



Chapter XIII

The Development of Urban E-Government in China

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Abstract

The chapter assesses and cognizes the development of urban e-government in China from two main aspects: functionality and complexity. To functionality, nine Web sites of urban governments in China at three levels were selected for this assessment. Data needed for the study were tracked and recorded continuously for six weeks from these Web sites. The influence of e-government to urban modality and evolution is explored. Result shows that e-government has a leading role to the gathering and decentralization of urban space, the organization of material (people) flows, and the informal exchange in internal cities.

Introduction

Electronic government (e-government), an Internet based system of information service and information process, deals with internal government bodies, other government bodies, the businesses and the public (Cheng, 2000). E-government, turning grade management structure into network management structure, is fit for the virtual, global, knowledge-based digital economy and the human-based notion of social running. E-government has also broken down the barriers of distance and time, and therefore offers the potential to enhance the quality of government services (OECD, 2001). E-government services not only provide benefits to citizens and businesses but also offer opportunities to reshape public sectors. It has even reorganized relationships between citizens, businesses, and governments (West, 2002). E-government is a symbol, which has been used for demonstrating the development level of a government's informatization for a long time (West, 2001). The construction of e-government involves software development, hardware platform, management and service model, and in particular the construction of government's Web sites (Nian & Yao, 2002). The functionality of an urban government's Web sites reflects the development level of its e-government. This chapter demonstrates the functionality of urban e-government in China by evaluating the construction of Web sites for nine urban governments.

E-government was launched in China in 1999. On January 22, 1999, Government Online Project, initiated by China Telecom, State Economic and Trade Commission and the other 40 departments, committees, offices, bureaus, was formally started (Zhang & Gu, 2002). Then, the main Web site of the Government Online Project (<http://www.gov.vninfo.net/>) and the guiding Web site (<http://www.gov.cn>) were formally published. This is the landmark that e-government in China is from planning stage to overall implementation stage. Till now, there are thousands of government and related Web sites with the ending "gov.cn" in their URLs. The whole development process of e-government in China can be divided into three main phases. The first phase is online information presentation and consultation services. Government information and services deliver to citizens and businesses through the Internet at this phase. Furthermore, by adding simple functionalities, such as e-mail and chat rooms, two-way communication is also supported. Most urban e-government Web sites in China are currently in this phase. The second phase is transaction-oriented online services. More and more users use government transaction systems by linking with commercial transaction systems in this stage, such as online taxation and online business registration. The government Web sites of large cities have developed relatively well in this function while small-medium cities are poor. The third phase is integrated online services. The integrated online services refer to functions and services produced by different department governments, which are integrated into a unified government Web site to provide "one-stop service." Most urban government Web sites in China are being developed towards this direction.

"The Evaluation Report of Urban Government Web sites in China," which is released by the research center of PC World, has published evaluation results of local government Web sites in China. The report has also explored the future development of urban government Web sites (Yao, Zhu, & Chen, 2001). However, this report only involves the Web sites of 36 major cities in China. Medium and minor cities such as prefectural cities have not been considered in the report. It will be beneficial to obtain an overall cognition of the functions of urban government Web sites by evaluating urban government Web sites at different levels of

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