



User
Centri
Cities



LOCAL WORKSHOP Report

Emilia-Romagna (Italy)



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Introduction to the project



Digital government policy in Europe requires the involvement of local authorities in the delivery but does not sufficiently involve them in the definition of the priorities. UserCentriCities (UCCs) aims to help bridge this gap by developing a local version of the Tallinn Declaration user-centricity principles.

*To that extent, UCCs wants to translate and adapt the user-centricity principles of the Tallinn Declaration for the local context of cities and regions, based on the needs of partners and the citizens, businesses and other users of local digital public services. **The translation process is done through an iterative co-creation approach.***

- Localised Tallin declaration User-Centricity principles (T1.2)

Introduction to the **project**

This workshop, organized by the Emilia-Romagna region with the involvement of Collaborative Communities, joins the UserCentriCities co-designing journey with two objectives:

- on one hand, to gather from **Local Administrations experiences and points of view** regarding user centricity when applied to their own digital services (what is the current state? What is working and what could be improved?),
- on the other hand, to **contribute to the definition of common guidelines for those who intend to design and provide user-centred digital services**, bringing ideas or design proposals that can be activated immediately or in the immediate future.



The workshop attendees

About 40 people, representing more than 30 Local Administrations of the Emilia-Romagna region, attended the workshop.

Participants are people who, within their institution, design and implement online services for citizens and companies. They also participate in working groups (*Collaborative Communities*) organised by the Emilia-Romagna region on issues dedicated to digital.



The Collaborative Communities are the place where the active participation of the Local Administrations is realized. Thinking and doing together enable the digital growth of our entire territory thanks to the sharing of knowledge, experience and competence.

La struttura organizzativa e la governance delle Comunità Tematiche – digitale.regione.emilia-romagna.it

In this document, we report the results of a 90-minute workshop held on **May 25, 2021**.

Workshop structure

We structured the workshop by retracing the journey of creating a digital service from the Local Agencies' point of view.

The 4 phases identified were:

1. **design and development** of the service,
2. **release** (communication) of the service and onboarding of users,
3. **providing** the service (and use of it),
4. **improvement** of the service.



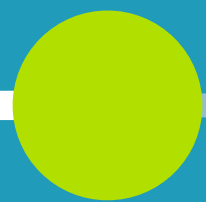
For each phase, functional questions were selected to obtain insight in relation to the 8 user-centricity principles of the Tallinn Declaration, dividing the work into two moments:

- gathering of experiences from the participants and description of the current “as is” state of the digital services within their Agencies;
- discussion and comparison guided by designed questions (*How Might We...?*) to gather opportunities and ideas for the future as well as potential indicators (KPI) to monitor.

We used **Mural** as our collaborative tool.

When gathering feedback, we structured the questions using different frameworks each time to stimulate both the pace of work as well as the attention of the participants.

Defining the context



What does “user-centricity” really mean?

WHAT IDEAS INSPIRE US?

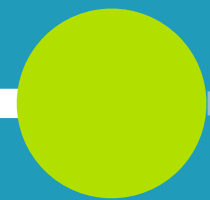
WHAT ARE THE CONCEPTS THAT WE IMMEDIATELY ASSOCIATE WITH THIS SUBJECT?

We asked the participants to freely express their ideas and thoughts that the term “user-centricity” evokes in their mind.

The themes that emerged describe the concept considering different aspects:

- creating services *for the users* starting with the *needs* and the *demands* (explicit or implicit) of the users themselves, “*thinking about the service by putting yourself in their shoes*” (of the user);
- offering personalized services (“*a tailor for each user’s specific needs*”);
- listening (to the user) before speaking and using a language that is simple, practical and less bureaucratic;
- reaching even the most “difficult” targets (the youngest generations and the oldest), working on the creation of “relationships” and not just communication;
- simplifying processes and tools, optimizing the experience of the service by guiding the user in their choices, offering intuitive interfaces and putting usability as the top priority;
- starting from the technological infrastructure to have interoperability between systems and apply the *once-only* principle.

Design and development of a digital service



Why did you feel the need to provide a service on a digital platform? Which needs/requests/situations pushed you to do so?

Was it your choice or were you forced to do it (if so, by what?)?

The main demand comes primarily from 2 sources (citizens and staff). The secondary demand comes from governing bodies or from the need to adapt to new legislations (“CAD 64bis”).

Regarding citizens, the demands that they want satisfied the most are:

- the possibility to use the services 24/7: every day, at any hour;
- saving time by not physically going to/from an agency’s office.

Digital services also provide greater “*convenience for the user*” and they “*bring everyone closer together*”.

Regarding offices, various themes persisted.

Remote working was the most important. Working digitally provides an option for those who cannot physically come into the office. It becomes the cornerstone upon which remote work is structured. One participant mentioned that “*during lockdown we risked default*”.

Other themes that emerged were the management of data and procedures.

Above all, their **optimization** to obtain greater organizational efficiency. Furthermore, “*you can work at all hours, not just during the ‘open-to-general-public’ hours*”. In this sense, the preliminary work is simplified, and you obtain facilitated

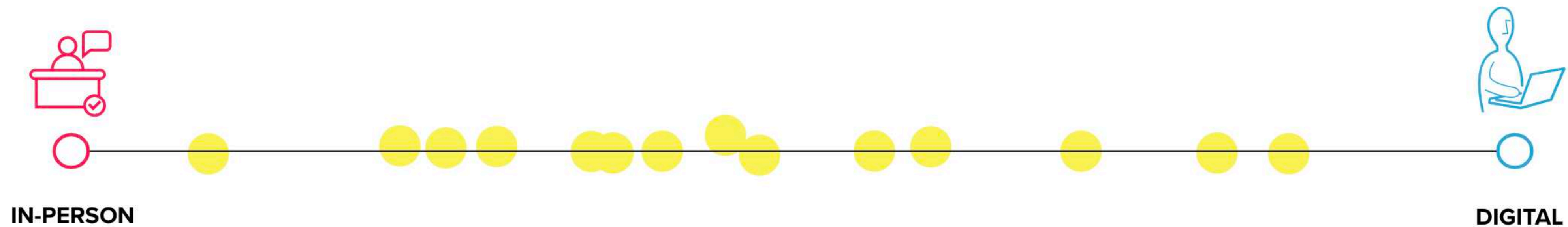
monitoring as well as results that can be consulted directly online. The data is generated already in digital form; therefore, they do not need to be transcribed, thus leading to a reduction of errors. The information can be checked and validated in real time and automatically.

All of this allows for greater control of the duration of the processes (“*sure completion date*”), therefore saving time on administration.

Regarding services that are available both online and in-person (for example, at a public service desk), on an average, which channel is used more, the in-person channel or the digital one?

14 responses were gathered, which were almost evenly distributed throughout the segment. This suggests that **the experiences in this territory can vary greatly** for a series of reasons.

Another interesting point that emerged was that nearly **half of the participants consider that citizens still prefer the in-person channel.**



Let's discuss problems...

What are the elements that can impede or limit the digitalization of a service?

Limitations include citizens and their competencies, the resistance to change within staff, internal procedures and supporting technologies.

The top limitation is the digital culture of some user groups. **It was emphasized that sometimes it is related to the age of the user, but also many young users can encounter difficulties.**

A person's capability of using a said technology is an additional obstacle for the diffusion of digital services.

Regarding the technological aspect, two important points were presented.

SPID (Public Digital Identity System) and CIE (Electronic ID card) are **tools that are difficult to**

understand and to use; they must be explained.

Furthermore, the services themselves *“are not always understandable or they require uploading and attaching files (which is difficult when using a smartphone)”*. Backoffice software that are complex to integrate, and *“unexperienced suppliers”* are two additional elements that slow down the digitalization process.

Other critical elements derive from:

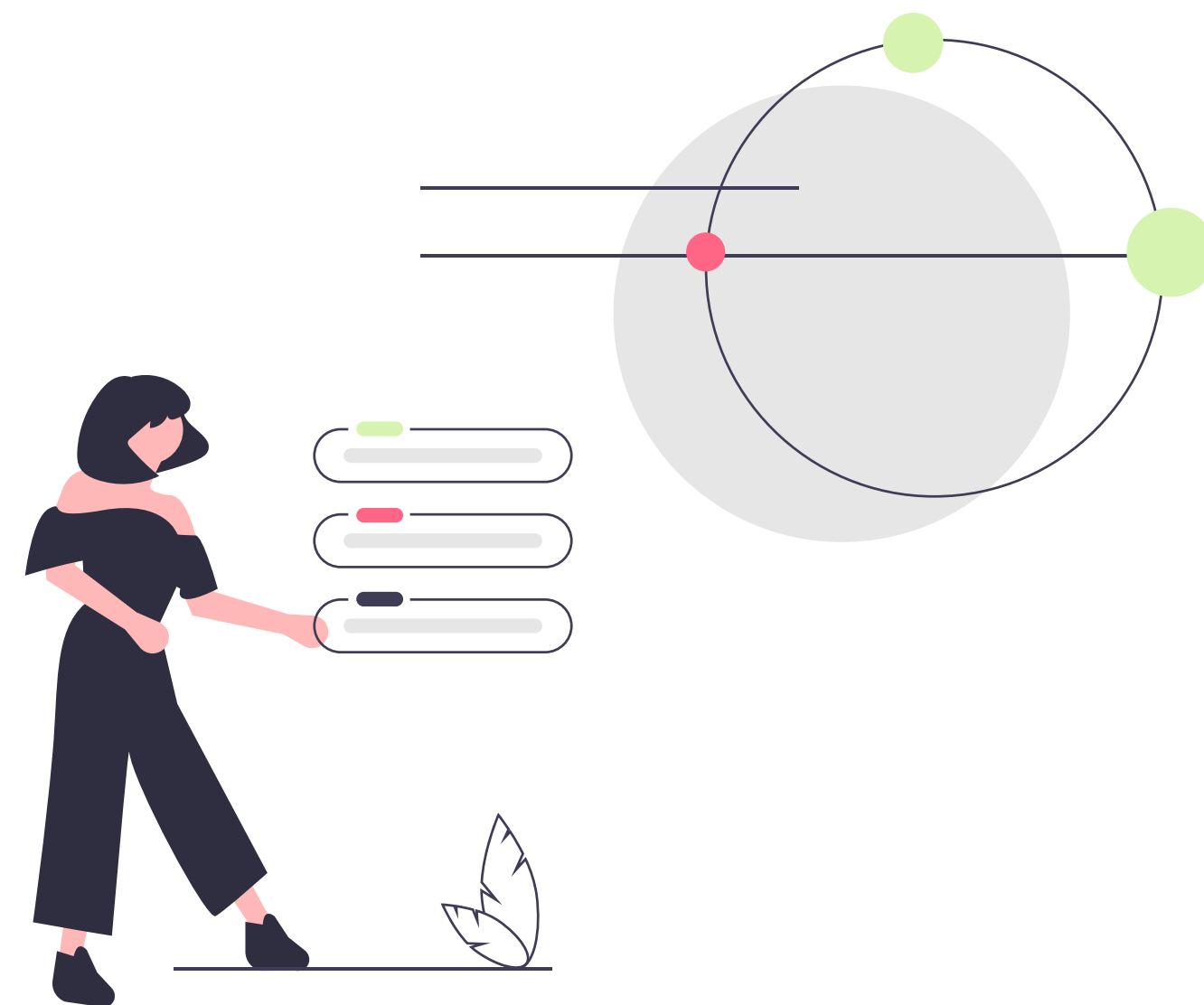
- the complexity of **procedures** that at times require too many steps or require other separate processes;
- difficulty in going beyond rigid internal procedures, and out of the comfort zone of *“it*

has always been done this way” (it is **“necessary to design by thinking outside of existing frameworks”**);

- **scarce empathy for the needs of citizens**, and on the contrary, difficulty in creating a sense of empathy similar to that which can be created at the in-person service desk;
- the *“lack of sufficient staff to manage the change”*.

