

# Chapter 11

## A New Model for Transparency and E-Participation: Who Transforms What Policy into Whose Practice?

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### ABSTRACT

*The analysis of transparency depends on the objectives and the research discipline in which the evaluation is undertaken. This study follows two main lines: to provide a framework for transparency evaluation, and to develop guidelines for the design and management of citizen-orientated Internet websites and e-participation initiatives. This is done in three stages: defining the research discipline, defining the concepts and terms, and defining measures for evaluation. Finally, the suggested framework is examined in the context of real estate planning in Israel, where the use of online systems – designed and implemented independently by a few local authorities – seems to bypass a controversial national planning reform. A close acquaintance with governance processes has raised the inevitable question, perhaps typical to many systems in the public sector: who transforms what policy into whose practice?*

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*Scales for measuring and evaluating the progress of Internet websites are usually based on their evolution, from brochure-like pages to interactive services (Ein-Dor and Segev, 1993). The number of contact channels may reflect openness levels in relatively simple Internet websites; while Web 2.0 applications, which express a higher level of Internet evolution, are more complicated for evaluation. Moreover, the spectrum of e-participation initiatives requires also a user-view framework of analysis.*

*The knowledge hierarchy, which is widely used in Information Systems (IS) research, may provide the desired user-view framework. The knowledge hierarchy can support the selection of targeted stakeholders in accordance with their skills and abilities. This can be done by matching each type of e-participatory activity to the appropriate level in the knowledge hierarchy. For example: matching processed inputs on a conceptual level, termed knowledge, with the wide community; matching specific information with engaged citizens that possess local knowledge in their areas of interest; and matching data with semi-professional local representatives that produce value out of data much as experts do. This model should help understand conflicts such as the ban of mosque minarets in a country with Muslim minority, or the often heard accusation of “too much democracy,” the disfavor of open debates and other expressions of imbalance in the new era of e-participation. Governments and communities may benefit from the proposed user-view framework while designing and implementing new e-participation initiatives.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

The evaluation of Internet websites success depends on the objectives and the research discipline in which the evaluation is undertaken. So is the analysis of transparency which is the main topic of this study. Transparency may encompass additional concepts such as accountability and collaborativeness that are crucial for the effective use of information technology (IT) and systems (IS).

Value of information is a concept that was evolved in the IS literature and is supposed to fit to the point more than common success indicators such as return on investment (ROI) or user satisfaction. These objectives do not capture various externalities, whereas measurements of the value of information might be linked to services that are public goods and to values and norms that are embedded in the IT (Walsham, 2009).

Different IT architectures may provide different levels of access, communication, flexibility and collaborativeness, and accountability. For example: to what extent does the owner of the system – the governor or regulator – hold a direct and exclusive control of the system; initiate open

discussions; encourage public debate; publish information; and mainly increase “organizational effectiveness through flattening hierarchies and enhancing public sector creativity” (Chadwick 2006, p.194). This optimistic vision expresses the nature of IT: “the introduction of new technologies not only fostered more rapid communication, it also caused fundamental long-term shifts in internal power structure. Vertically integrated hierarchies of command and control were being displaced by looser, more flexible, horizontally integrated networks. [...] Access to centralized databases allows rapid retrieval of information necessary for good decision making. In this perspective, e-government goes beyond simple task automation” (p.194). Moreover, the concepts of information and power are going through a radical change following the creation of the new Web 2.0 practice of sharing (Ahituv, 2001).

Indexing and theorizing the growing variety of e-participation initiatives, which clearly go “beyond simple task automation”, is a new challenge in e-government research. In an attempt to capture the “Value for Citizens”, Nordfors et al. (2009) proposed the value to “be of personal or private

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