

## Chapter 5.5

# Evaluation of Arab Municipal Websites

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### ABSTRACT

*High speed wireless networks and mobile and web-based services are changing the way we, as consumers of information, communicate, learn, do business and receive services. Successful e-commerce models have raised the expectations of citizens to have government agencies and organizations provide public services that are timely and efficient. With the growth and development of Arab cities, especially in the capitals, life becomes a little bit harder for citizens dealing with highly bureaucratic government agencies as their demands for basic services increase. Although e-readiness in the region has grown considerably with impressive progress, Arab cities have been clearly absent from studies on worldwide e-municipal websites. In this study, an evaluation checklist for was used to evaluate official municipal websites of Arab capitals. The study found that these websites were not citizen centered, suffered from fundamental problems, had some features that were inoperable and did not follow basic guidelines for any municipal website. These sites were dominated by aesthetics and technical novelties alone, providing inactive information rather than the inclusion of interactive e-services with immediate feedback and easy to use, navigable interfaces.*

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## INTRODUCTION

High speed wireless networks and mobile and web-based services are changing the way we communicate, learn, do business and receive services. As consumers of information, our relationship with education, government and commerce is changing through e-learning, e-government and e-commerce respectively. With such a fast delivery of private sector services, e-commerce has raised citizens' expectations to have government agencies and organizations provide public services that are timely and efficient. Citizens think of governments as large bodies of bureaucratic paperwork that impedes their active participation, creating legitimacy problems, which can only be solved by bridging the gap between citizens and the government through a more active and open relationship (Daemen and Schaap, 2000).

E-government initiative development should be supported by improved Information and Communication Technology (ICT) infrastructures. This would give accessibility to all citizens in an effort to bridge the digital divide and to create more informed citizens willing to participate in the development of their city. It also should be supported by the following elements (Intel, 2003): delivery of operational efficiency that is result-driven and accountable; delivery of government policy with faster implementation that extends best practices more effectively; access by citizen-centered users anytime and from anywhere; and development of strategic investment models to stimulate revenue for economic development and to encourage partnerships.

Therefore, governments need to continuously evaluate the needs and expectations of their citizens by getting them "out of line" and putting them online due to changing financial and social situations in light of rapid technological developments (Pardo, 2000). In the United States, President Obama's presidential transition team treated government websites as core government business function rather than information tech-

nology projects where they recommended the development of government-wide guidelines for disseminating content in universally accessible formats such as news feeds, videos, pod-casts, etc (Goldberg, 2009). US Government agencies have an editor-in-chief appointed for every website they maintain as do popular commercial websites, in order to develop and enforce website policies to ensure the site is effective and usable and that the content is accurate, relevant and written in a style all citizens would understand (Goldberg, 2009).

## E-MUNICIPALITIES

ICT's transform cities from local and inhibited social, economic, political and cultural living spaces to global centers, carrying urban and local values into the global arena (Çukurçayır and Eroglu, 2010). The most important citizen to government relationship is that of citizens' relationship with their city, because municipalities directly affect the daily service needs of citizens; they also experience the most frequent per capita level of service contact, generating heightened demands with high-level economic prospects (Prychodko, 2001).

City municipalities should aim to increase the consciousness and co-responsibility of the residents for the quality of life in the city, to have respect for the rules of living together, and to improve the performance of the city's services (Rodriguez, 2005). E-municipality can be defined as a municipality realizing all kinds of communication, business and service offers in an electronic environment (Akinci, 2004).

The incentives for both citizens and governments to utilize and provide ICT services include the following (Town of Freetown, Ma, 2007; Center for Democracy and Technology and Infodev, 2002; Pardo, 2000; Daemen and Schaap, 2000; Goldberg, 2009):

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