

Chapter 77

A Positive Hegemony?

Arguing for a Universal Knowledge Regime led by an e-Governance ‘Savvy’ Global Knowledge Enterprise!

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ABSTRACT

Amlan Bhusan raises important questions in this chapter. To him, there is a growing academic consciousness, regarding the use of e-governance, to deliver social goods in a better way. This voice advocates that more needs to be done by public institutions, governments, and more importantly, the academia, to develop e-governance as an enabler for social efficiency. Such developments would help reach debates and discussions on this area to the grassroots of the policy system. His chapter is neither a commentary of the application of e-governance to deliver social change nor a study of how different governments have handled this area around the world. Rather, it is a practicing consultant's views of the power of e-governance to refine public choice and social decision making and how this process was enriched by a more vigorous role of the academia. Taking specific examples from the education sector, particularly universities, this chapter is a comment on some of the ways in which e-governance ‘can’ be handled across the education system and how lessons from the developed countries can be used to inspire similar revolutionary changes to the status quo in the developing world. His objective is to promote a greater role for the academia in the public policy making process. The idea is to support a more constructive engagement of the academia with the more vulnerable parts of the social system. Above all, he argues for the benefits of spreading the values of information democracy, right to access to information, among the people. He envisages that the power of a more vocal and active academia would be profound in how it could positively affect the information apartheid affecting many large sections of the developing world. He proposes greater research and development on the means of engaging with e-governance and to establish the mechanisms to enhance, converge, simplify, homogenize, and structuralize the knowledge and information enterprise of the global political and social systems.

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INTRODUCTION

Basu (2004) refers to e-governance as use of information technologies by government agencies to transform relations with their citizens, businesses, and their other arms of governance. Singla (2002) asserts that, key requirements for establishing e-governance were anticipation, transparency, and accountability. Therefore, it can be said that, to establish a regime of e-governance, any policy system needs to accommodate optimal public participation in decision-making and ensure that all have free and easy access to information. The role of the academia, the research communities and also, the practitioners and consultants, in such a process, deserves due attention here. It can be said that without a positive collaboration between these various factions, a constructive engagement between the people and the governmental machinery would be hard to achieve. The premise of ideal governance being engrained in an active relationship between the government and the society, it will be impossible for any governmental or bureaucratic machinery, to deliver its maximum potentials unless a well-orchestrated collaboration was crafted between the people and the system: the role of the academia and practitioners to help achieve this process assumes extraordinary importance.

Further, the fruits of e-governance cannot and should be confined to the developed world. Examples can be drawn from the successful experiences wherever they take place, to enrich the lives of the more vulnerable sections of the society, particularly in the developing world. The creation of a universally applied e-governance regime, aided by a more vocal and active academia and practice communities, is an ideal outcome of the global knowledge renaissance. Hegemony it is, of knowledge, and this chapter argues in its favour.

BACKGROUND

The role of academia, the universities and research establishments, in shaping the intellectual direction of a society cannot be neglected (Goddard, et al., 2006). The way in which these institutions assist in co-production of new knowledge and invention of new ways of doing research is an extremely important contribution in aide of the knowledge enterprise. Irrespective of their national, socio-cultural, and economic differences, institutions around the world shared their responsibilities to continue to play a major role in developing, fuelling, and engineering a collective pursuit for new knowledge and new ways of doing things. E-governance is a tool, which can help fuel the knowledge building capabilities of a society. By helping integrate and operationalise the knowledge creation enterprise of a functional society, e-governance as a field deserves to be studied, researched, and taught with a greater and a renewed interest.

It is important to note here that mere knowledge provision and teaching alone will not affect desired social outputs. As such, there was no simple correlation between university education and economic growth (Wolf, 2001). There was, however, a strong interlink between 'top' universities and economic growth of the country or region they were based in. This is an indication that academic excellence could not be translated by merely being in the business of knowledge creation. But, efforts to reach knowledge and information to the wider sections of the society, and thereby attempting social change, was what established an institution's social responsibility. This positive correlation is particularly visible in case of several US universities (EU Commission, 2006), and this can be attributed to their growing commitments to being tech savvy and their appetite for using technology to aide their efforts to achieving a well-rounded excellence.

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