the refining of the existing procedures and elimination of relevant risks with the specific focus on client orientation. It also discussed the avenues for further research.

**Key words:** public service, citizen orientation, Kazakhstan.

### **Introduction**

The state, through its organs, carries out domestic policy, aimed at the realization of the rights and freedoms of citizens, through provision of public services. Public services are provided through a specially created State Corporation "Government for citizens" (hereinafter referred to as the state corporation). At the moment work state corporations provide more than half of all public services.

The most important component of the work of the state corporation is the quality provision of services. The importance of this approach stems from the public's trust in state, since ordinary citizens are in direct contact with by the state represented by this state corporation and on how and what quality the service rendered to it depends on the confidence of the people in the state. Implementation of innovative model based on client-orientation is an important pillar of the state's domestic policy. In addition, insufficient sessility in client-orientation on provision of public services by state body can influence the citizen satisfaction with the services provided.

Generally, by innovation in the public sector we consider a set of ideas and new services with the end goal of improving or changing existing services, its mechanisms, and reasoning

behind them. Innovation refers to the changes that as a consequence lead to significant transformation of the public service, its perception, and its delivery. A well-functioning public administration plays an essential role in the adoption and implementation of the innovation (Smith et al., 1999).

The application of a customer-centric model is key in internal politics of the state. However, in practice, for all the seeming completeness, problems exist that need to be addressed.

As is known, the quality and timing of the provision of public services affects its implementation, which is presented in both digital and conventional versions.

In 2021, Kazakhstan adopted a concept for the development of public administration in the Republic of Kazakhstan until 2030: building a "human-centered" model - "People First". The concept sets priority tasks that take into account the introduction of proactive state approaches based on the provision of composite services through unique request, by integrating various information systems and databases.

This important question concerns how efficiently public services will be delivered. The government of Kazakhstan has been carrying out a number of modernizations in recent years, focusing on expanding the access of services to the population, despite the fact that the state apparatus has significant results in providing services in the digital version, there is often still a problem in providing services where a physical presence is required in public service centers, which causes dissatisfaction among the citizens. In Kazakhstan, a register of public services has been approved, all 1323 services are provided by state corporations. The participation of only one state in this sector is due to the fact that the rules for obtaining permits and licenses are not fully regulated (Register of public services, 2020).

The creation of the necessary conditions for the provision of public services, unlimited access to information, the availability on the Internet of open data contained in the information systems of state bodies, in fact, this is an important innovative block in public administration and every civil servant. The state in these conditions must respond flexibly, therefore, in this paper, the authors tried to consider a qualitatively new model of public administration to ensure a high quality of life for the population in the direction of developing client-oriented services.

The most efficient way is the digital version, which can be carried out on the basis of available data. As practice shows, not always a state corporation can provide a service in this manner, and often for the provision of the service requires a physical presence in the service centers population, which causes dissatisfaction among citizens. Moreover, not completely

the rules for obtaining permits and licenses have been regulated. Prior to the process of personnel selection and competitions has not yet been automated. All this negatively affect the quality of public services, creates corruption risks and ultimately negatively affect citizens' confidence in the state. According to Section VII of "The National Report on the state of the civil service in the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2021" according to results of public monitoring, 75.4% of citizens are satisfied with the quality provision of public services (Government of Kazakhstan, 2021).

Therefore, it is important not only to enhance the existing mechanisms but also to look for new solutions.

It is widely accepted that public sector can no longer be perceived as an organization that is operated based on the traditional hierarchical structure (Hsiao and Lin, 2008). Transformation of the public service into a more customer-oriented service has been a crucial reform agenda. In today's world, citizens are becoming more conscious about their rights as the availability of information regarding the services provided by the public sector has become more widespread. Hence, the demands and expectations of the citizens in relation to the quality of services are growing (Mathaba et al., 2015).

This study also contributes to the study of the impact of customer focus on managerial decision-making processes in addressing the current needs of the population, the development of necessary measures to improve the quality of services provided and performance in the public sector.