Which services would you like to digitalize in the near future? 1/3

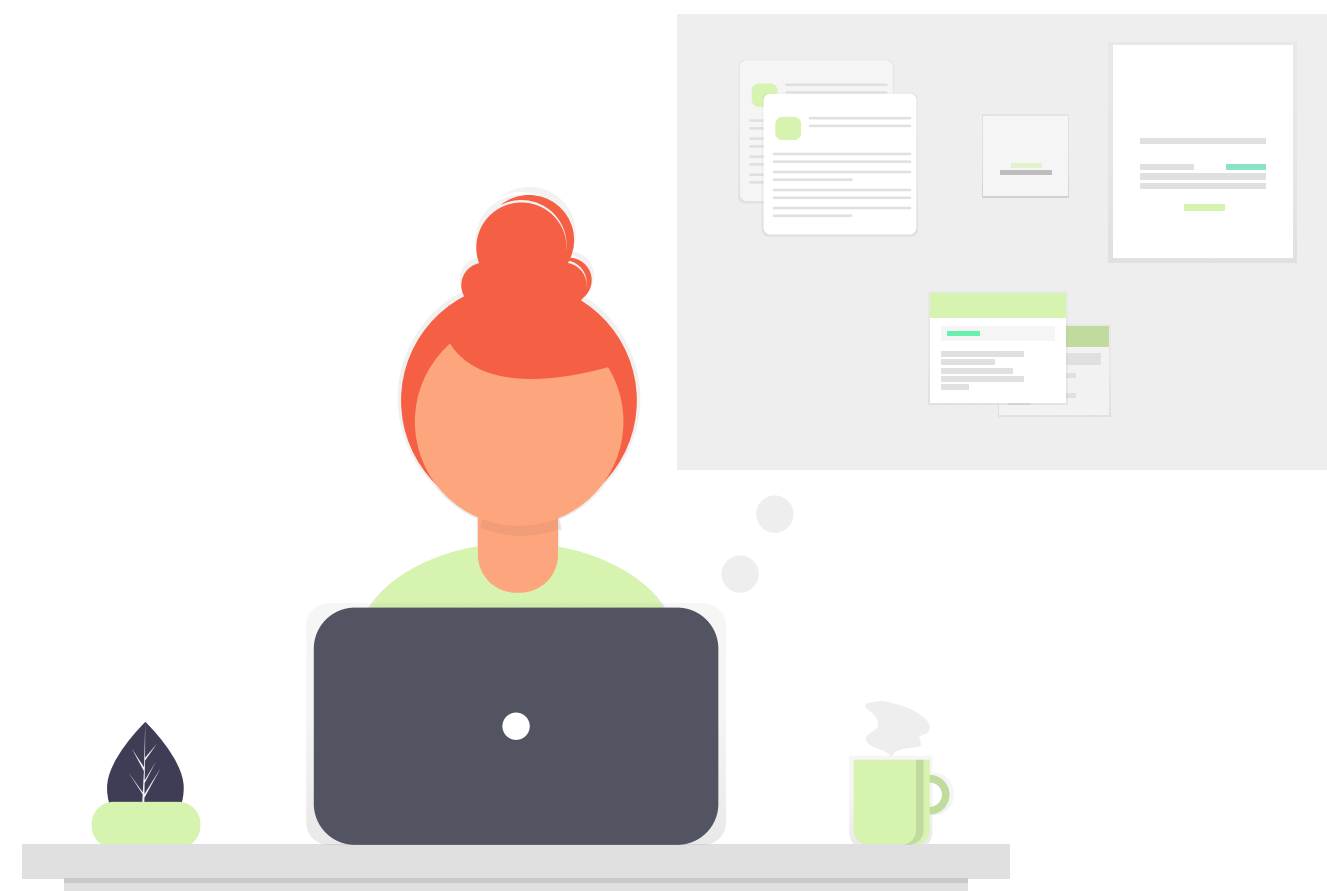
We asked to divide future services into three groups: those that are already being developed, those that the administration is considering, and those on the “wish list”.



In the development process

- Co-working project
- Civil Registry office
- Management of Competitive examinations for placement/recruitment
- Enrolment in educational services
- Digital Construction/ Building office
- Integration of SPID
- Air Quality Service
- Digital payments
- Technical office requests
- Requests for all services (*“we completely mapped the requests”*)

Which services would you like to digitalize in the near future? 1/3



Being planned...

- Residential construction permits online
- PagoPA (Public Administration payment platform) for all fees
- Payment services
- Construction Project Archive
- Civil Registry office
- MU (Property tax) self-certifications
- E-democracy
- TARI (Waste management tax) declarations

Which services would you like to digitalize in the near future? 1/3

It is evident that, relative to an identical service, some agencies are more advantaged. Why not use experiences as a common denominator?

Integration with the IO app is seen as a feasible element in the future, not as an element that can be utilized today.




It would be nice (maybe one day...)

- A system that simplifies the sharing procedures between agencies
- A system of unspoken requests, e.g., children
- To view the monitoring system of citizen's feedback
- To view a map of car accidents that can be used by citizens to monitor road safety in their own municipality
- Construction permits
- Civil registry office
- Digital cultural services
- Complete messaging system on IO app
- Use IO app to interact with citizens
- All services on IO app

Which advantages or disadvantages compelled the Agency to digitalize a service? What works very well and what could be improved?

To facilitate the answer, we asked the participants to reason within these quadrants:

BENEFITS FOR THE AGENCY 

DISADVANTAGES FOR THE AGENCY 

WHY THE SERVICE WORKS WELL 

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED IN THE SERVICE 

Which advantages or disadvantages compelled the Agency to digitalize a service? What works very well and what could be improved?

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BENEFITS FOR THE AGENCY



The advantages for the Agency are numerous:

- the requests are generated digitally, therefore the gathering of information and the delivery of the services is faster: improved performance;
- tracing of the requests and who is responsible;
- automation of actions that are of scarce added value;
- cleanliness of data, thus making it easier to analyse and draw statistics;
- reduction of staff at the service desk, yet at the same time lengthening the amount of service hours;
- the opportunity to offer even more services.

Which advantages or disadvantages compelled the Agency to digitalize a service? What works very well and what could be improved?

To facilitate the answer, we asked the participants to reason within these quadrants:

DISADVANTAGES FOR THE AGENCY



On the other hand, a series of issues were presented:

- cost and important initial investment;
- risk of malfunction during updates and integrations;
- confusion when there is a mixed request, both digital and hardcopy, which also creates a lack of clarity within the staff regarding the document flow procedures;
- the need for training of staff regarding both user-centricity and the adopted technologies;
- the available staff is not enough (*“Tech Support becomes essential, but the people are still the same people”*).

Which advantages or disadvantages compelled the Agency to digitalize a service? What works very well and what could be improved?

To facilitate the answer, we asked the participants to reason within these quadrants:

WHY THE SERVICE WORKS WELL



The service is appreciated when:

- it works 24/7;
- it supports remote working;
- it allows for immediate filing;
- the requests are easy to complete.

Which advantages or disadvantages compelled the Agency to digitalize a service? What works very well and what could be improved?

To facilitate the answer, we asked the participants to reason within these quadrants:

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED IN THE SERVICE



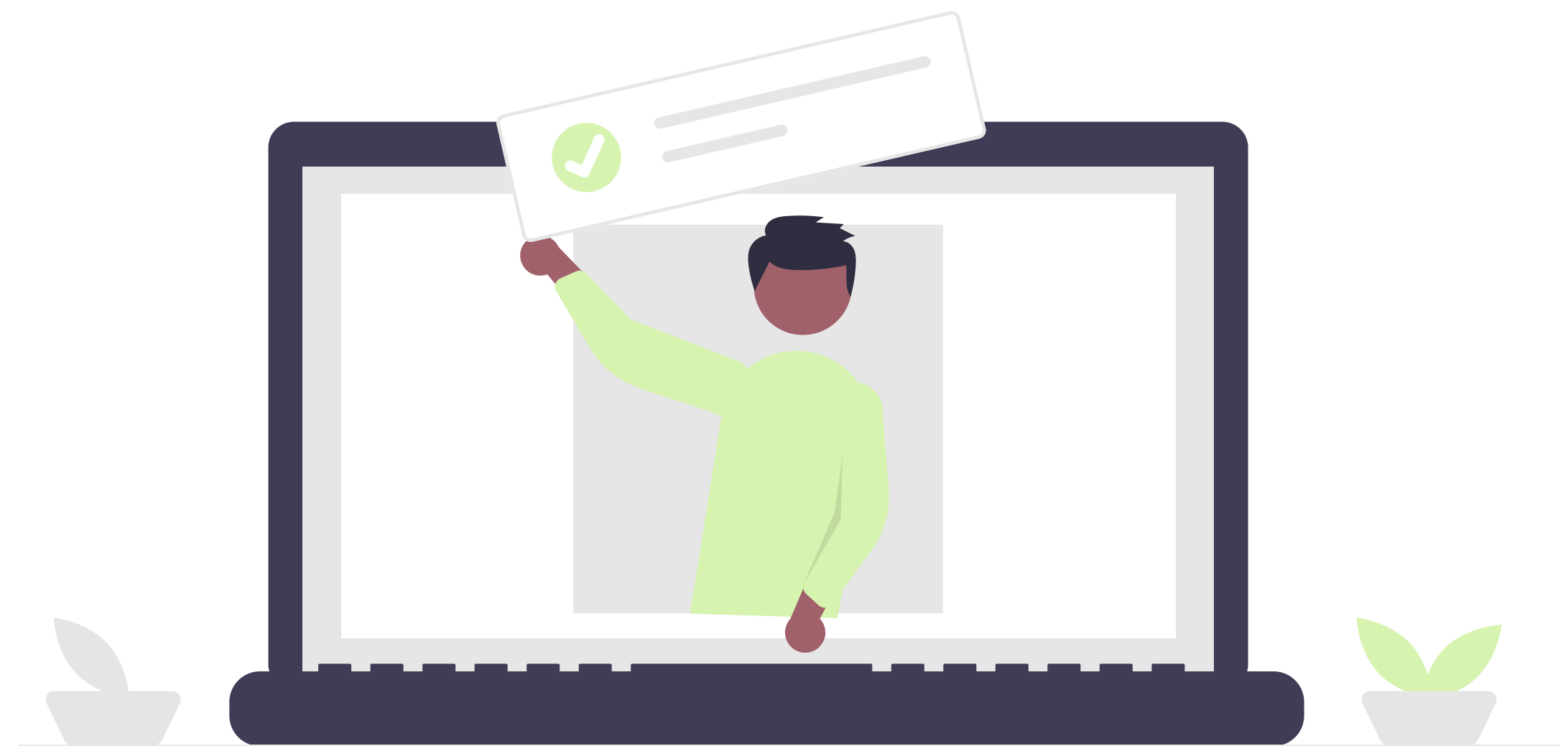
The improvable elements that emerged are related to:

