

E-Government and E-Democracy in Latin America

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INTRODUCTION

Latin America is suffering from many of the negative consequences of globalization, without benefiting from many of its advantages. Among the advantages are those derived from the increasing availability of ICT and from the potential development of citizens' participation to foster e-democracy. In general, the corporation of ICT have not been carefully thought through by many of the governments in LAC. In the case of e-government, the effects of the underlying relationship models between government and society as portrayed on each country's main portal site (hereinafter called "portal") not only vary but generally do not show any appreciation of the transformation of government services. Mexico, Peru, Chile, Venezuela, Uruguay and Brazil appear to be engaged in the early processes of modernization of services, networking, and online access to governmental administration. The rest of LAC appear to be well behind these countries efforts.

BACKGROUND

Definitions and Existing Models

Before examining the detail of developments of e-government in LAC, it is necessary to go through some definitions of models of Latin American e-government and e-democracy described by academic literature. The World Bank, refers to e-government as the means to update public management through the use of Information Communication Technology (ICT), searching for better practices, delivering more control, efficiency and transparency. E-government is the opportunity for users to access and actively participate in public services, in a more flexible way, without the need to go to government offices (Araya Tagle, 2003).

Stephen Clift, a respected world authority on e-government has developed a useful definition of e-democracy as follows:

E-democracy represents the use of ICT (...) by democratic actors (governments, elected officials, the media, political organizations, citizens/voters) within political and

governance processes of local communities, nations and on the international stage. (Clift, 2004, p. 39)

It is suggested that "e-democracy" may also become a means (through ICT) for people to participate more actively in deciding the agenda of public politics. This constitutes a further development of the democratic process that goes beyond a representative system. This concept is referred to in this article as referring to a broad view of "e-government and e-democracy."

Existing Models of E-Government and E-Democracy

With the increasing availability and use of ICT across the world, government policy makers, elected officials and scholars are beginning to explore new models of democratic processes under the titles of "e-government" and "e-democracy". New forms of discourse to describe principles, practices, evaluation and models are emerging. For example, the OECD (2001) defines three types of interaction between government and its citizenry—(1) *one-way information provision*, in which the government decides what information to provide without consulting citizens; (2) a *two-way relationship* where citizens have the opportunity to give feedback on issues; and, (3) a *partnership relationship*, in which citizens are actively engaged in policy-making (G2P).

The first approach is only informative and does not produce changes in the traditional form of representative government. Porras (2003) calls the second approach "The Consultative Model." However, the use of this approach does not generally cause significant transformations in the way a representative government operates. Although governments consider it relevant to keep the information channels with their citizens permanently open, they are not seeking consensus but providing just information. For Porras the third approach is referred to as "The Participatory Model"; using this approach implies a deep transformation of the concept of representative governance. In this paradigm, the government acts more as a facilitator in the governance process. Its usefulness and effectiveness depends on the government's ability to coordinate the interdependent social agents involved.

The decline of political participation in many societies could indicate that people do not believe in the effectiveness of modern day representative governance. It may also suggest that the way to rebuild interest in governance could include measures that go beyond voting (representative democracy) but should be extended to involvement in every day matters of governance as well. At this point, the boundaries between e-government and e-democracy become blurred. Therefore, it becomes necessary to generate mechanisms to survey citizens' claims and proposals for better government services.

The relationship between government and society can be even more complex through the so-called "Networked Governance" (Figure 3), where stakeholders as partners (non-governmental and the private sector) join in with public agencies to design, implement and evaluate policy making connected with daily events (Börzel, 2001; Caldwell, 2004; Girard, 2002; IADB, 2004; Norris, 2004)

Proposed Models

New variables are added to the above mentioned models: e.g.:

- relationships between bureaucracy and technology
- scale of impact¹(Mackintosh, 2003); and
- communication according to users' profiles;
- non-public sector integration;

In order to categorize the Latin American experience, it is useful to describe the existing e-government models that result from current practices as observed and analyzed by the author. LAC countries have their own characteristics, needing the development of their own specific models. These models are:

1. **Technological Model** (see Figure 1): This model has some definite limitations to incorporating ICT into government decision making in a way that maxi-

mizes the potential of ICT. Some basic concepts of this model are:

- It assumes that technology acquisition automatically implies positive effects.
- It is a government-centered model, which generates incomplete institutional information, without any degree of participation from non-governmental actors. No consideration is given to two-way communication.
- This approach to e-government considers the appropriation of ICT in government is largely a matter that belongs to I.T. professionals and does not give any prominence to the potential for collaboration of public policy.
- It considers that e-government implementation consists of building portals featuring some official information (Informative Model), a little technology, and some governmental internal electronic procedures, all overlapping the existing bureaucratic structure.

2. **Managerial Model** (see Figure 2): This model is characterized by the use of digital technologies to maximize the government's efficiency in the provision of services (Porras, 2003). The first step is the application of the Internet and ICT to internal procedures and exchanges between different government levels. Expected benefits are substantial improvement in efficiency and cost reduction, as well as promoting internal unity among the different governmental agencies. This model basically combines ICT with the reengineering of the organizational structures. It provides electronically enabled basic services and applications such as online services, e-procurement, support to small and medium enterprises (SMEs), directory of agencies and public officials. Its scale of impact is mainly local.

Figure 1. Technological model

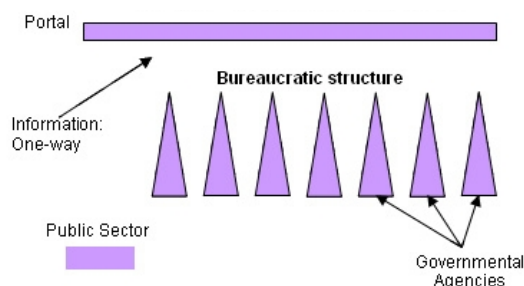
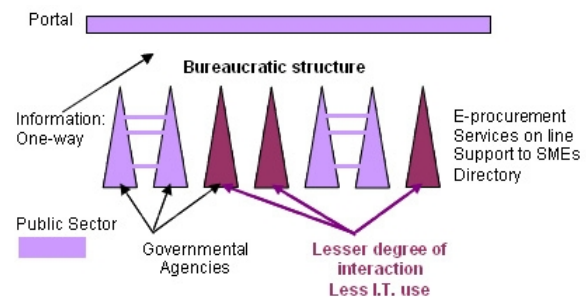


Figure 2. Managerial model



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