### ***Research question***

The main research questions of this article are aimed at exploring how the state policy in the field of public administration development has changed, as well as the consideration of innovative strategies of the state apparatus to transform the public sector to provide services to the population based on the principle of customer focus.

### ***Literature Review***

Over the last decades public sector worldwide has witnessed transformation driven by the socioeconomic developments, globalization, and digitalization. In particular, social expectations related to the public institutions has been as main motive for the public organizations to reconsider their approach. This led to the efforts to increase the quality of the services and their provision (Ludwiczak, 2014). By the end of the twentieth century there has been a growing body of literature that addressed customer orientation as a principle of public management represented primarily by the works of Flynn, 1997, Wagenheim & Reurink, 1991, Swiss, 1992, OECD, 1987 (Schedler and Summermatter, 2007). Before, customer-oriented management was mainly considered in the context of private sector. It has gained a lot of attention and was well covered in the literature dealing with service provision.

Prior to moving to discuss results of the empirical research it is important to discuss some of the works focusing on the customer that gave rise to the inclusion of the principles that underlined the market relations. Berry (1995) addressed the quality of the service delivery by examining the role of the customer relations where the interests of the customers is emphasized when creating a quality and value of service. This paradigm was also developed by Peppers and Rogers (1993). Their work was embraced by many as sort of methodological guide for businesses on managing customer relations. It was them who coined the concept of Customer Relationship management based on the customer centric approach.

These also coincided with the reconsideration of the public sector by incorporating this customer centric idea. Wagenheim and Reurink (1991) argued that many of the principles that were practices in the private sector are indeed can not only be applied in the public

administration but it also has a promise of solving some of the efficiency issues as well as satisfy the employees within public sector.

In a light of these different theoretical developments, there has been also some theoretical reconsideration of “new public management” toward a “new public service”. Denhardt and Denhardt (2015) in their article argue that direct engagement with the democratic principles and citizenry is one of the tendencies that has shaped the way public administration works and which can make it more efficient. They also criticize the emphasis on the business principles which is reflected in the NPM by stressing the importance of creating a common good.

According to OECD (2019), provision of the public service that prioritizes the citizen needs and demands “entails overcoming resistance to change and breaking down silos in public administrations. This implies working with a common objective of putting people at the centre, building and sharing collective knowledge, streamlining information flows and integrating data processes in order to collaborate and reach citizens wherever they are” (p. 27). Main principles that guide these processes are “access, transparency, integrity, responsiveness, accountability, equality and stakeholder participation” (OECD, 2019: 27).

The need to transform public policy is accelerating in the era of globalization and digitalization. Scholars also point to the importance of policies in ongoing civil service reforms around the world. Around the globe have been driven by the UN Sustainable Development Goals where SDG 16 stresses the importance of “building peaceful, just, and inclusive societies, with equal access to justice under the rule of law, along with the existence of sound governance and transparent, effective, and accountable institutions” (Baimenov and Liverakos, 2022: viii). Furthermore, the issue of corruption which is relevant in the context of the selected case study has been recognized as one of the factors that impedes building public trust and increasing social capital (Baimenov and Liverakos, 2022).

According to the World Bank (2018), the main contribution of developing a citizen-centric service delivery of public services is that it allows policy makers to capture the real needs of the citizens and the nature of these needs and hence create better public policies. Moreover, it can also contribute to a more evidence-based policy making processes.

According to Paarlberg (2007), customer-oriented organizations are distinguished by the three main principles “placing a high priority on customer interests, generating and using information about customers, and creating systems to act on such information” (p. 2002). Increasing the efficiency of the public service delivery through employing market mechanism with the specific emphasis on the customer service standards has been reflected in New Public Management model. A significant body of research considered customer orientation through NPM efforts in different parts of the world. According to Osborne and Stokosch (2022), main components of the NPM include “the privileging of markets as the mechanism through which to coordinate resources with need; output as a key component of legitimacy; a managerial orientation to organisational performance management; the repositioning of citizens as customers/consumers; a preoccupation with performance measurement and management; and the assumed superiority of private sector management techniques” (p. 187).