- the relationship with citizens in terms of information, training and assistance; at the same time, it is important to prepare the staff;
- cost reduction, by collaboration among more than one Agency to split the costs;
- the technological integration between systems (data banks, vertical applications, registry databases, payment systems); we can also “*evaluate Blockchain, which is underestimated*”;
- the simplification of system configurations.

How might we define the next steps (guidelines) for digitalizing a service that today is solely available in-person, following an approach that is centred on the user?

These are the **suggestions that emerged**:

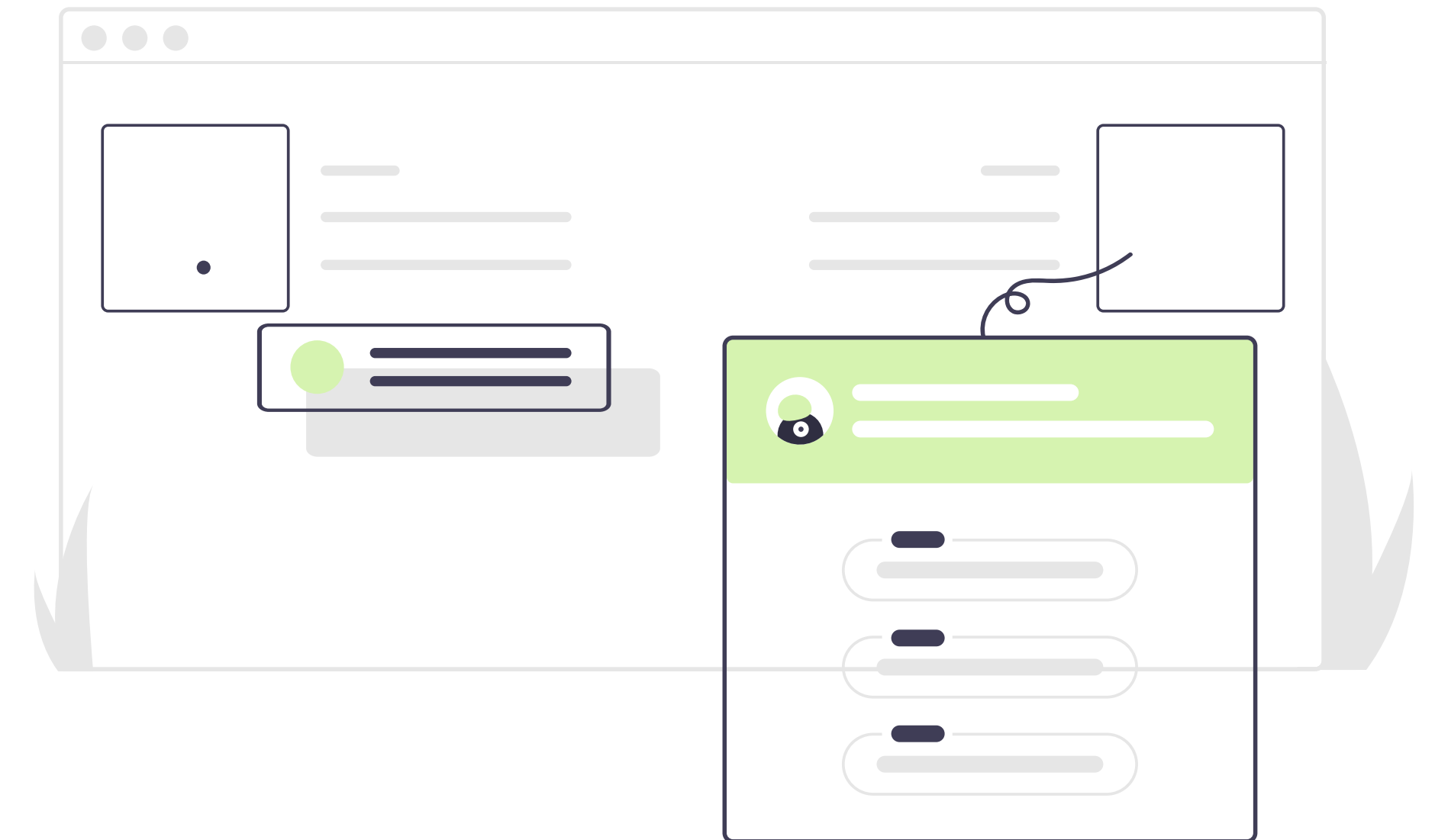
- the service must have a minimum user base, which needs to be evaluated; below certain levels, it is not worth the investment to digitalize the service;
- precisely identifying the specific use and for whom the service is intended, evaluating which are the advantages for the user;
- evaluate if it is possible to provide the service end-to-end completely digitally, or if the interaction with a staff operator is necessary;
- re-evaluate the service in its complexity, simplify internal procedures and introduce tailored training moments;
- allow the service to be tested by a small group of users.



How might we eliminate or overcome the limits that inhibit the digitalization of services?

These are the **suggestions that emerged**:

- formulate a digital culture of the citizens (starting already in the schools) and amongst the staff (internal training);
- create a strong commitment;
- share with offices the creation of a new procedure/service;
- have a unified taxonomy for all services: all agencies must use it;
- force the user to utilize the digital services.



Experiences gathered from the participants

The main difficulty experienced in the past few months was encountered by requests such as: *“I need to take my services online. Here is the pdf – make me an online form.”* The organizational / cultural block is related to rules, regulations and habits. Rather, services should be re-evaluated considering: *“what does the citizen need? To have their child eat at school, not to sign them up for lunch service”*.

This change requires a lot of work: in a group of 8 municipalities, we need coordination, and it does not regard any single technical/IT aspect.

“I always start at the bottom: I speak with one or two people at an agency, and I try to explain to them the advantages of a particular tool. We reason together about the opportunity, then I wait and let the news spread. At that point, I turn

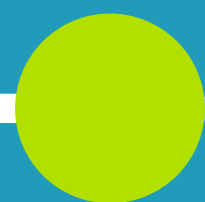
towards the office manager. I do not present a solution; I join their fight, because if the office workers do not believe in the tool, the system will not work.

It is an underdog approach, and it is conducted very quietly (in the end, it is a competition)”.

“We are small. We need to know who our audience is. We need to calculate our investments.

If it is a service for only 30 people, then even simple email can be the perfect tool. Other services (for example, the management of library cards) could be executed at a national level: it would cost much less. Regarding regulations, as an assistant mayor, if I could, I would simplify: I always have to ask public officials. Often, it is so complicated that it becomes necessary to accept the regulations as they are”.

**Release (communication) of the
service and onboarding of users**



How do you communicate to people about the availability of an online service? What information do you provide?

The informative **channels** are for the most part **traditional** ones:

- **official websites** of the municipality, through news, messages and press releases;
- social media;
- **newsletters** to already profiled users;
- information from Public Relations office and the in-person service desk.

Other more specific ones are:

