

Chapter XVII

E-Government's Barriers and Opportunities in Greece

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INTRODUCTION

In recent years, we have witnessed the rapid evolution of the World Wide Web. This development allows millions of people all over the world to access, share, interchange and publish information. In this context, many governments have realized that their information resources are not only valuable to themselves, but valuable economic assets, that fuel of the knowledge economy. By making sure the information they hold can be readily located and passed between the public and private sectors, taking account of privacy and security obligations, it will help to make the most of this

asset, thereby driving and stimulating national and international economy. Governments take advantage of information and communication technologies (ICT) and the continuing expansion of the Web and started e-government strategies to renew the public administration and eliminate existing bureaucracy, therefore reducing costs (Riedl, 2003; Tambouris et al., 2001).

In Greece, ICT started being explored at first and then exploited in order to help e-government grow. The main boost towards e-government was initiated by EU funding on respective actions. The Greek approach towards e-government and the information society has undergone, in terms of

top-level planning, a radical change between the second (1994-1999) and third (2000-2006) community support framework (CSF) periods. The efforts during the second period concentrated mainly to informational e-government web portals and to supply Public Administration with technological infrastructure in order for the employees to get familiar with technology and quit the traditional paperwork. During the third period some, but not much, transactional e-services are provided by the Public Administration (Hahamis et al., 2005).

This chapter presents the efforts took place so far in Greece as far as e-government is concerned. Its aim is to point out the necessity of designing and implementing efficient e-government applications. The vision of an electronically modernized Greek public administration will be realized if a series of key strategic aspects will be considered as well as international best practices and experiences. Moreover, it will demonstrate the arising opportunities and the key challenges.

BACKGROUND

Although the literature relating to this area proliferates, the definition and the various models of e-government are still unclear among researchers and practitioners of public administration. According to the E-governance Institute (2004) "*E-governance involves new channels for accessing government, new styles of leadership, new methods of transacting business, and new systems for organizing and delivering information and services. Its potential for enhancing the governing process is immeasurable.*" Another quite broad definition which incorporates its four key dimensions that reflects the functions of government, that is e-services, e-democracy, e-commerce and e-management is the following "*E-government is the use of information technology to support government operations, engage citizens, and provide government services*" (Dawes, 2002).

E-government can be distinguished into three basic categories: (a) *Government-to-Citizen (G2C)* that relates to the relationships between governments and citizens, (b) *Government-to-Business*

(*G2B*) that relates to the relationships between governments and businesses, and (c) *Government-to-Government (G2G)* that relates to the activities that improve and upgrade governments' services (Egov, 2003). Recently, a fourth category has been added, the one of *Government-to-Employees (G2E)* (Ndou, 2004).

E-government is not a one-step process or implemented as a single project. It is evolutionary in nature, involving multiple stages or phases of development. According to the Gartner Group, an international consultancy firm (Baum & Di Maio, 2000), e-government mature according to the following four phases:

- **Stage 1—Presence:** The primary goal is to post information such as agency mission, addresses, opening hours and possibly some official documents of relevance to the public.
- **Stage 2—Interaction:** This phase is characterized by Web sites that provide basic search capabilities, host forms to download, and linkages with other relevant sites, as well as e-mail addresses of offices or officials. This stage enables the public to access critical information online and receive forms that may have previously required a visit to a government office.
- **Stage 3—Transaction:** This phase is characterized by allowing constituents to conduct and complete entire tasks online. The focus of this stage is to build self-service applications for the public to access online, but also to use the Web as a complement to other delivery channels. Typical services that are migrated to this stage of development include tax filing and payment, driver's license renewal, and payment of fines, permits and licenses. Additionally, many governments put requests for proposals and bidding regulations online as a precursor to e-procurement.
- **Stage 4—Transformation:** This phase is characterized by redefining the delivery of government services by providing a single point of contact to constituents that makes government organization totally transpar-

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