On the whole, the customer oriented public service has been recognized and adopted as principle of public service delivery in a number of countries such as Australia, Belgium, Canada, Finland, France, India, Ireland, Italy, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Singapore, Sweden, UK, and US (Milakovich, 2003). Already in the beginning of the twenty first century experiences of the countries have set an example for other to follow in relation to the increasing customer satisfaction with the provision of public services as they developed “more flexible, networked and customer-responsive strategies” (Milakovich, 2003: 77).

The state of the customer centric delivery in public organizations varies across regions and countries. More literature is produced in the Western context. Back in 2009, Jansen et al. when assessing the situation with client centric approach in the delivery of public services in Netherlands argued that while there is increasing demand for a more customer-oriented approach in different public organization, there is lack of empirical inquiries which assess the state of it. In line with their findings obtained through an electronic questionnaire, there is lack of a specific client centered approach but at the same time majority of the service providers focus on the basic client profile. It was also revealed that those public entities which have yet adopted these practices explain it by the lack of skills and required capacity (Jansen et al., 2009: 302). This is an important insight as many of the research works point out to the lack of professional skills that are important in order to integrate client centric forms. Milakovich (2003) when discussing the reforms that took place in US during Clinton’s administration to incorporate more customer centric public service claims that training employees constitute a crucial part especially when it comes to front line workers. In this regard, it is suggested that apart from the “set of rigid rules, policies, procedures or practices” (p. 71), educational and training programs should focus on values. More generally, there is also a challenge associated with the lack of commitment and lack of desire to change the traditional hierarchical system. Behavior of the employees in such structures is also a significant obstacle (World Government Summit, 2017).

According to the study of the citizen centricity in the public sector in Norway, Berntzen et al. (2016) claim that some efforts ignore the individual’s needs. In a broader perspective they also explore the challenges associated with the implementation of the electronic government and state that some of the obstacles are relevant for the citizen centric service delivery. In accordance with their findings the following problems stand out: “public sector structure, fragmentation in service areas and/or decision-making responsibility, lack of communication/collaboration/coordination, no relation/ alignment between organization and technology, insufficient understanding of users, security and privacy not addressed, lack of standards, complexity and interoperability of legacy systems, basic infrastructure underdeveloped” (p. 5). They also add to this list issues stemming from “data quality, benchmarking using non-citizen-centric indicators, public sector autonomy, lack of semantic interoperability” (Berntzen et al., 2016: 5).

Other countries that embraced the importance of customer-oriented approach include the United Arab Emirates which has introduced the Service Factory initiative. One of the key changes is the incorporation of the concept of the customer journey mapping which is translated in the cocreation process (World Government Summit, 2017). Both these concepts have been adopted and widely discussed in the literature on the client centric public service.

In addition to the reforms that sought to adopt the NPM which focus on improving customer satisfaction and trust of the citizens in the state, digitalization (e.g., electronic government) as well as the concept of Open Government have gained some prominence. Similar to the barriers to the effective implementation that have been witnessed with the NPM reforms, these latest innovations face challenges including but not limited to “design-reality gaps, insufficient resources, cross-country relevance, and political influence” (Ingrams et al., 2020). Hsiao and Lin (2008) studied the customer orientation in the local government Revenue Service Office in US and came to the conclusion that to improve the delivery of the taxation related service, the office has incorporated different techniques (e.g. hardware environment and intangible matter) that was reflected in their specific framework.