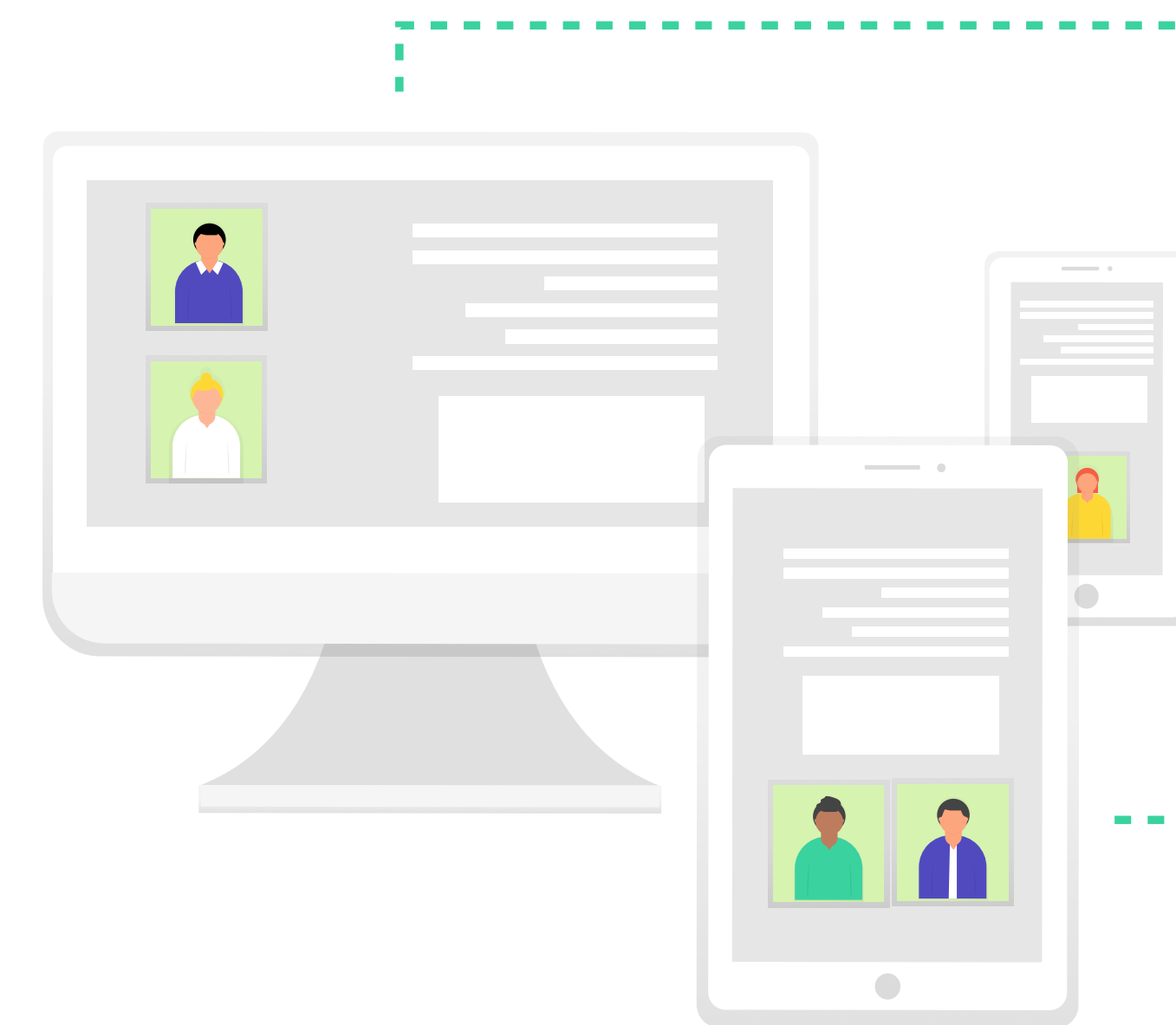
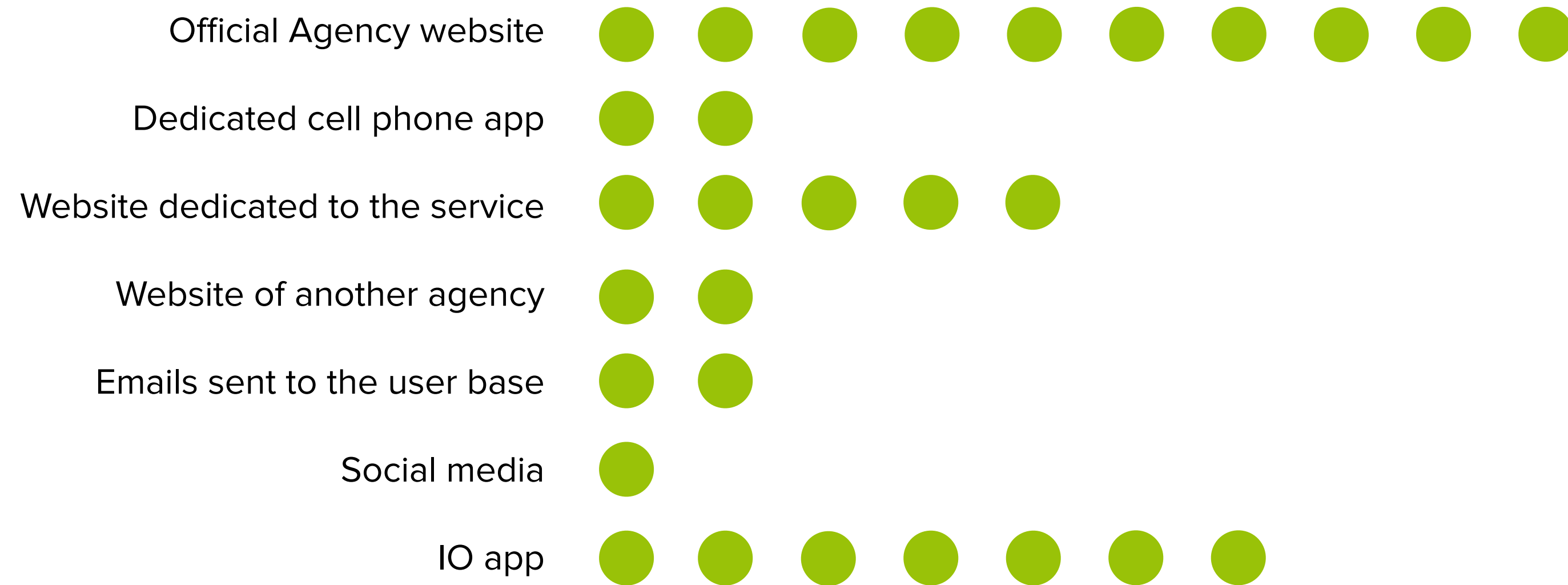
- in some cases, the involvement of trade associations;
- the distribution of flyers to specific targets (at schools to promote online enrolment services);
- endorsement videos with people well-known locally;
- meetings and webinars.

Some potential critical points to be addressed emerged:

- sometimes new services are communicated on the municipality's website through messages that are too long;
- the service is often communicated as a **“political project”**;
- the new service is presented as a *“revolution in the works”*, but *“then you have to manage it...”*.

How does one access the service (from the municipality's website, an app, an external website...)?

Touchpoints and channels

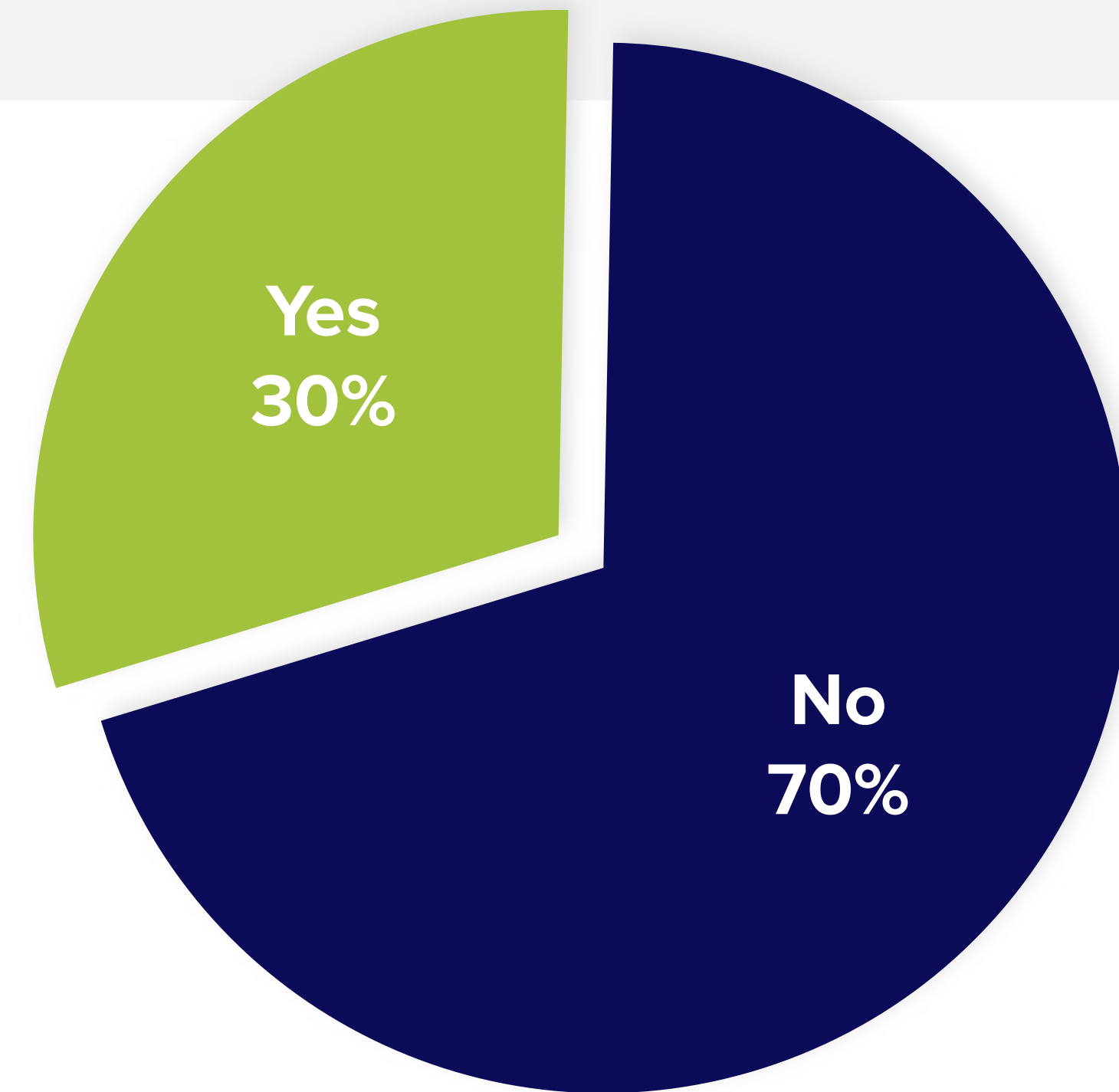


Do you provide some type of support for users that want (or must) use the service? If so, what kind?

Most of the participants responded positively. Information support that was provided was principally supplied through **direct contact** (phone or service desk) and in an asynchronous form through manuals, guides, FAQ lists, webinars and tutorials.

Do you measure access to support systems?

There were two and a half times as many “no” answers as “yes” ones.



Do you measure abandonment rates (that is, requests that were started digitally but not completed)? How many in percentages?

Also in this case, the dominating response was “no, we do not measure that”.

Two people indicated an abandonment rate of the service at 50%, and one person indicated an even higher abandonment rate.

