

Digital City Projects: Information and Public Services Offered by Chicago (USA) and Curitiba (Brazil)

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ABSTRACT

Offering full information and efficient public services is a permanent challenge for cities concerned with citizens' quality of life and effective municipal management. The objective of this study is to describe and assess the digital city projects in Chicago (USA) and Curitiba (Brazil), using information and public services offered to citizens by the website. The research methodology consisted of case studies covering the city hall, municipal departments, and other municipal entities. The results show advantages for the citizens who have free communal access to public services on the internet. Chicago offers its citizens 281 public services distributed in 256 subjects or themes and Curitiba 508 public services distributed in 26 subjects or themes. The conclusion reiterated the importance of the implemented projects. In both cities it resulted in benefits for citizens through access to information and public services offered by the internet.

KEYWORDS

Digital City Projects, Electronic Government, Municipal Information, Public Administration, Public Services

1. INTRODUCTION

Information and public services, along with information technology (IT), are relevant resources to a proper smarter government. The use of information to provide public services is a constant challenge for cities concerned with planning and developing municipal affairs from the perspective of citizens' quality of life and effective municipal management. Such a challenge requires the involvement of the whole population of the city, including municipal employees and citizens, whether they are workers, students, retired individuals, housewives, councilors or businessmen. Furthermore, the social, environmental, financial and political issues that cities constantly face mean that municipal managers are under pressure to adapt accordingly. At the same time, the participation of citizens in the affairs of a city is an inexorable requirement. One way of addressing these challenges is through collective information and public services at both city hall and municipality level, in which systematized information is a prerequisite for municipal organizational and management activities.

Digital city projects can contribute to the improvement of public policies and government programs through the provision of information and public services to citizens. The information can be an important resource that adds value to municipal management, facilitating the communications between the citizens and government to expand the credibility, trust and equality, while promoting accountability, transparency, and democracy. With the use of information technology it is possible to integrate the citizen to the government.

For effective integration between citizen and government, it is necessary to discuss and plan in advance for information and public services. The planning of information and public services, like the

municipal strategic planning, is one of the tools for managing city halls and towns of unquestionable relevance. These pressures for effectiveness can be minimized by the preparation and implementation of participative strategic planning in the cities, as it can propitiate the collective engagement of the citizens with their wishes and also can decentralize and share the local managers' decisions. Information and public services planning, like other municipal plans (e.g. Strategic Municipal Planning, Municipal Director Plan, Municipal Multi-Annual Plan, Governmental Plan and others) requires exhaustive practical exercises based on deep-seated theoretical fundaments. These exercises are related to dynamic intelligent daily activities of the city halls and the management actions of the cities. Such activities have to be prepared in an integrated and structured way, where personalized and timely information are utilized for suitable and participative management of the cities. Evidently, these activities will be more profitable to the cities if they have effective participation of their citizens.

Many cities have problems with the inexistence or inadequacy of information and public services, which enhances the difficulties of municipal management. Compounding this is the fact that citizen participation is uneven, creating sub-optimal democracy and a lack of full contribution to urban, rural and regional development.

The objective of this study is to describe the digital city projects in Chicago (USA) and Curitiba (Brazil). The project emphasized information and public services offered by website. Both projects covered city hall, municipal departments, and other municipal entities, such as schools, health centers and citizen-oriented municipal information offices. The reason for that is due to structuring, storage and availability of information and public services, which surely do not happen overnight and require short, medium and long term action in the cities.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

In order to have the concepts debated and understood some pertinent legislations and culture of each country must be taken into consideration.

2.1. Public Services

Public service can be understood as any service provided by the government or by their delegates under state standards and controls to meet the essential needs of the community or secondary or simple convenience of the State. Examples of public services: public education, the police, the public health, the public transportation, telecommunications, and others (Meirelles, 2013). Also, public services can be understood as goods or services provided by the public sector for its constituents. Public services can be directly provided through the government or through financing the private sector provision of such services. The social rationale behind public services is that there are certain services that should be provided to all citizens, regardless of income (as defined by the market) or social standing. Concepts of deconcentration and devolution of public services delivery from the national to local governments and citizens have recently been applauded for their ability to see quicker gains than with centralized public services systems (Gfldr, 2010).

Scholars and administrators of municipal governments generally agree on four essential goals of public services: efficiency, effectiveness, equity and responsiveness (England, Pelissero & Morgan, 2012). Historically, the role of government in providing these services has led to a notion of government as bureaucratic, hierarchical and controlling. This relationship has led to calls from academia and the city to democratize the structure of public services and bring the citizen into the equation. It calls 'new public service' and define it as a structure where the citizen is at the center of the governance system and not on the outside (Denhardt & Denhardt, 2000).

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