In the study of primary health service delivery in Iran, Tabrizi et al. (2018) based on the expert interviews found out that apart from the common issues associated with the NPM reform, lack of customer-oriented culture has been noted to be one of the other significant issues often ignored by policy makers. Another look at the extent to which customer centric approach is integrated in the public service is discussed by Sebusang and Moeti (2005) who explore the issue in the context of Botswana. The study is important as it notes the difference of the role of public sector in the countries that lack of development democratic institutions and where government and public sector tends to dominate. These factors play an important role in the success of the efforts to create a more customer-oriented culture. Mathaba et al. (2015) looked the challenges of service delivery in South Africa based on Department of Public Works. Through the questionnaire of employees, it was revealed that lack of integrated management system as well as lack of experts and personnel with specific skills as this department is a technical one turns out the main issues that hindered a timely and efficient delivery of the services. Moreover, authors mentioned the problem of corruption. Similarly, the problems associated with the lack of efficiency of public service delivery are well researched in other more developing parts of the world.

Mehta (2014) addressed the barriers toward the implementation of the customer-oriented service in India and discusses the development of electronic government and incorporation of other information technologies to fill the existing gap. It is argued that information technology has been viewed as panacea for anticipating customer needs (Mehta, 2014). However, electronic provision of the public service is also susceptible to some weaknesses. Soos (2020: 318) when discussing the problems of public sector reform in Hungary points out the prevalence of digital illiteracy among the population that leads to customer distrust in the electronic infrastructure. As already mentioned, currently, one of the distinguishing features of the research into the citizen centric provision of public service is its focus on the digitalization and information technology. There is consensus that information systems can help to integrate more citizen-oriented delivery of the public service (Chen, 2010). At the same time, the pace with which governments adopt it as well as use it varies as number of factors intervene in these processes.

Thus, the client-oriented model of public policy determines the development of the civil service and its reform in the context of a country that is in the process of socio-economic and political transition. The issues of a client-oriented service approach are undoubtedly relevant in innovative strategies for reforming public administration in Kazakhstan as a whole and are of particular interest to the state apparatus.

Since the case study of this research paper is Kazakhstan, it is also important to look into the literature that deals with the state of the public service and its reforms in the context of countries that have been in the process of socioeconomic and political transition. This is important because there are other important factors that might undermine the efforts. According to Janenova and Kim (2016), on the whole the managerial practices underlined by the NPM might be constrained when it comes to the transitional states as there are contextual challenges varying from institutional to cultural ones. One of the problems is specifically changing the recipients of the public service into the customers (Janenova and Kim, 2016: 324). Apart from previous lack of experience and existence of the prerequisite institutions, more specifically the difficulty arises in the contexts with social and cultural “inertia” as well as state and civil relations that lack transparency and genuine cooperation and recognition (Janenova and Kim, 2016).

## **Methodology**

The case study of Kazakhstan was developed based on the qualitative exploratory analysis by using a documentary analysis method. To capture the existing works that deal with the review of citizen oriented public service examined in different country contexts, different materials were consulted. The international scholarly articles, books, newspaper articles, governmental reports as well as reports by the international organizations like OECD and World Bank were assisted. In addition, similar academic materials that specifically address the problems associated with the citizen-oriented approach in the provision of the public services in Kazakhstan were used.

The data consulted through secondary sources covers the period from 2015 until today as the year of 2015 marks the period when Kazakhstani government has implemented wide range of reforms in the public sector which include the Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan No. 408-V “On Amendments and Additions to Certain Legislative Acts Regarding the Provision of Public Services” which is a as a part of a wider “Plan of the Nation – 100 Concrete Steps for Implementing Five Institutional Reforms”. However, in order to gain a more sophisticated understanding of the conditions of the public service reforms previously generated data was also taken into account.

## **Results**

As stated in the official state program “Kazakhstan Strategy 2050”, modernizing, and improving public service is one of the important steps toward the achievement of the ambitious plan of Kazakhstan’s government to become top 30 world most developed economies (OECD, 2016: 6). The Strategy provides the legal framework for the public service reforms that puts an emphasis on the “increasing the effectiveness of government, introducing modern information technology, reducing bureaucracy, and restricting state intervention in the national and local economies” (Ibrayeva and Nezhina, 2017: 58). The regulatory and supervisory body - the Agency for the Public Service Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan has been in charge of



performing the management of the delivery of the public service and its quality performance (Egov, 2022).