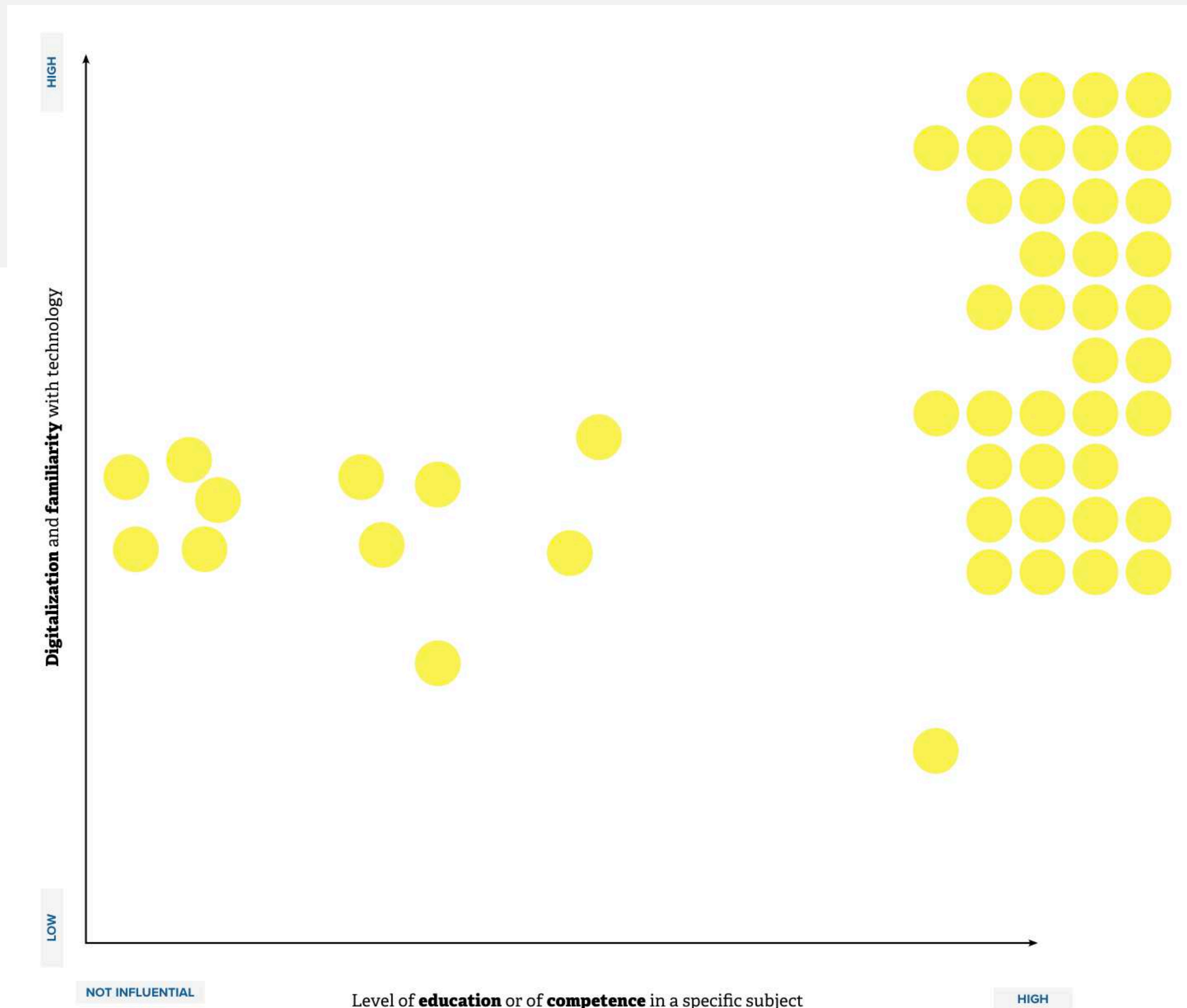


What type of preparation or level of education is necessary to use your online services?

In this case, we asked to compare 2 dimensions of a digital service relative to the user:

- the level of digitalization and familiarity with technology averagely requested in order to use the service;
- the level of education or of competence in a specific subject required for the user to comprehend what they need to do.

The result is placed at a medium level of digital competence (skills superior to those needed to use a social media platform, but less than those needed to use a bank app) whereas regarding the level of education or of competence in a specific subject, the answers were evenly distributed between irrelevant and average.



What are the advantages for the people who choose to use your online services in respect to your traditional ones?

The benefits for users mainly included:

- **time savings and speed** (both in presenting a request as well as using a service);
- **convenience and smart fruition** (no lines at the service desk and “*the advantage of doing everything from home 24/7*”);
- having assistance in filling out requests;
- having greater **transparency, traceability and security** (“*having the certainty that the request has been presented*”, “*completeness of information, that does not depend on the staff*”, “*seeing the progress of the request*”).

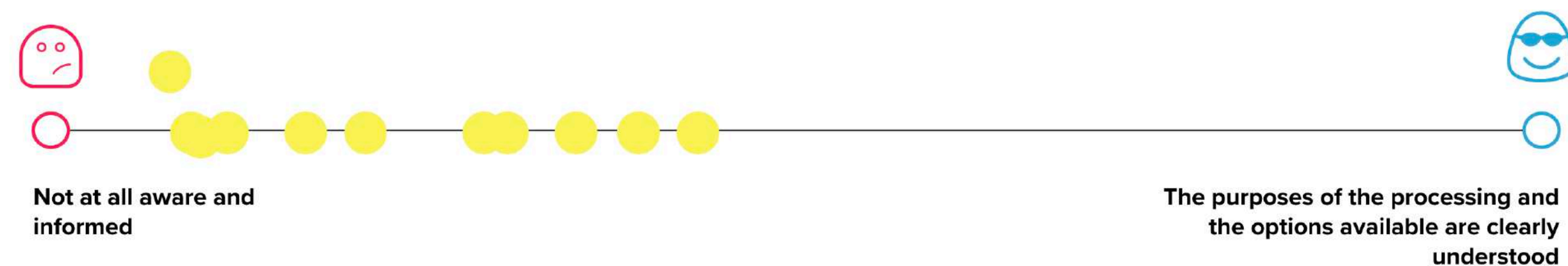
Are they clear for everyone? How do you describe them?

- Digital services are **always available**, even via smartphone.
- **You do not have to sign**: you can use the SPID or electronic ID card.



In your experience, do you have evidence of how much citizens are informed regarding the treatment of their personal data?

We asked each participant to position their post-it on a scale that went left to right from “completely uninformed and unaware” to “they have a clear vision of the objectives of treatment and the available options”.



Among those that answered more towards the left side of the scale, the participants highlighted that:

- users are not interested in notices regarding the treatment of personal data;
- there is a lack of informative campaigns.

On the other end of the scale, we had the following input:

- the policy is required everywhere, therefore everyone signs it without worrying about it;
- usually people trust the public administration;
- they do not request for integrations when the privacy policy notices are not sufficient.

How might we destroy any entry barriers to digital services for users that do not use them today?

These are the **suggestions that emerged**:

- supplying dedicated staff to support the user that must utilize the new digital service, as if a sort of tutor, at least during the initial phase, to make the user autonomous for future use;
- training for the general public;
- offer or provide incentives, for example quicker processing times, or by giving back to the citizen part of the savings obtained by digitalizing the service;
- reaching out to citizens in traditional ways presenting them with information regarding digital services in places where they already

congregate (open information desks in main squares and beaches, direct emission of SPID credentials);

- accompany the service with the possibility of direct support for information (if it is via email, then foresee the possibility to call the citizen back) but being careful to provide “empathy” training for the staff.

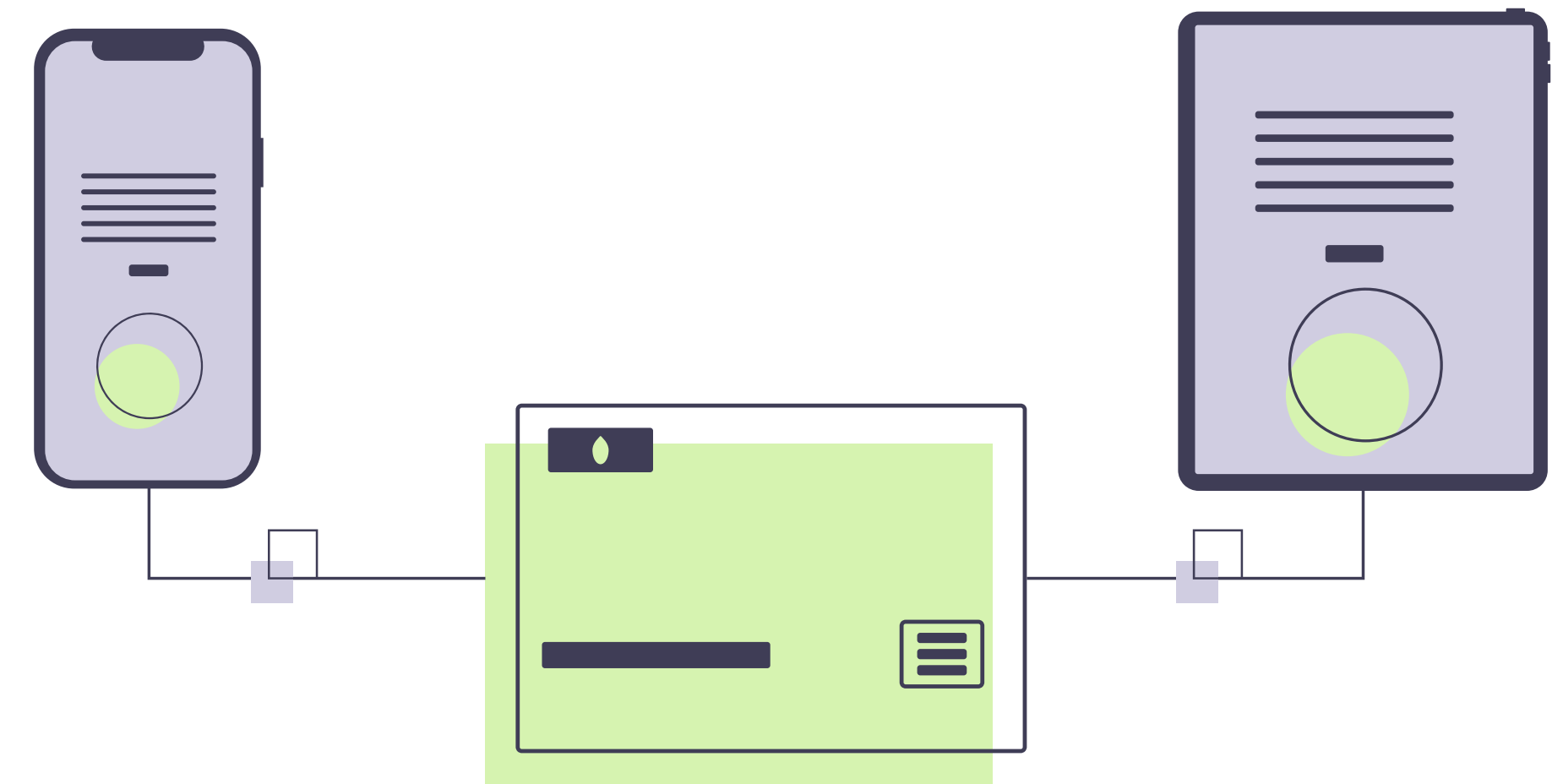
KPI to be monitored:

- the usage percentages of the service online in comparison to the total number of requests made of that service

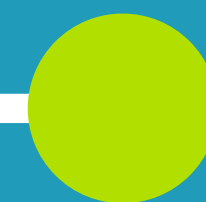
How might we make the benefits of digital services more evident, explicit and tangible?

