The Implications of the Estonian E-Residency Project on Statehood and Territoriality

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Abstract

In 2014 Estonia became the first country in the world to launch an e-residency project. It is advertised as opening the country's digital borders to the world. This allows for anyone anywhere to apply for an e-resident status and thus gain access to certain parts of the Estonian e-governance platform allowing almost complete location independence when it comes to creating and running a limited company. The e-residency card also gives the holder a secure state guaranteed digital identity. The program has sparked a lot of international interest on both governmental levels in various states as well as in the media. One can find an abundance of claims and expectations regarding what the e-residency project is and what it could be. Many authors in the media claim that the program could quite likely change the meaning of concepts such as citizenship, residency, borders, territoriality and sovereignty. There are also claims that the whole meaning of statehood is under threat and the behavioral logic of countries in fundamentally changing.

The paper attempts to establish if the Estonian e-residency project is really as revolutionary as often portrayed. This thesis aims to analyze the previously listed concepts according to existing literature. The more recent conceptualizations of the mentioned aspects tend to be rather flexible, so according to the analysis presented in this paper, e-residency does not change the way various state attributes are contemporarily viewed and understood, but it rather supports the processes already in motion. Although e-residency is not as ground breaking conceptually as often believed, its implications should nevertheless not be downplayed. The thesis provides a thorough overview of how e-residency works and what kind of changes we can expect to see in matters of statehood and its attributes; especially if Estonian e-residency was to gain significant worldwide popularity or if other states were to implement similar projects.

Keywords

E-residency, Estonia, e-governance, citizenship, residency, borders, borderless, territoriality, political territoriality, sovereignty, statehood, nation branding, country as a service, digital identity, location independence.