The 2007 Presidential decree on “Measures aimed at Modernizing the Public Administration system in the Republic of Kazakhstan” marks the beginning of the number of comprehensive reforms of the public administration. Aims pursued by the decree involved “improving the quality of public administration processes, procedures and public service provision, and improving professional skills, efficiency and coordination of the state apparatus” (Amagoh and Bhuiyan, 2010: 16). It also identifies the performance management as a mechanism for improving the processes that underly the delivery of public service. Overall, the performance management as outlined in this Law set the stage for “service standards, performance rating, effectiveness audits, annual reporting, and client feedback through regular public opinion surveys” (Ibrayeva and Nezhina, 2017: 58).

The transformation of the public service and making it more efficient stems particularly from the New Public Management paradigm. Kazakhstan similar to other countries joined the global trend of main principles of NPM that places an emphasis on “cost reduction, introduction of a self-regulatory regime, improved quality of regulation, increased competition, and corporate-style output-oriented public service delivery” (Vakulchik, 2016: 2). To achieve the integration of the main NPM principles, Kazakhstan like others opted for the assistance of information technology. In the modern world, innovation is recognized to be one of the primary mechanisms through which public administration has been evolving.

It was the year 2004 when the government of Kazakhstan introduced the two programs – One stop Shops and e-government (Janenova and Kim, 2016). In addition to the above-mentioned initiatives, a move toward a more citizen oriented public service delivery has been as well manifested through the three policies of “open government portal; open dialogue; and open budgets” (O’Connor et al., 2019). In line with the results of the customer satisfaction survey of 28 participants by Ibrayeva and Nezhina (2017) in OSS of Almaty demonstrated that citizens are content with the services delivered through OSS. Among the benefits that are stress is the easier access to make financial transactions as well as communication. It was concluded that despite of the lack of citizen engagement in the political decision making, the improved quality of the public service provision contributes to the recovering the public trust toward the institutions (Ibrayeva and Nezhina, 2017: 58).

In 2015, “100 Concrete Steps to Implement Five Institutional Reforms” were introduced to help the implementation of the objectives of the Strategy 2050. Given the economic and geopolitical challenges that Kazakhstan experienced, deeper reforms in the public administration were required. At the heart of the 100 steps is the “formation of a modern, professional and independent public service that ensures high-quality implementation of economic programmes and delivery of public services” (Rustem, 2015). It is worth noting that this year there were also amendments to the existing legal documents on the public service and the anti-corruption policy that paid special attention to the public office (OECD, 2017).

According to the global ranking of the United Nations e-government development index (EGDI) Kazakhstan has improved its position from 39<sup>th</sup> to 29<sup>th</sup> in the world between the period of 2018-2020 while in the CIS region it ranks the 6<sup>th</sup> (Development Asia, 2022). It is argued that e-government intuitive has contributed to the transitioning toward more “sustainable, inclusive, and equitable” (Development Asia, 2022) provision of the public service. In terms of e-participation, it is reported that Kazakhstan ranks 26<sup>th</sup> in the world in accordance with the results of the UN 2020 EGovernment Service. An overall improvement is noted in terms of e-government and e-participation between 2009 and 2020 (Development Asia, 2022: 2-3).

Simultaneously, there are wide range of programs that are being implemented at the same time aimed at complementing each other. Apart from enhancing the public sector, they also have an end goal of providing basis for further transitioning toward a more sustainable economy and within it support the diversification efforts. Digital Kazakhstan is the program that seeks to provide total population of Kazakhstan with the digital access. One of the pillars of the program is the digitalization of the public services and anticipation of the citizens’ needs and demands (Egov, n.d.). Furthermore, a concept of Listening State was introduced in 2019 by President Tokayev that rests on the “quick and efficient response to all constructive citizen requests” (Starr, 2019).