These are the **suggestions that emerged**:

- the communication of the service must promote more the advantages for the user in terms of time savings and less effort required (quicker processing times of requests, no wait time at the in-person service desk, no travel time required);
- we could gradually reduce the availability of a service available via an in-person service desk, in favour of the digital version of the same service, up until a total “switch off” of the in-person service (in this case, it would be fundamental to offer adequate support with tutoring and guided assistance);
- learn from the success obtained by the IO app thanks to the activation of the cashback incentive (a very strong incentive for the onboarding of new users).



Providing the service (and use of it)



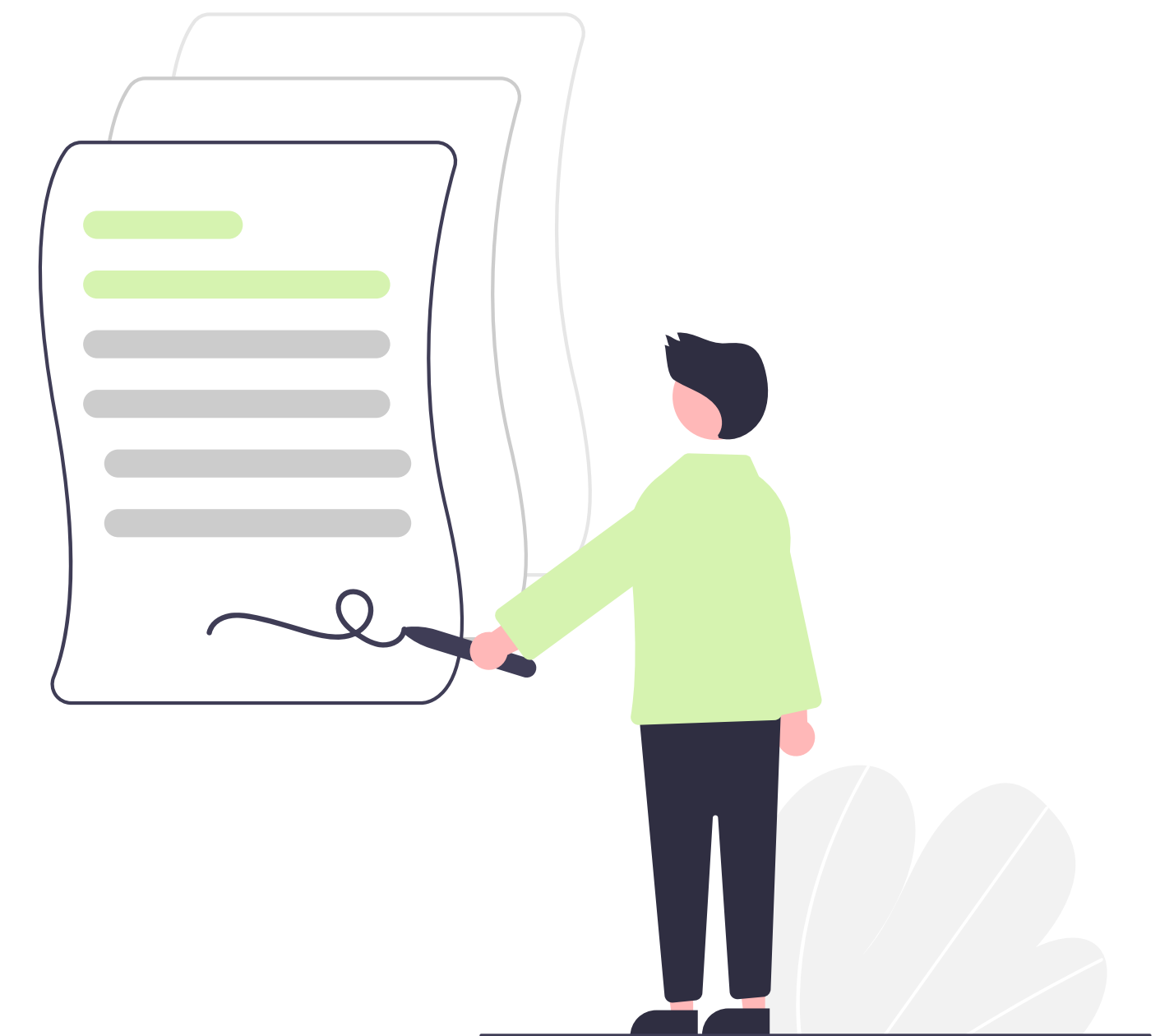
For the staff, is it simpler to manage user requests using the traditional (in-person) method or digitally? Why?

The “Digital” method was the preferred method, twice as much as the “in-person” one.

Habit, resistance to change and fear of not being sufficiently prepared are the motives that keep staff still anchored to the traditional in-person management of a given service.

The others appreciate digital services for the following reasons:

- streamlined, simplified and standardized procedures as they have been reconsidered and adapted for digital use, in order to automate and reduce errors;
- finding a request already filled out and properly filed reduces processing times;
- more security and better quality of entry data thanks to automatic controls and blocks built into the system (if the user does not fill out all the required fields, the request does not move forward);
- the possibility to freely organize work in space and time.



QUESTION 3.2

Within your online services, are you able to fill out automatically some/all the basic information (personal data, data inserted from the same type of request) from previously processed requests provided by the user to the Agency?

We only need an “average” evaluation amongst all the services provided.

Providing the service

✓ Yes
✗ No

✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
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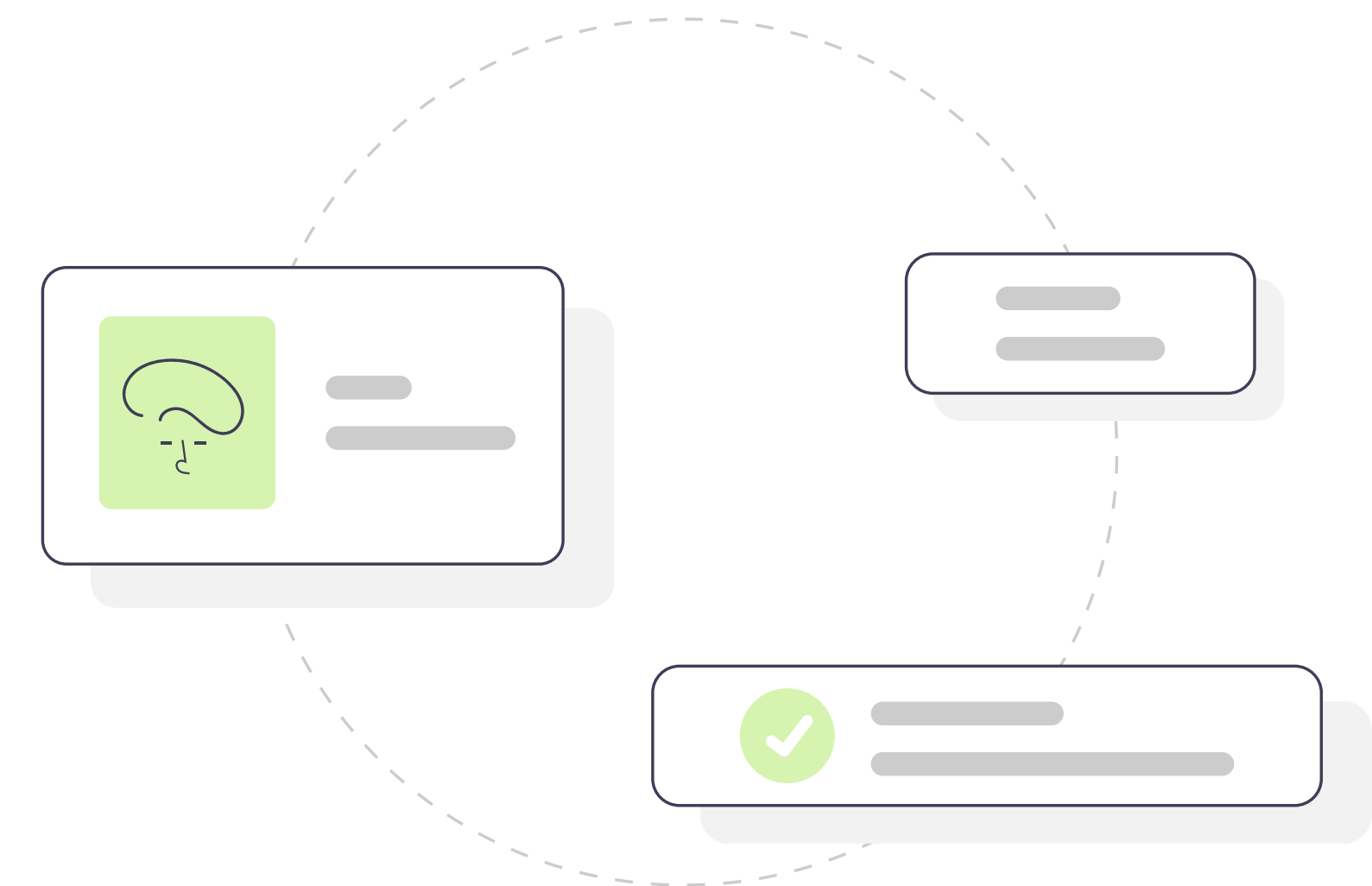
In situations where you must interact with other agencies/institutions to provide some of your online services, what type of dynamics do you observe? What works and what does not?

The most critical point regards the **lack of national standards of interoperability between agencies**. Most of the difficulties are encountered towards central agencies.

On a technical level, there is a lack of API and integrations between infrastructures and different services (even nationally).

Some external systems necessary to complete the process of providing a digital service (such as the management of payments with PagoPA) do not work well, creating difficulty for the final user.

Lastly, problems are reported in the interaction of agencies with an inferior level of digitalization: *“what do you do with those who cannot use digital services? We fill it out for them...”*.



What are the problems that you encounter (in the backend) when managing or providing online services?

Many critical points that were reported regard the suppliers of technology:

- continuous mediation with suppliers to adapt the system to legislative updates;
- difficulty in having the supplier understand the Agency's needs, on the other hand, delay or lack of a response from them;
- obsolete service contracts.

Legacy platforms and technologies that are still present in a good portion of information technology infrastructures of agencies suffer from

instability and inadequacy for new needs, and they lack integration with vertical software. In particular, the latter causes an interruption in the digital flow of the service: *“the data gathered in forms needs to then be manually inserted into different vertical software”*.

