Chapter 7

MetaStrategy of MetaCities:
An Example of Ankara Municipality Project BLD 4.0

Sevda Mutlu Akar

https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1208-0258
Bandirma Onyedi Eylul University, Turkey

Senem Nart

Bandirma Onyedi Eylul University, Turkey

ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze voter-municipality and virtual political communication within the scope of the BLD 4.0 project of the Ankara municipality, which is the first Turkish municipality to join the Metaverse world and to examine the voters' perceptions about the Metaverse world. The study evaluates the comments submitted to the official social media accounts of the Ankara municipality, which has declared it will participate in the Metaverse world. The results of the analysis conducted, the importance of digitalization in governance has emerged, and it has been found that there is awareness among citizens regarding the concepts of industry 4.0 and the Metaverse. In particular, it is understood that the perception of innovative leadership created by the digital municipalism approach creates trust in a political leader.

INTRODUCTION

The Internet is one of the most fundamental tools, enabling most of the world's population to access information and services, interact with each other, socialize, trade, and be entertained. Especially in recent years, the acceleration of the digitalization process and the integration of the digital and physical worlds has paved the way for the development and diversification of digital technologies. Spatial technologies such as Web 3.0, Virtual Reality (VR), and Augmented Reality (AR) have started to offer innovative digital products and services to individuals on the one hand, while on the other, they have helped organizations shape new business models (Mystakidis, 2022).

One of the most important factors accelerating the digitalization experience was the COVID-19 pandemic, which minimized the physical contact of individuals during this period. Due to this global pandemic, governments took many strict measures to prevent its spread and imposed curfews and travel restrictions. In this process, services in many areas of business life were either provided through hybrid working models or jobs were completely moved to digital platforms and directed to work from home. Individuals who work from home have shown more interest in computer games and online applications that allow them to visit cultural and historical cities online in their free time. As digital channels gained greater importance during the pandemic, this led to a heightened interest in the virtual-centered Meta-verse. According to Hayrullahoğlu and Varol (2022, p. 246) and Sun et al. (2022, p. 6) the main interest was heightened when Facebook changed its name to Meta – the suffix of the Metaverse.

The term Metaverse consists of the words: "meta" and "verse," the former referring to "beyond" and the latter "universe" (Choi, 2022, p. 4; Park & Kim, 2022, p. 3; Sun et al., 2022, p. 7). The Metaverse refers to a three-dimensional virtual world inhabited by avatars created by real individuals (Kim, 2021). Avatars can perform various political, economic, social, and cultural activities in this virtual world (Park & Kim, 2022). We first heard about this technology during the COVID-19 pandemic, but it is a term we are familiar with from science fiction movies. In the literature, the Metaverse is known as a world of interconnected virtual communities and a new online digital space where users interact in a multidimensional way (STM ThinkTech, 2022, pp. 3–4). Accordingly, it can be argued that in the future, the Metaverse will replace the Internet. As the Metaverse has become more prominent, both the private sector and governments have started to direct their investments to adapt to this process. The Metaverse is considered an important step toward becoming a smart city as it can significantly impact public service delivery in the form of information, access to services, cultural activities, and economic opportunities (National League of Cities, 2022, p. 18).

Virtual cities in the Metaverse are called "Metacities." The first study that introduced the concept of a metacity to the literature was conducted by Wang et al. (2022), who state metacities are created by mapping real cities in the virtual world. Metaverse virtual cities are cities that run parallel to our real cities. In other words, all the elements in the real city exist as virtual elements in the virtual cities. Metacities are important because they promise to offer solutions to accelerate and improve the decision-making process on many fundamental issues, such as feasibility, efficiency, economy, communication, and security in real cities.

In Turkey, on January 5, 2022, Mansur Yavaş, the Mayor of Ankara Metropolitan Municipality, announced that Ankara Municipality was the 4th test city in the Metaverse after Los Angeles (USA), Bari (Italy), and Helsinki (Finland). With its BLD 4.0 project, Ankara Municipality has become one of the test cities of the Open AR Cloud Association, which develops standards for open and interoperable computing technologies to connect the physical and digital worlds of the Metaverse.

Therefore, Ankara Metropolitan Municipality, the first city from Turkey to enter the Metaverse universe, is a municipality worth examining. Ankara Municipality has taken an important step in achieving Turkey's goals for digitalization and technological transformation; accordingly, and its adaptation to technology needs to be better understood. Within this context, this study aims to analyze the effects of digitalization in the administration of Ankara Municipality within the scope of the BLD 4.0 V22 project through the voters and to investigate their perceptions regarding the Metaverse world. In general, the study seeks answers to the following questions:

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