### ***Barriers to implementation***

The analysis of the existing materials that carry out the assessment reveal mixed perspective toward the effectiveness of the measures that have been in place. Among the problems that are stressed related to enhancing the efficiency of the delivery of public services in Kazakhstan the following barriers are noted “limited scope of influence of the State Corporation «Government for Citizens» on the process of improving the quality of public services; low wages of front-line employees; lack of effective inter-agency cooperation between government agencies, State Corporation and one stop shops; and complex bureaucratic language of public service standards, incomprehensible for the citizens” (Janenova, n.d.: 2). Moreover, according to Bokayev et al. (2021) while the digitalization of the public service delivery created number of benefits including the automation of processes which in turn led to cost and time effective solutions, it lacks the orientation toward the daily needs of the citizens. Given the adoption of these innovative technologies, the assessment of the efficiency of the public services in Kazakhstan is considered particularly in the context of the e-government. In 2020, the integration of e-government has entered the transformational stage of development. The overall users of the services through electronic means are reported to increase from 10.960 to 8.6 million between the period of 2009-2018 (Amanbek et al., 2020).

One of the innovative ways to enhance the citizen centric public service delivery is to engage citizens into the creation of the solutions that give them an opportunity to make a contribution as well as provide feedback. There are several ways in which feedback provision can be made available for citizens (World Bank, n.d.: 5). Apart from the direct suggestions, social media is considered one of the newest ways. For example, in Azerbaijan a system called ASAN was created to improve the communication with citizens though social media networks Facebook and Twitter (World Bank, n.d.: 6). According to the public survey carried out by the "Talap" Applied Research Center in partnership and cooperation with Kazakhstan’s United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Kazakhstan and the Agency of the Republic of

Kazakhstan for Civil Service Affairs in 2020, there was an overall increase in the citizen satisfaction which increased from 74.8 to 75.1 % between 2019-2020 (UNDP, 2021). The survey and interviews revealed that among the main problems reported by the participants are “weak feedback on complaints, lack of publicly available information on the procedure for public service delivery, non-automated services, lack of integration of information systems with the e-government portal” as well as technical issues when it comes to the usage of e-government (UNDP, 2021).

Similarly, Bekenova and Park (2018) conducted the study by using survey in Kazakhstan regarding the quality of information offered by the e-government services. The study demonstrated that surveyed population is concerned with the privacy and security of the digital processes to obtain a needed service. Moreover, their priority is the “complete and accurate information”. The study also touched upon the cultural factor that persist among the older population that use traditional means in order to engage in the social interaction (Bekenova and Park, 2018).

### ***Role of disruptive technologies in improving public service delivery and citizen-oriented service***

Since the development of the citizen centric public service delivery in Kazakhstan is mainly considered through the adoption of the innovative initiatives including e-government and OSS and given the Kazakhstanian government program “Digital Kazakhstan”, a sophisticated identification of the challenges toward its implementation is important in the wake of the latest developments and applications related to Blockchain, Artificial Intelligence, and Internet of Things. It can be expected that in the short-term future Kazakhstan will move its attention toward these innovative solutions as the rise of the pilot projects in the country demonstrates.

A recent rise of disruptive technologies that are mainly represented by blockchain led to a number of applications (mainly pilot) in the public administration procedures across the world. The applications are popular in the provision of the public services that include obtaining certificates and registration. Some theoretical models also see the integration of this technology into the existing electronic government models (Saxena et al., 2022). The final goal of these disruptive technologies is related to the empowerment of the citizens, increasing transparency, and reducing corruption which taken together can potentially increase the trust among citizens toward public institutions (Lindman et al., 2020).

The state strives to deliver electronic services as effective as possible but the maturity levels usually differ from the expectation or government plans. The application problems are always tightened with infrastructural coverage of joint service provision which is why the government of Kazakhstan started in 2019 the conceptional changes in “e-Government and Digital government” programs that could lead to centralized updates to sustain the systems as well as submitted feedbacks from the citizens to prove (Jussupova et al., 2019).