“Difficulty in simplifying procedures” and *“overcomplexity of configuration”* are the problems reported from an internal point of view.

Which difficulties do the users of your online services encounter? Are there frequent points of failure?

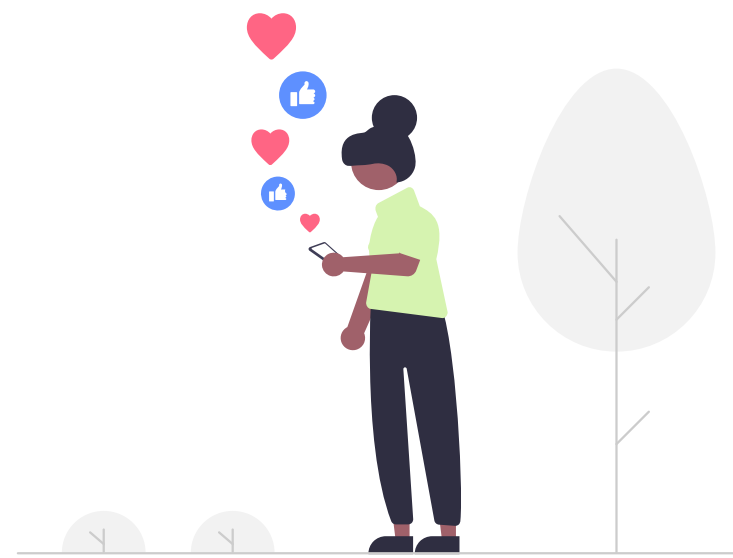
The main points-of-failure for users are on parts of the service that are not directly controlled by the Agency itself: the main problems encountered were with the authentication process via SPID and with payment via PagoPA.

Other sources of critical points are:

- navigation of the service is often difficult (lack of videos regarding the use of the online service, they are not easy to find, or the new services provided by the agency cannot be found on the Agency's official websites);
- complexity of language;
- lack of a *once-only* data request processes;
- difficulty in supporting and assisting the most fragile user groups.

Do you give incentives for using online services? In what form? Do they work?

The participants could be divided into three groups:



Those who had not yet taken them into consideration, but **find the idea interesting.**



Those who have used them, but **did not experience any particular improvement.**



Those who see an inherent advantage so evident that **they do not need any incentives.**

How might we evolve current digital services to improve the usage experience and enlarge the target base?

Two different methods were pointed out:

Involvement of citizens to understand **how to improve the service**



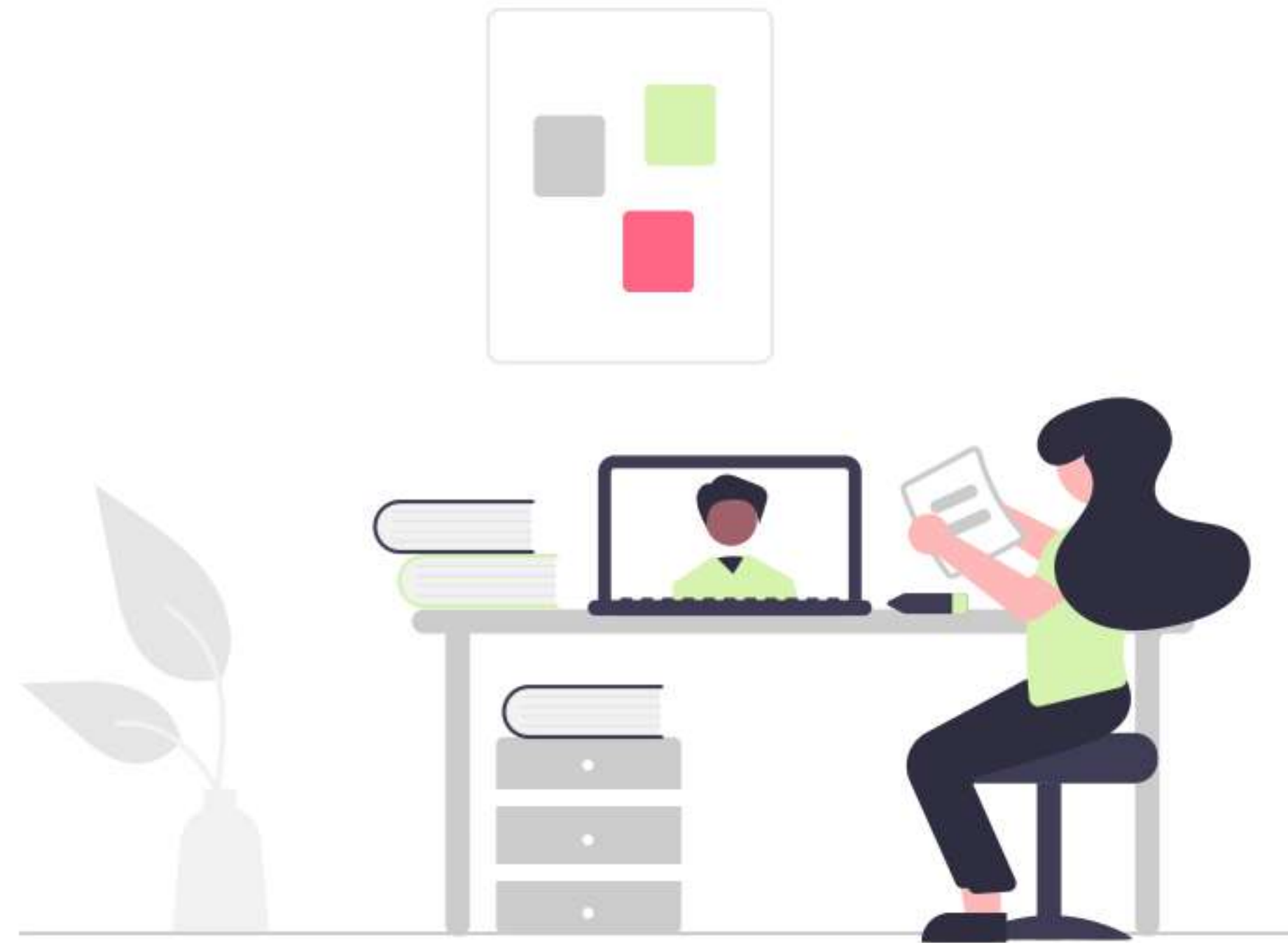
Digital training to then **promote the services online**



How might we help the backend operators and simplify the organizational part that supports a digital service?

Training was identified as a first step to oversee through direct courses and webinars. The objective is to increase trust in digital tools and to insist on both hard and soft skills.

Both teamwork and support tutoring are useful tools.



Experiences gathered from the participants

The experiences that revealed to be effective were those where the staff was involved also in the early stages of the digitalization process, and not just as executors: *“the point of view of the operators counts, just as much as the one of the citizens”*.

Bringing base knowledge and a different vision of the process were two winning aspects. It is also true that these activities are seen as a *“cultural leap within our organizations”*.

“The biggest hurdle: operators that have little familiarity with digital tools, they are the ones that fear innovation”. This means they *“do not have to feel forced to change”*.

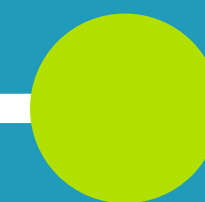
“Often other colleagues are convinced and in turn

they get each other involved in the project; if they feel the support of someone who helps them in their training, at the end they succeed at taking the leap (they jump only if trust is created). Once it is understood, they actually like the tool and it is a more satisfying experience”.

If the situation arises where they must resort [to the old system], they realize the simplicity of the digital system.

You understand that the journey is developing well when *“they stop searching for every little thing!”* or *“when they ask us difficult questions, meaning they have a deeper understanding”*.

Improvement of the service

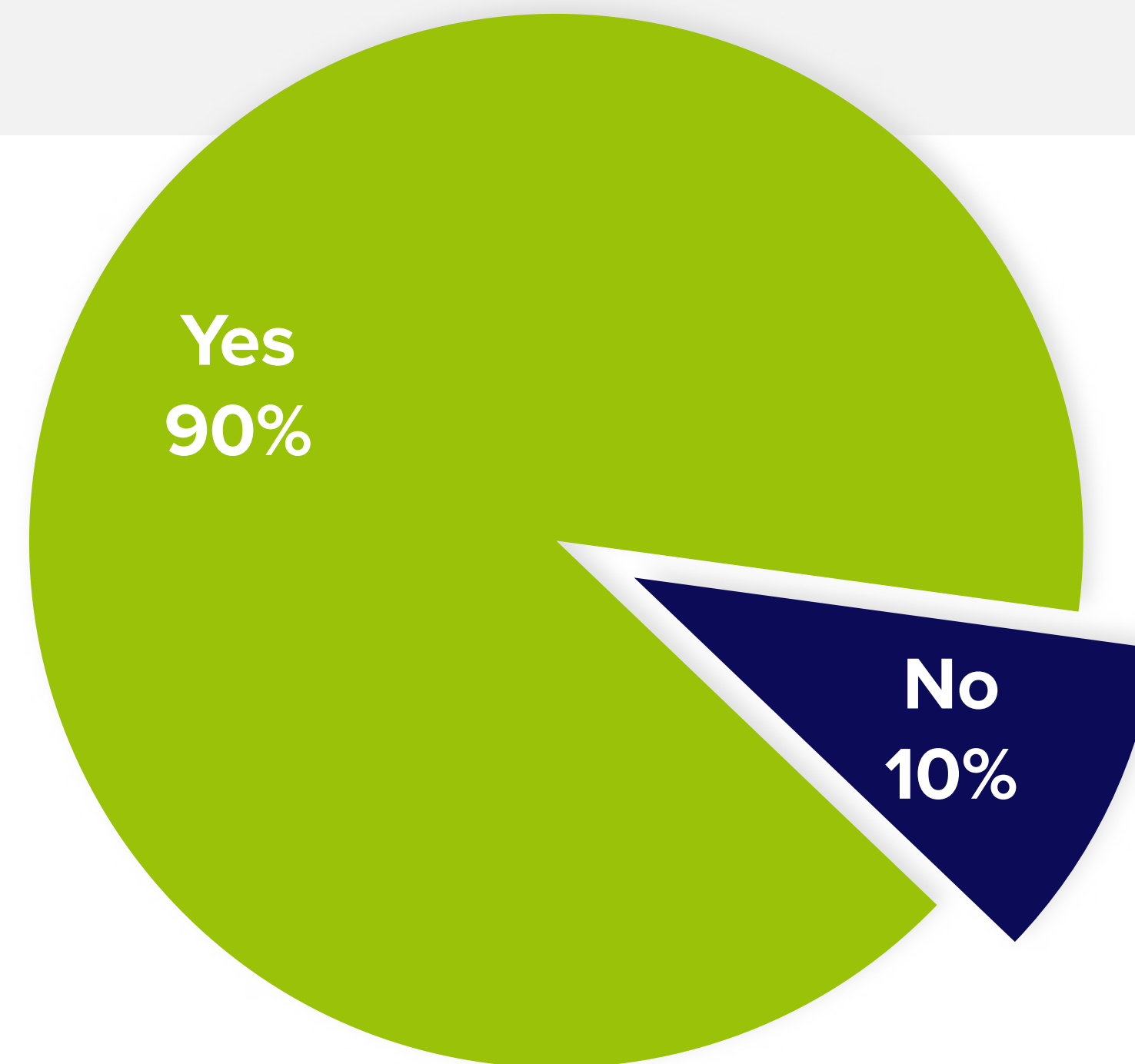


Do you gather or listen to complaints/issues presented by back-end operators?