For example, Uzbekistan cooperated with the tech company to apply blockchain enabled solution in the country’s civil registry office (European Union, 2022). Beyond enhancing the efficiency of the public service, it aims at providing access to the services to people from rural parts of the country and vulnerable communities. In Georgia, Russia, Honduras there are projects

aimed at property registration using this technology (Balan and Bukovsky, 2018). In Estonia, the use of digital ID allows easy access to retrieving data including birth, marriage, and contract. Certainly, the integration of blockchain based solution to public service delivery has faced number of challenges that range from the costs, infostructure, technical difficulties even in the most developed parts of the world.

As mentioned, there are also some initiatives that are currently under test in Kazakhstan. The smart city concept was developed in Kazakhstan in 2019. Apart from improving “safety, transport, housing and communal services, education, health care and city management” the goal of the concept is to improve the delivery of the public service provision (Egov, n.d.). Recently, President Tokayev has also announced that citizen centric delivery of public service is still one of the main priorities and that use of solutions of digital technologies is the main mechanism. The cooperation with private sector was highlighted. For example, companies including Kaspi, Khalyk, BI Group developed platforms that help citizens to have easy access to the public services (Kapital.Kz, 2022).

In 2021, the transitioning toward eGov 3.0 has started that seeks to incorporate the Artificial Intelligence which is also part of the Smart Bridge Project (Development Asia, 2022). The government has also introduced a new National Development Plan until 2025 part of which is the Concept for the Development of the Sphere of Digital Governance and the ICT Industry and the DigitEL (Digital Era Lifestyle) project (Shayakhmetova, 2021). Main pillars of this project are based on the following objectives: “(1) provide government services in less than 5 minutes; (2) promote the growth of information technology (IT) businesses; (3) become a listening and effective government; (4) provide high-quality internet and ensure data security; (5) enable paperless transactions; and (6) deploy digital tools to improve social welfare” (Development Asia, 2022: 5).

Nonetheless, similar to the issues discussed related to the current provision of the service, smart city initiative requires the attention to the same problems. According to Shalbolova and Kenzhagaliyeva (2018: 5), “Improving the coordination of efforts at the national and municipal levels of innovation policy. Increasing transparency of the legal framework and the protection of privacy. Involving citizens in implementation of projects. Engaging in national and international knowledge sharing networks. “Smart” adjustment in the construction of new infrastructure by attracting private and public entities” should be addressed.

According to Akhmetbek and Špaček (2021), blockchain technologies and related tool are not identified as strategic “tools and methods” for public administration in the Digital Kazakhstan program’s framework while at the same time it is considered as an economic technology. Moreover, blockchain and distribute ledger platforms are present in the 2020 Law on Digital Technologies of Kazakhstan. However, again there are no clear provisions of its use. Among the current applications in Kazakhstan’s public service, State Corporation “Government for Citizens” has been in a process of blockchain into the service of pledge agreement registration. Moreover, in 2020 mortgage registration of mortgage contracts were introduced by the electronic government portal (Kuzekbay, 2022). The VAT Blockchain initiative has also been piloted which aims at quicker and safer processing of the tax related obligations as well as VAT refunds (Akhmetbek and Špaček, 2021).

## Discussion

In this article, the citizen orientation in the provision of the public service in Kazakhstan was discussed. In particular, attention was given to the innovation and problems that are associated with current provision of the public services. The article joins the discussion of the public sector reforms in the transitional countries like Kazakhstan. It contributes to this discussion by also including some consideration of more recent technological advancements that have been applied to leverage the public service functioning. Therefore, the findings of the present study can serve as an assistance to the policymakers as well as academia to fill the existing gaps.

The study is also relevant given the current context in which Kazakhstan's public reforms are implemented. Given the economic crisis, rising inflation, and other global developments that hinder the economies, it is crucial more than ever to increase the efficiency of the public sector as in a cost-effective and cooperative manner. The consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic also demonstrated a need for adopting more innovative practices (OECD, 2020).

There is a consensus that the state is a key player and a responsible in ensuring the provision of the indispensable public goods and services that in turn determine the well-being of the population. Apart from this, efficient and effective delivery of the public service delivery that emphasizes the needs of the citizens at different levels of governance is considered key for the "successful implementation of a national development agenda" (Anderson et al., 2015).

The findings indicate that the government of Kazakhstan has embraced the concept of the citizen centric delivery provision of the public service. In a wider scope it is reflected in the Kazakhstan's transition toward NPM as a part of its socioeconomic and governance reforms. Citizen centric public service provision is one of the central pillars of the NPM. The delivery of the public service has undergone changes since 1990s. The reforms in the public sector have been primarily characterized using ICT (information and communication technology).

With the emergence of the digital age, Kazakhstan's public sector has oriented toward innovative approaches including electronic government and OSS. In the wake of the rising popularity of the new disruptive technologies there have also been innovative applications to further enhance citizen participation.

The study also suggests that there is a positive link between the citizen satisfaction and public service delivery with the help of these innovative solutions over the years. It can be observed that initiatives to make public service more accessible and viable have been developing along with improvements in institutional and technological structure. While some positive changes are observed, number of challenges of the different nature still persist. Similar to the experiences of other countries, Kazakhstan's provision of the public service suffers from shortcomings in the managerial efficiency, expertise of the public servants, some issues related to privacy, digital literacy, insufficient infrastructure, lack of genuine commitment on the part of the policy makers. Some also noted the low wages for the front workers that might result in the corrupt behavior. With respect to the last point, the nationwide anticorruption policy has been in

place since 2015 that specifically addressed the public sector that also stressed the increase in the remuneration of the civil servants (OECD, 2017).

## **Conclusion**

The creation and management of a service-based state apparatus is fundamental to customer/citizen/client-centric public service delivery, and is also an important step worldwide towards a more efficient public sector. As can be seen from the results, a customer-centric approach is part of the new government, and it correlates with initiatives related to e-government and open government, as well as the adoption of concepts such as co-creation and the customer journey. The results of the study also show that innovation in practice varies across country contexts. As for the challenges, it is clear that in addition to the general problems associated with a lack of expertise, lack of digital literacy, lack of budget, infrastructure, corrupt behavior, some countries face challenges of a political and socio-cultural nature.

It is encouraged that the government in Kazakhstan or relevant entities carry out the nationwide assessment of the citizen satisfaction with the delivery of the public service nowadays with the specific focus on the digital provision of public services. Most of the studies that were consulted to identify the state and barriers are limited in number and don't cover the current period. Moreover, reporting on the conducted studies should be communicated on a regular basis.

Apart from making digital services easier and more comprehensible to citizens, in the context of Kazakhstan as a country with significant regional differences, traditional delivery of the public services deserves attention. Overall, when establishing the mechanisms for the provision of the public service either through more innovative solution or by conventional channels it is important to take into account the demographic profile including age and socioeconomic status (Ramakrishnan, 2013: 5). For that customer feedback platforms should also be improved.

This study has also some limitations that need to be discussed. First of all, the study didn't assess the citizen satisfaction in the specific public service. Hence, the study draws some general conclusions. Second, as noted, it neither explored the views of the front employees or managers. This limitation leads to the suggestion to collect primary data through survey method. Finally, a cross regional assessment of the delivery of the public service is suggested given the variation in sociocultural underpinnings in local governance.

Overall, it is expected that findings of the research can be replicated to the countries with similar sociopolitical context to shed light on the common barriers toward efficient and citizen-oriented delivery.

This also study encourages the further research on other innovative tools like disruptive technologies to create a more citizen based public service delivery system in Kazakhstan. it should cover the risks and obstacles and whether the existing infrastructure is ready for this state-of-the-art technology and what should be done to overcome it.

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