The prevalent answer was “yes” among the participants.

In what way or what form do you gather them? How do you use them?

- In a non-systematic way: phone calls or complaints to the IT department.
- A complaint/issue management system is used, where the issues are analysed and, if necessary, the supplier is contacted to improve the system.
- We consider together a possible reorganization of the process.

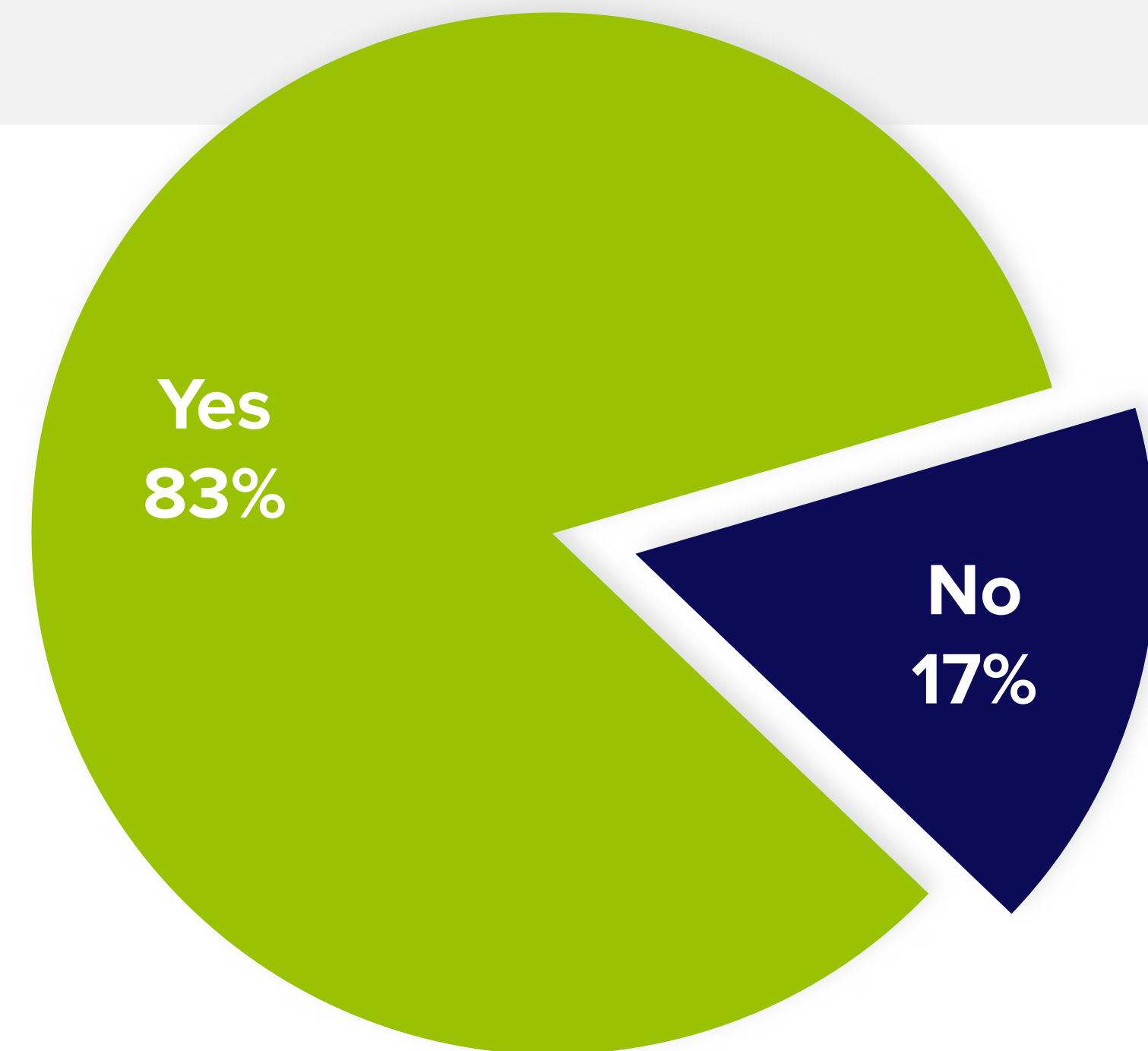


Do you gather feedback or complaints presented by citizens regarding your online services?

The “yes” answers were 5 times more than the “no” answers.

In what way? How do you manage them internally?

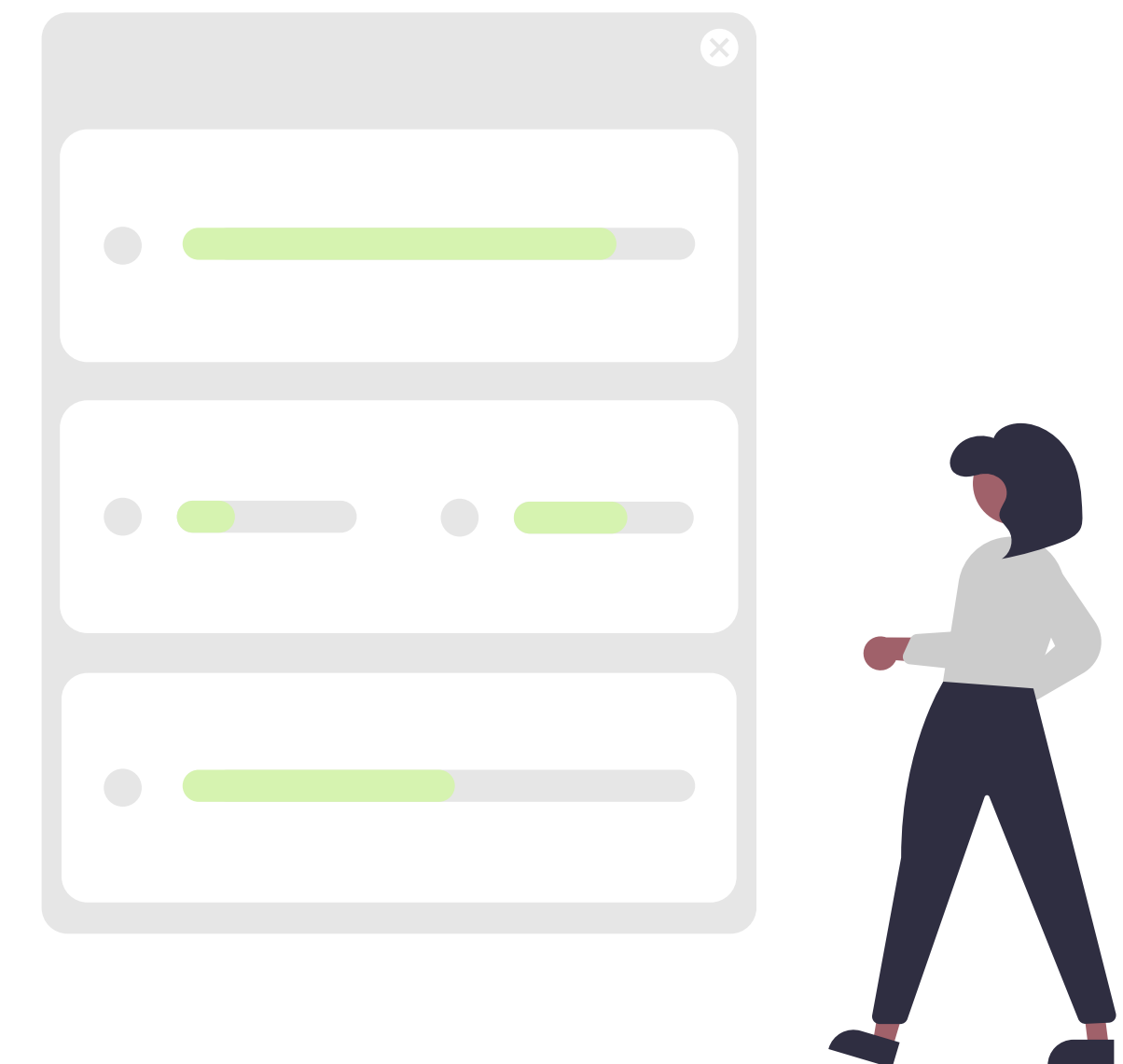
- With interviews after the launch of the online service, to evaluate revisions to either the process or the service.
- Active listening during events/courses.
- Annual quality surveys.
- Tests on new portals.
- Online surveys.



Are you able to say (today) if your online services work and are useful for people? What makes you think so? What evidence supports this?

In general, the participants responded positively, presenting the following points:

- we measure usage and we often have positive informal feedback;
- we understand it through monitoring and suggestions;
- when the service is down even if only for an hour, numerous complaints arrive. From that you can understand the usage;
- during the lockdown period after 2 years of use, we did not receive any assistance requests from the general public;
- we had high percentages of enrolment in scholastic services and subsidy requests (summer camp reimbursements, computer purchase coupons, ...).



How might we gather from the users more feedback or more useful/ focused feedback with the objective of improving the service?

The answers were concentrated on filling out a feedback questionnaire.

It could occur after the completion of a process, at the service desk or on social media.



Experiences gathered from the participants

The participants observed that in their experience, they measured an increasing number of users that utilize digital tools. Furthermore, they consider it important to **measure the time saved** by the operators and the gathering of their feedback.

One of the participants has a **ticketing system through Google Forms**, in which the operator can describe the problem they encounter. For structured problems (for example, accessibility) they then collaborate with the supplier.

Others use the same tool to gather issues from both the online process as well as from the in-person service desk. Through this system, **they measure performance**.



LOCAL WORKSHOP

Report

Emilia-Romagna (Italy)



Giallocobalto led the workshop and wrote the report

